

Safety and Security in Ventura County High Schools

Background

A report was issued by the 2001-2002 Ventura County Grand Jury regarding safety precautions in the county high schools.

The report included the following recommendations:

1. All high schools should have perimeter fencing enclosing the entire school campus.
2. All high schools should have a full time law enforcement School Resource Officer (SRO) present on campus during school hours.
3. All high schools should staff campus entrances with campus security personnel.
4. All high schools should have regular emergency practice drills with some drills occurring during a lunch or passing period, and evaluate the efficiency of such drills.
5. All high schools and districts should have in place procedures for conducting random searches of school property for weapons.
6. All high schools should have an up to date security camera system.
7. All school districts, high schools, and local law enforcement should adopt the attitude of "we are Columbine" and prepare accordingly.
8. All districts with high schools should implement the "Teen Court" or "Peer Court" program in at least one of the high schools.
9. All school districts should have school buildings in their districts identified on each building's rooftop to facilitate easier identification by law enforcement air surveillance.
10. All high schools should have a certified school nurse, nurse's assistant, or health aide on duty during school hours.
11. Where school districts lack the funds to make their schools as safe as other schools within their district, or within Ventura County, these districts should align their budgets to accomplish parity by July 1, 2004.

Methodology

The 2002-2003 Ventura County Grand Jury, as part of its oversight responsibilities, revisited every high school addressed in the 2001-2002 report. For the most part, the school representatives acted in a positive, professional manner during the visits. On the occasions where there was a philosophical difference, the dialogue was a positive experience.

Findings

- F-1. Four high schools did not have complete perimeter fencing. Some decisions appeared to be made at the district level, others were dictated by the feeling of the local community.
- F-2. All schools appeared to be in compliance.
- F-3. Three schools had no security personnel at the school entrance. Two additional schools were observing pupil-free days when visited, so analysis was impossible.
- F-4. All schools had excellent procedures for emergency drills. Some schools have yet to conduct a drill during lunch or passing period, but have plans in place to do so.
- F-5. The majority of schools did random searches. The non-compliant schools felt the local community might object.
- F-6. Several schools had inadequate cameras; some had digital quality systems (or were in the process of procurement). Some felt there was no need for cameras.
- F-7. All high schools agreed with this recommendation.
- F-8. Those high schools not utilizing Teen Court or Peer Court are either researching the idea, or using teen mentors and peer counselors.
- F-9. Only a few schools had complied with this recommendation. Local law enforcement agencies do have detailed maps of the campuses.
- F-10. All schools appeared to be in compliance.
- F-11. Progress is being made.

Conclusion

Most high schools are making a concerted effort to comply with the prior recommendations of the 2001-2002 Grand Jury. The problem with F-9 occurs when the roof composition makes compliance impractical. The few schools that yield to community pressures would appear to be giving lip service to student safety, possibly compromising the well-being of the school.

Recommendations

Each high school representative should read this report to determine if the observed inadequacies refer to their school site. Schools have traditionally been recognized as the safest location of the day for students and staff alike.

Responses Required

None.