

The Dispatch

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Keeping Schools Safe

Issues Impacting School Safety

Traffic accidents

There are two types of drivers: those who have had an accident, and those who will. Body shops and car dealers continue to keep busy due to this fact. However, when the common “fender bender” results in serious injury or even death, the issue is no longer an inconvenience.



Last semester we lost five of our students in two separate traffic accidents in one week's time. This event reverberated throughout the city and school district. Community leaders from the city, county, and school district held a press conference where a commitment was made to reduce the number of teen traffic fatalities.

Across the United States, two out of five deaths among U.S. teens are the result of a motor vehicle crash.

Some of the risk factors are:

- Teens are more likely to underestimate hazardous situations.
- Teens are more likely to speed, run red lights, make illegal turns.
- Teens have the lowest rate of seatbelt use.
- Fifty-four percent of teen driver deaths occurred on Fridays, Saturdays, or Sundays.

Some research indicates traditional driver's education is insufficient for reducing the high risk of teen crashes. However, Graduated Driver's Licensing programs do seem to help reduce the number of teen driving related deaths by restricting the time of day, number and type of passengers, and requiring an apprenticeship of planned and supervised driving practice. These types of programs, along with instructional based efforts, will be explored by a group in the District studying driver education and teen safety issues.

For information on The Teen Safe Driving Initiative contact Captain JJ Schmidt @ 512-414-1188.

What kinds of programs reduce gang activity?

According to Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott: “Where gangs are violent or where they are driving up local crime rates, special police tactics may be needed. But gangs are not primarily a law enforcement problem.”

Opportunities. Gang activity often occurs when young people do not have access to socially acceptable alternatives. Children who are poorly prepared for school and receive little support for their positive efforts may turn to gangs for a chance to “be somebody.” Academic support and positive extra-curricular opportunities are essential for at-risk youth.



Alternatives. Gangs are the only form of recreation and companionship available to some young people. To compete successfully with gangs, recreational programs must offer excitement and close, supportive relationships. Mentoring programs may be combined with after-school and summer activities.

Supervision. Too many “latchkey” children are left unsupervised for extended periods of time. After-school programs can help by providing safe places for children to learn and play when they would otherwise be left alone. These programs can also help by providing nutritious meals, tutoring, and mentoring.

Social Development Some children need help with interpersonal and decision-making skills. Young people can be taught to visualize the consequences of their actions, and to understand that they can choose what to make of their lives. Children and parents can benefit from learning new ways of communicating with each other and positive ways of resolving interpersonal conflicts.

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What kinds of programs reduce gang activity? (continued)

Our city has seen an increase in juvenile gang activity over the past year or so. Last August, this activity reached a level that resulted in the death of one of our students as he stepped off his school bus near his home. Superintendent Forgione called on then Austin Chief of Police Stan Knee to assist in forming a diverse group of citizens to study the problem and develop specific action plans that would address juvenile gang activity.

In the coming months we will cover specific recommendations made by the group and the progress of those adopted recommendations. One recommendation that has been put into place is the forming of a Joint Juvenile Gang Response Unit. This unit is staffed by two AISD PD officers and three APD officers. This unit will be highlighted in the Spring edition of the AISD PD Dispatch.

Why is it Done That Way?

Police Practices and Legal Points

When is a fight not a fight?

At first this may seem to be a silly question. Anyone who has children or been around children for any length of time knows what a fight looks like. Under the law there is a subtle difference, a difference that may be overlooked by those responsible for dealing with the aftermath of such an event.

The Texas Penal Code places what many of us would call a “school yard scuffle” in the category of Disorderly Conduct by Fighting, a class C Misdemeanor. The requirement is that the combatants mutually agree to fight in a public place. On the other hand, if someone does physical harm to another, then you have an assault. Simple right? Well, it becomes problematic when a third party observes an altercation after the event started and what appears as a “fight” may in reality be a victim of an assault, defending him or herself. It is recommended that all assault events be investigated to the satisfaction of the intervener so that all circumstances surrounding the event are known prior to official action being taken.

Chief's Corner

Safety on the Internet:

Nothing will make you keep abreast of day-to-day goings on in the world as much as having a teen-ager in the house. One of the things I have noticed is the shift in how today's teenagers communicate. The phone is still the “old standby” but the internet is the “king of the hill” in my house.



With the increase of on-line predator cases, this does give parents cause for concern. Here are some tips I picked up from a group known as the National Cyber Security Alliance that may help educators and parents keep web-surfing students safe from the “cyber sharks”.

- Never give out personal/family information. This includes school, work, or hang out locations.
- Never give out financial information.
- Do not develop a user name that allows for personal identification.
- Post only information that is appropriate for the entire public. Do not post inappropriate photos, engage in discussions that can lead to damaged reputations and unwanted attention.
- Do not add strangers to your IM, or Buddy list. Do not flirt with strangers on line.
- Tell a trusted adult if you ever feel threatened on-line.
- Don't meet on-line friends off-line without parents knowledge and permission.
- For other tips and updates for safely surfing the internet. See: <http://staysafeonline.org/connectedandprotected.html>.

Until next time, stay safe and secure.

W. Patrick Fuller, Chief
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