

# TELEMASP BULLETIN

## TEXAS LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STATISTICS PROGRAM

April 1995

Vol. 2, No. 1

### Independent School District Police

#### School Violence

Students are wounded in drive-by shootings, sexual assault is commonplace and gangs and gang initiations are a problem at every school in the country. It is estimated that more than 3 million crimes a year are committed in or near the 85,000 U.S. public schools. A University of Michigan study reports that 9 percent of eighth graders carry a gun, knife or club to school at least once a month and in all, an estimated 270,000 guns go to school every day (*U.S. News and World Report*, November 8, 1993).

The National Education Association estimates, while more conservative than the *USN&WR* data, state that everyday 100,000 students carry a gun to class; another study reports that 13 percent of all incidents involving guns in the schools occur in elementary and pre-schools. Violence not only affects the children, it also has an impact on the adults working within the schools. Every school day, 6,250 teachers are threatened with injury and 260 are actually assaulted (*Time*, February 8, 1993).

In an effort to respond to the concern of parents and students, school trustees are beefing up campus security. Target hardening includes the removal of lockers to eliminate the concealment of drugs and guns, strict dress codes to eliminate the wearing of gang colors, metal detectors placed at building entrances and athletic stadiums, increased lighting, and surveillance cameras. The most dramatic response to school violence has been the evolution of often unorganized school security officers into well-trained Independent School District (ISD) police departments. This bulletin contains descriptive information about ISD police in the state.

#### What Students Have to Fear

*Twelfth graders who reported they were victimized at school during 1991*

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Injured with a weapon           | 5%  |
| Threatened with a weapon        | 14% |
| Injured without a weapon        | 13% |
| Threatened without a weapon     | 25% |
| Theft of student's property     | 37% |
| Vandalism of student's property | 26% |

Note: Figures from 1992 survey, *USN&WR*  
Basic data: University of Michigan

*Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas*

ISD police departments utilize professional officers to make the school a safer place. The ISD officer may be uniformed or in plain clothes but is almost always armed. The officer's responsibilities include the insurance of safety and security for students and teachers, proactive policing, and education of students, teachers and the community with regard to the myriad problems associated with the policing of violence in today's schools.

#### How Times Have Changed

*Public school teachers rate the top disciplinary problems*

|                       |               |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1940                  | 1990          |
| Talking out of turn   | Drug abuse    |
| Chewing gum           | Alcohol abuse |
| Making noise          | Pregnancy     |
| Running in the halls  | Suicide       |
| Cutting in line       | Rape          |
| Dress code violations | Robbery       |
| Littering             | Assault       |

*USN&WR*

Basic data: *Congressional Quarterly Researcher*

In addition to the named responsibilities and duties, ISD police deal with the same problems as traditional police departments. Today, within Texas, there are more than 65 school districts that have organized and equipped a police department. These police officers not only provide security but become actively involved in policing the campuses. However, until recently they were restricted to policing exclusively on campus.

In 1993 a new law authorized Texas school district police to investigate incidents and to make arrests off campus (*Houston Chronicle*, May 22, 1993). Under the new law, each school district determines the duties of its officers and defines their jurisdiction. In response, school trustees are expanding the jurisdictions of ISD police so officers can make school-related arrests off school property. This has caused some concern among police

unions regarding overlapping jurisdictions, and has spurred debate about the qualifications of ISD police officers to perform certain police functions. These concerns notwithstanding, ISD police departments are growing in size and number and are almost certainly here to stay.

#### Confronting School Crime

*If the child is safe . . . Everyone is safe.*

G. Morgan

During March 28-30, 1995, representatives from 46 of Texas ISD Police Departments assembled at Sam Houston State University to attend a special program of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas. The purpose of the conference was to discuss problems, explore alternative policies, and educate attendees regarding issues relative to ISD policing in the state of Texas.

*For a child to achieve he has to feel he is within a safe environment.*

Ron Garrison

One of the primary trainers for the conference was Ron Garrison of Garrison Associates. Garrison, considered one of the nation's leading experts on violence prevention in the schools, considers "safety and security as instrumental when it comes to issues of student achievement." Garrison explained that a student could not do well on a test if he/she knew he/she was going to get "beat up" during class change.

During the conference such issues as legal matters, budgeting, resource management, legislative affairs, child abuse, interagency cooperation and most specifically, how to make our schools a safer place, were discussed. Participants from each of the 46 ISD police departments represented were surveyed as to problems, issues and concerns within their own ISD relative to violence in the schools, security measures, ISD policing and crime problems. Results of the survey follow.

## Spring Branch School District Police

An often cited example of a "model" school district police department within the state of Texas is the Spring Branch ISD Police Department (ISD PD). Located within the Houston city limits, Spring Branch ISD PD provides services to some 44 campuses with an approximate student enrollment of 28,500.

Local school superintendents and trustees have opted for this highly visible deterrent in an effort to make Spring Branch schools safer. The Spring Branch ISD PD maintains a force of 19 officers headed by Chief Robert W. Bigger. Like any professional police department, Spring Branch has its duties and responsibilities spelled out through adherence to federal, state and local laws and strict compliance with established district policies and procedures, beginning with a very clear mission statement.

### *Spring Branch ISD PD Mission Statement*

*To protect the safety and welfare of persons and district property at all Spring Branch ISD facilities and properties within carefully prescribed policy, ethical, statutory and constitutional restrictions.*

The Spring Branch ISD PD distributes its human resources in a manner to insure a police presence 24-hours-a-day throughout the year, providing all of the services of any city police department. The results of a September-November 1994 local crime survey indicated that within the stated time period, 456 offenses were reported to the Spring Branch ISD PD. Over 34 percent were classified as simple assault, with petty theft comprising another 24 percent. Of 391 incidents relating directly to students, almost 49 percent occurred during class, with the classroom being the most prevalent location for the incident (approximately 26% of the time). Sixteen-year-olds were the most frequent offenders, involved in 64 of the incidents, followed closely by fourteen-year-olds with 54 incidents. Two percent of all incidents involved the use of a weapon.

In addition to their regular police duties, many of the officers are dedicated to developing specialties. Some work primarily with school gangs, while other specialize in drug prevention/enforcement, and yet others specialize in sex crimes. Spring Branch Officer Jeanne Hughson is specially trained in the handling of sexual assault complaints. The increased number of sex-related crimes has become so numerous she deals almost exclusively with problems of this nature. Officer Hughson indicates that alleged occurrences of sex-related crimes has increased within the last few years, with the most dramatic increase coming from allegations made against teachers by students. Officer Hughson stresses that most allegations of sexual misconduct involving teachers' abuse of students are unfounded.

Spring Branch ISD PD has also utilized "creative" problem solving in dealing with a particularly troublesome problem within a school in their district. This particular school was plagued with student tardiness and curfew violators (Texas law mandates children attend school and the city of Houston imposes a curfew on students from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.) It was very difficult to determine which students belonged to this particular school because of its proximity to other schools. Further, the proximate schools often had different class starting times. Differing schedules meant students would be in transit to school at different times of the morning. The children attending the school in question would blend with students enroute to other schools and either not show up for class or would "cut" school shortly after arrival.

In an effort to more readily identify the children who attended the school which had serious attendance problems, students were required to wear uniforms comprised of a bright red shirt and blue or black slacks. The red shirts allow patrol officers to readily identify students who are "not where they are supposed to be."



**Violence in the schools.** The survey asked 46 ISD police department officials to estimate the number of incidents of students assaulting other students and the number of incidents reported where teachers were assaulted by students as reported annually in their ISDs. The estimate of annual school assaults involving student attacks on other students were 9,541 for the past year. There were 1,193 estimated attacks on teachers by students annually, an average of 26 per district represented at the conference (see Figure 1).

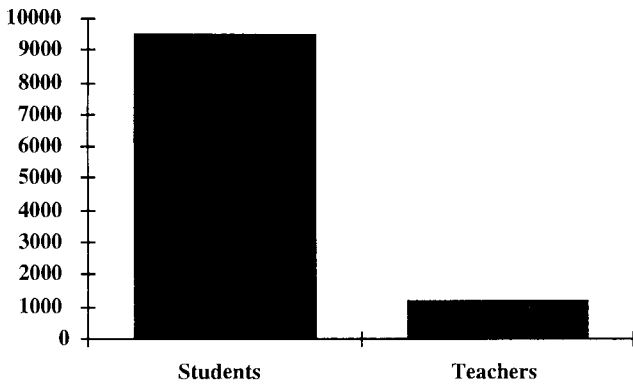


Figure 1

**Estimated Annual Assaults of Students and Teachers**

Respondents were asked if either a student or teacher had been injured through the use of a firearm or other weapon during 'the past year within their ISD. Of the 46 ISDs responding, 87% indicated that there was no incident where use of a firearm occurred during the last year (see Figure 2).

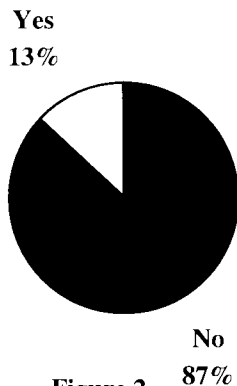


Figure 2

**Student and/or teachers injured by a handgun in the past year**

Regarding the use of weapons other than a firearm, 48% indicated such use in reported crime (see Figure 3).

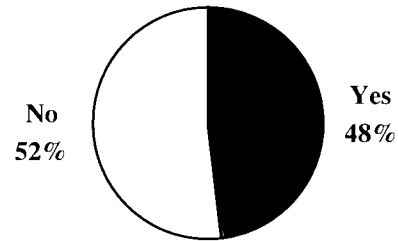


Figure 3

**Student and/or teacher injured by a weapon other than a gun in the past year**

Respondents were asked to rank the frequency of use relative to handguns, knives, clubs or other weapons in incidents where a weapon was used within their ISDs. The most common weapon of use as reported by 46 percent of the respondents was a knife, followed by handgun use 11 percent of the time, and use of a club 9 percent of the time. Respondents indicated other non-specific weapons were used 34% of the time (see Figure 4).

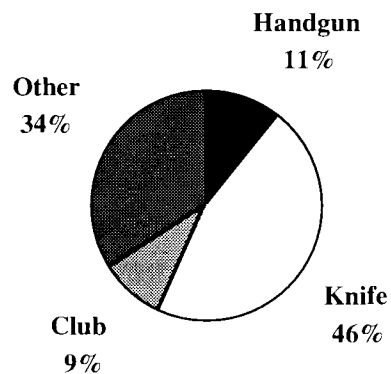


Figure 4

**Frequency of use for weapon type specific to crimes involving weapons within ISDs**



**Security measures.** Respondents were asked as to the use and importance of specific devices and techniques which are currently available for use by school police. Of the 46 police departments asked, 61% utilized some type of metal detector, 54 percent utilized surveillance cameras, 85 percent prohibited the wearing of gang colors and 65 percent enforced a strict dress code. Twenty-four percent of the respondents rated strict dress codes as having the greatest potential contribution to school safety, followed by surveillance cameras (17%), fixed metal detectors (15%), increased lighting (11%), handheld metal detectors (9%), removal of lockers (9%) and other miscellaneous devices (15%) (see Figure 5). When asked their opinion concerning the most important thing that could be done to improve school safety, over 50 percent of the respondents identified three central themes: (1) more community cooperation; (2) increased parental involvement; and (3) increased education and training for students, teachers and administrators.

**ISD policing.** Respondents indicated that of the 775 officers employed by their departments, 635 of those individuals were certified as peace officers by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education. Only 20 percent of the 46 departments utilized "plain clothes" officers in campus patrol duties. Sixty-nine percent of the ISD police departments conducted education and training programs for students and teachers relative to campus security. In dealing with police and sheriff's departments sharing ISD PD jurisdiction, the most common problem cited was a lack of understanding by the police and sheriff's departments as to what the ISD police role was.

**Crime problem.** Respondents were asked to identify the most significant crime problems within their ISD. Assault was ranked as the number one crime problem by 55 percent of the respondents, followed by petty theft (18%), drugs (13%) and other crimes (14%). Respondents identified marijuana as the primary drug involved in drug-related crimes within their schools, followed by cocaine, controlled narcotics and heroin (see Figures 6 and 7).

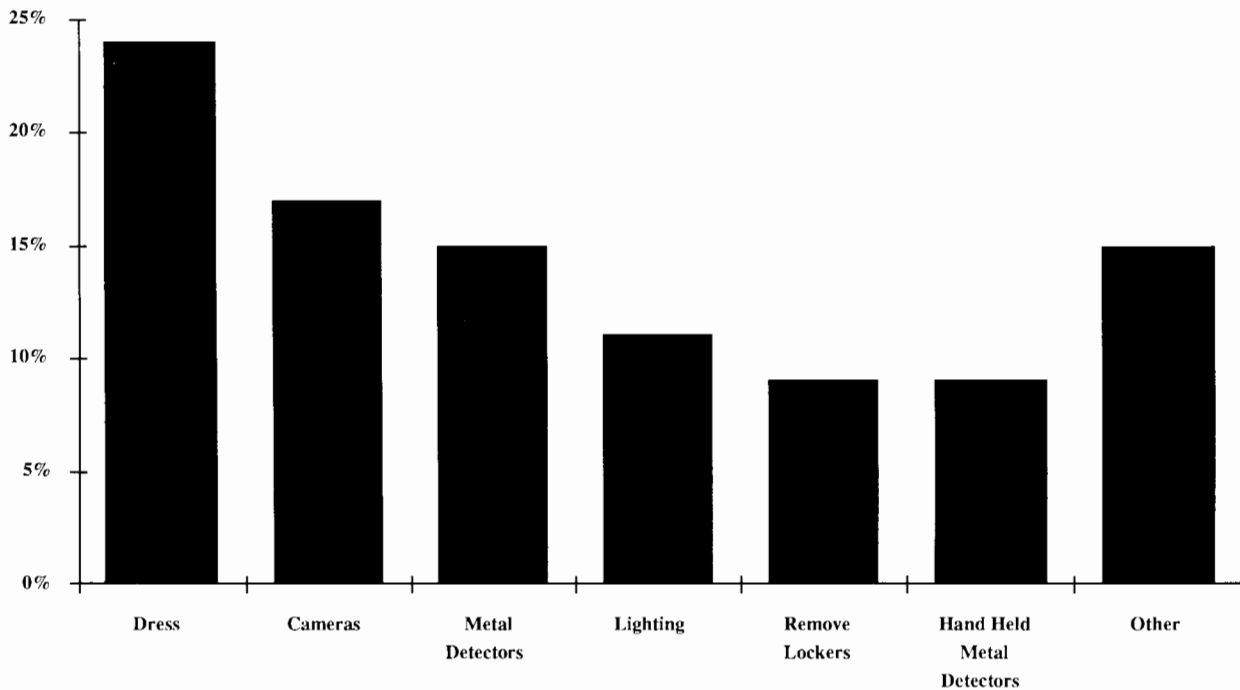


Figure 5

Rank as to the potential contribution specific security devices would make to school safety

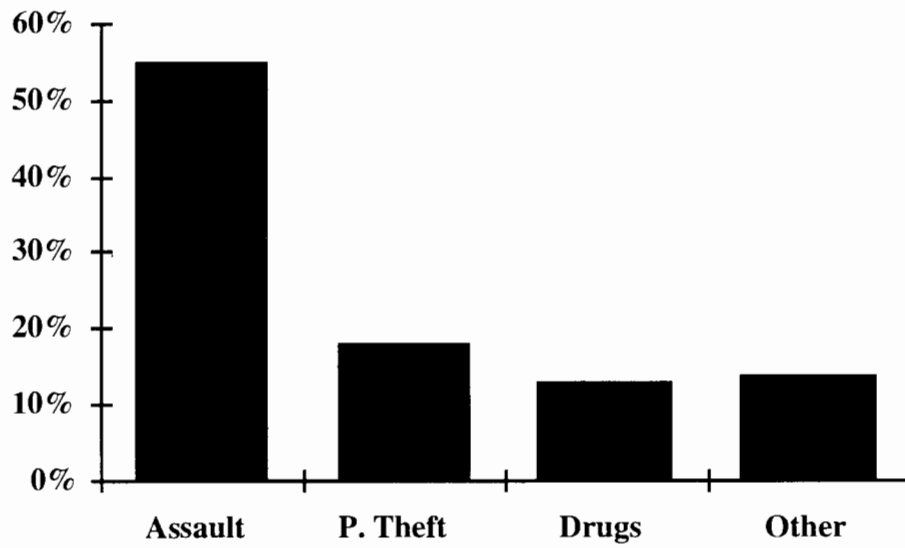


Figure 6

Most significant crime problems within ISDs

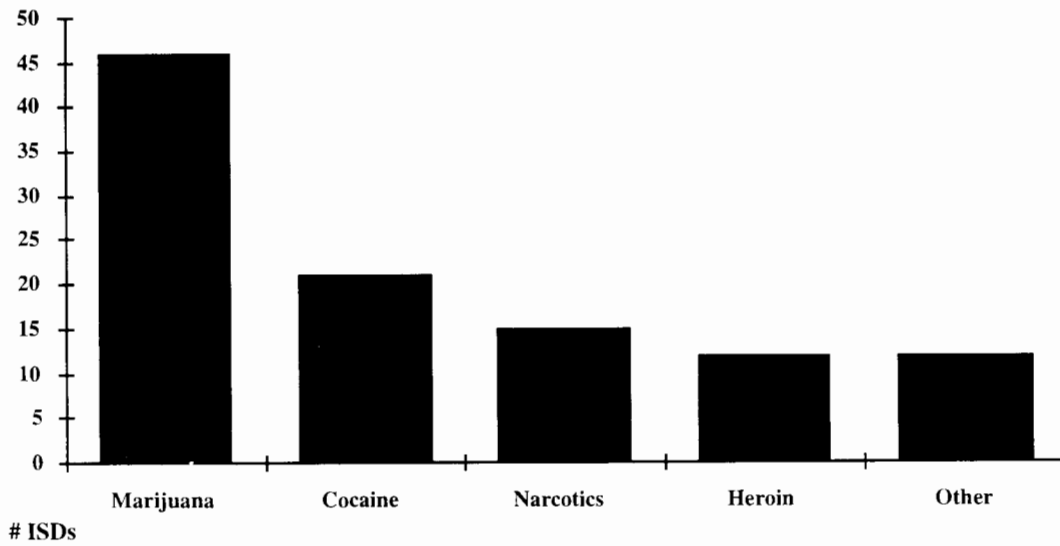


Figure 7

Primary drug related crimes within individual ISDs involved in the use and sale of named drugs

## Status of ISD Policing in Texas

School districts continue to create their own police departments within the state of Texas. These departments are a response to citizens' desire to provide safer schools for both the student and teacher. With the expansion of jurisdiction to encompass the entire school district, ISD police are rapidly becoming a very visible presence in communities throughout Texas.

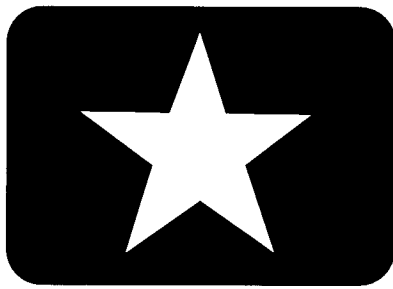
For further information regarding Texas ISD Police, contact Gene Blair, Special Programs Manager, Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX 77341-2296, or call (409) 294-1669.

### References

- Hall, J. D. (February 8, 1993). "The Knife in the Book Bag," *Time*, p. 37.
- Markley, M. (May 22, 1993). "School Police Get More Power," *The Houston Chronicle*, p. 30.
- Markley, M. (September 4, 1993). "Tracking Crime on Campus," *The Houston Chronicle*, p. 35.
- Markley, M. (October 8, 1991). "Stiff Federal Law Highlighted to Fight Guns, Drugs in Schools," *The Houston Chronicle*, p. 15.
- Toch, T., T. Gest & M. Guttman (November 8, 1993). "Violence in Schools: When Killers Come Home," *U.S. News and World Report*, pp. 31-40.

Special thanks to Spring Branch ISD Police Department. Thank you to the following ISD Police Departments for participating in this month's bulletin.

Aldine ISD Police  
Alief ISD Police  
Alvin ISD Police  
Athens ISD Police  
Austin ISD Police  
Bay City ISD Police  
Brookshire Police Department  
Carthage ISD Police  
Center ISD Police  
Conroe ISD Police  
Corpus Christi ISD Police  
Crosby ISD Police  
Dallas Public Schools Police  
Dayton ISD Police  
East Central ISD Police  
Edgewood ISD Police  
El Paso ISD Police  
Fort Bend ISD Police  
Frenship ISD Police  
Galveston ISD Police  
Houston ISD Police  
Humble ISD Police  
Huntsville ISD Police  
Jefferson ISD Police  
Judson ISD Police  
Katy ISD Police  
Killeen ISD Police  
Mansfield ISD Police  
Midland ISD Police  
Mt. Pleasant ISD Police  
Nacogdoches ISD Police  
New Caney ISD Police  
North Forest ISD Police  
Northside ISD Police  
Pasadena ISD Police  
Schertz-Cibolo Universal City ISD Police  
Sealy ISD Police  
Sheldon ISD Police  
Socorro ISD Police  
Southwest ISD Police  
Spring ISD Police  
Spring Branch ISD Police  
Texas City ISD Police  
Texarkana ISD Police  
Tyler ISD Police



**BILL BLACKWOOD**

**L**aw  
**E**nforcement  
**M**anagement  
**I**nstitute of  
**T**exas

Gerald L. Williams, D.P.A.  
Executive Director

Kay Billingsley  
Publications Manager

For information about LEMIT  
programs, call (409) 294-1669

TELEMASP Monthly Bulletins,  
ISSN 1075-3702, are produced  
under an agreement with the

**Police Research Center**

Sam Houston State University  
Larry T. Hoover, Ph.D., Director  
Jamie L. Tillerson, Program Manager

For information about TELEMASP  
Bulletins, call (409) 294-1704

This bulletin was authored by Mr. James H. Francis. Mr. Francis is currently a doctoral degree candidate at SHSU. A former Special Agent of the FBI, he also dedicates time to his private consulting business which assists international businesses in their defense of corporate espionage.



*A Member of The Texas State University System*



Printed on recycled paper

**Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement  
Management Institute of Texas**  
Criminal Justice Center  
Sam Houston State University  
Huntsville, TX 77341-2296

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Permit No. 26  
Huntsville  
Texas