

Oklahoma City Public Schools
Stop the Violence, Start the Revolution: One Small Step
Awareness Campaign to End School Violence
Project Summary

Assessment

On the afternoon of September 22, 2008, a fourteen year old student at US Grant High School in Oklahoma City brought a loaded 40 caliber, semi-automatic pistol inside the school and into a classroom. Thankfully the student was peacefully apprehended in a hallway by the police and arrested. Following the incident the school was placed on lockdown for three days causing tension among students and an uproar among the community. This forced the spotlight on the issue of students not feeling safe while at school; resulting in poor student attendance. The lockdown forced the cancellation of scheduled homecoming activities. Community members and media called for tighter security measures. An increase of police presence on campus as well as thorough student and facility searches took place. After reviewing the negative media clips of the events, the US Department of Justice contacted the OKCPS Administration to offer assistance in reducing and preventing racial conflict and civil disorders.

Immediately following the intense week, students, staff and district administrators developed a plan to unite the school and bring awareness to the need for ending school violence. Research shows students who participate in school activities or sports are less likely to get involved in dangerous behaviors. Additionally attendance data indicates students who don't feel safe, do not attend school.

Measurable project goals included:

- Expose half of the US Grant student body to available clubs, organizations, and activities.
- Attendance at the school performance of "Bang, Bang, You're Dead!" during the Stop the Violence Week Activities.
- Improving average daily school attendance numbers by 10 percent.

Secondary goals included:

- Increased community awareness measured by attendance at school play.
- Media promotion of the events.

Planning

Prior to meeting with the high school administration and key staff, the Communications Executive Director presented the concept to the Superintendent's Cabinet for administration buy-in. After the administrators approved the awareness campaign a core planning team comprised of the Regional Executive Director for US Grant HS, the Communications team, principal, counselors, teachers, students, community leaders were put in place. The core planning team identified the target audience as: US Grant High School students and staff, the south Oklahoma City community, and the secondary audience as: other OKCPS students and the wider Oklahoma City community. Goals were established and a timeline was put in place. The team also identified the communication channels as: posters, daily school announcements, AlertNOW phone messages, electronic flyer, "Bang, Bang, You're Dead" the play, the playbill, newspaper/newsletter articles, radio and television, and the district website.

Execution and Communication

Media and community interest was already peaked due to the recent arrest of the student who brought the loaded gun on campus. Capitalizing on this interest, the Communications team put out news releases on the weeks activities, promoted individual events, and worked on graphics and branding for the print and digital materials. District wide electronic flyers were sent out, schools hung posters, the Superintendent's recorded audio message was distributed to 45,000 students and employees, and the website deliverables were posted.

- Kick-off Event: Key city, district and community leaders gathered to help students kick-off the week long events. Proclamation from the OKC Mayor designated Nov 17-21 as Stop the Violence Week in OKC.
- Peace-O-Grams: Sold to raise awareness of the need of kindness. Proceeds supported a community program.
- Activity Fair: Booths were set up by community, district as well as school clubs, sports and special interest groups to recruit and inform students. The daily fair was held before school and during lunch.
- Mural: US Grant High School art students created a graffiti mural with the "One Small Step". Students who pledged an end to school violence had their names added to the mural.
- Blackout Day: Students wore all black to show their support of the victims of school violence. Key student leaders also wore signs indicating the life that was impacted due to school violence and a message on placing a safe call.
- "Bang, Bang, You're Dead": US Grant High School League of Speech and Drama production to increase the awareness of the consequences of school violence among teens. 2 student performances, 2 community performances, 2 district performances and 1 sneak preview for community leaders.
- Peace Summit: 95-100 students from a variety of ethnic, economic, and social backgrounds participated in small breakout groups facilitated by community leaders, counselors and district employees. Students identified three specific outcomes to work on with school and district administrators to help unify the student body.
- Make a New Friend Day: As a result of the Peace Summit, students hosted a day dedicated to meeting someone new within the high school.
- SPIRIT Day: The US Department of Justice facilitated training to help students identify resolutions to ethnic tensions within the school. The outcomes included peer mediators, short term and long term goals.

Evaluation

The Stop the Violence, Start the Revolution: One Small Step Awareness Campaign yielded positive outcomes for the Oklahoma City Public School District and US Grant High School.

- School Organizations and clubs increased awareness of approximately 1330 students during the daily student activity fair. More than 85 percent of the total student body received exposure.
- Student absences decreased from 240 daily absences to 164.5 daily absences, an average daily attendance decrease of 13 percent.
- Previous school play attendance was approximately 200 students per performance. "Bang, Bang, You're Dead" performed to sold out student crowds of 600. Evening performances engaged large community audiences and to meet the district demand, additional daytime student performances were scheduled for middle school students.
- Media coverage of the Stop the Violence, Start the Revolution: One Small Step, and the Spirit training resulted in 4,349,460 positive impressions of the awareness campaign.
- A proclamation issued by the Oklahoma City Mayor provided additional awareness to the community notification strategy.

Although the formal evaluation has ended, students and staff at US Grant High School continue the efforts of Stop the Violence, Start the Revolution: One Small Step.