



# Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

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## MEDIA RELEASE

# Violence-Free Zone Program Has Positive Impact on Richmond's George Wythe High School

## School and Police Data Show Progress Against Violence, Suspensions

The youth anti-violence program piloted in George Wythe High School has already produced positive results in only four months, data from the Richmond School District indicates. The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise's community-based Violence-Free Zone initiative was introduced at George Wythe High School in September, 2008. The VFZ program is implemented in the school by CNE's community partner, The ROC (Richmond Outreach Center). Richmond Public Schools data shows that incidents dropped by 22%, out-of-school suspensions dropped 3%; expulsions dropped 71%; and drop-outs dropped 17% compared to the same period one year ago (see chart, page 2). The results reflect a close collaboration between Richmond Public Schools, the Richmond Police Department, GWHS Principal Willie Bell, school teaching, counseling, and safety staff, School Resource Officers (SRO), and the Violence-Free Zone staff.

In addition to the RPS reports, Richmond Police data shows substantial reductions in arrests and incidents reported by School Resource Officers at the school. Arrests of students dropped from 52 to 32 (down 38%), and SRO reported incidents from 50 to 27 (down 46%) compared to the same period one year ago.

Police officials also credited the program with reducing some crime in the immediate neighborhood. Motor Vehicle thefts are down 73% (from 64 to 17) in the sector. According to RPD Lt. Scott C. Booth, Third Precinct Sector 312, "I believe that the youth intervention aspects of the Violence Free Zone at GWHS has impacted Motor Vehicle Theft in Sector 312. Probably our largest incident producer in 2007 in that crime was the Northrop Neighborhood, the area immediately adjacent to GWHS. With the introduction of the VFZ, kids are staying in school more and less of a negative impact on the adjacent neighborhood."

Richmond corporate leaders have made a significant investment in the community through their support of the youth violence reduction program. Dominion Resources, Altria Group, Inc., MWV, and Genworth Financial are a few of the many corporate leaders that have contributed support to the project through the Richmond Police Foundation. The project represents an unprecedented collaboration that brings together the Richmond Police Foundation, The Richmond Police Department and Richmond Public Schools in an effort to improve the lives of youth through intense, ground level outreach.

**How the VFZ Works:**

The CNE Violence-Free Zone partners and works closely with school security officers, teachers, and counselors, to add a new layer of support to students. In addition to serving the schools as a whole, the VFZ provides intensive mentoring services to the high-need students, as identified by school staff. CNE has found that about 10% of the students in most schools are responsible for disruptions and violence. At George Wythe, 94 students were enrolled in the Violence-Free Zone program during the first four months of the school year.

The program is carried out in the schools by “Youth Advisors,” young adults from the same background and experiences as the students. These young men and women, because they have had the same challenges as the students, are able to understand and motivate them and change their behavior. They act as hall and cafeteria monitors, mediators, and character coaches, and they mentor the high-risk students referred by school staff. The Youth Advisors are screened, hired, and managed by the local nonprofit organization the ROC. Although the Youth Advisors’ efforts are targeted on the students enrolled in the VFZ, they work with and build relationships with the entire student body.

**Richmond Youth Advisor Report:**

During the four-month period from September through December, the Youth Advisors reported handling 186 mediations between students, students and teachers, or students and security. They helped prevent 176 incidents and logged more than 5,550 “supportive conversations.” They also provided classroom assistance to teachers 202 times, had 571 contacts with parents or guardians of students, and provided tutoring services 202 times. In addition to the in-school activity, The ROC provides after-school, weekend, and summer programs that offer some of the most at-risk young people a safe haven and support at all times.

The VFZ approach was created by the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, which selects effective youth-serving organizations in each locale to implement the program with CNE providing overall direction, training, measurement, and linkages to support. The ROC, founded in 2001, has more than 100 ministries providing a variety of services to low-income, at-risk youth and families. More than 1,000 children are transported by bus to The ROC every Saturday to participate in positive activities.

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise was founded in 1981 by Robert L. Woodson, Sr., to help residents of low-income neighborhoods address the problems of their communities. CNE provides training, technical assistance and linkages to community-based organizations. In the 2008/2009 school year, CNE’s Violence-Free Zone initiative is being successfully implemented in 30 high-risk urban schools around the country, including Antelope Valley, CA (1); Atlanta (3); Baltimore (3); Dallas (14); Milwaukee (8) and Richmond (1).

**George Wythe High School Pre and Post-Violence-Free Zone  
September through December (4 months)**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Pre-VFZ (07/08)</b>	<b>Post-VFZ (08/09)</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
<b># Incidents*</b>	<b>872</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>Down 22%</b>
<b>Susp. – Out-of School*</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>Down 3%</b>
<b>Truancy*</b>	<b>4095</b>	<b>4420</b>	<b>Up 8%</b>
<b>Expulsion*</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Down 71%</b>
<b>Drop Out*</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>Down 17%</b>
<b>Arrests**</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>Down 38%</b>
<b>SRO Reported Incidents**</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>Down 46%</b>
<b>Motor Vehicle Thefts, Sector 312**</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>Down 73%</b>
*Richmond Public Schools data; **Richmond Police Data			