

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Announces Initiatives to End School Violence

As children across the state were preparing to head back to school, Gov. Christie Whitman today announced a cadre of initiatives aimed at putting a stop to school violence before it starts. The Governor joined a panel of experts in New Brunswick to discuss the urgent need to address the problem of youth violence.

Gov. Whitman announced a comprehensive package of programs that will involve a number of state departments, parents, teachers, students and the community in an outreach effort to prevent violence in schools.

The initiatives include an early intervention program to help identify warning signs before violence happens, a peer-based anti-violence campaign, a partnership to increase security in schools, cooperative efforts between law enforcement and education officials and a standard protocol to help treat victims of youth violence.

"Recent tragedies across the country, while thankfully rare, are a chilling reminder of the presence of violence in our schools," said Gov. Whitman. "Our preliminary data reveals a trend toward an increase in violence among our young people. Here in New Jersey we are committed to reversing that trend. We are committed to bringing together the education community, the law enforcement community, teachers, parents, students and health professionals to prevent violence among our children."

"Intervention and prevention are the keys to keeping our children safe. The programs that we are announcing today will aid in the identification and treatment of troubled students before violent crime occurs. They will help break the cycle of violence," said the Governor. "These programs will ensure that our children are safe in the schoolyard. They will ensure that our schools are safe places for our children to learn and grow."

The package of programs announced by the Governor today bring together the expertise of a number of state and independent agencies, including the state Departments of Education, Law and Public Safety and Health and Senior Services, the New Jersey School Boards Association and the Violence Institute at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ).

The FY 1998 and 1999 state budgets provided \$750,000 each year to fund the Institute for Violence at UMDNJ to help develop programs to combat violence in New Jersey. The Institute for Violence is the only such statewide institute in the nation.

The components of the package announced by the Governor include:

1. Trigger Locks -- The Attorney General's office will dedicate \$175,000 to help new gun owners defray the cost of sensible gun locks to reduce children's access to weapons. This program will provide a \$5 dollar rebate for the purchase of trigger locks.
2. Intervention and Referral Services Project (IRSP) -- A Department of Education project which is designed to assist schools in identifying and helping students with learning and behavior problems. Program components include:
 - Providing to each New Jersey school district a four- part IRSP video series, companion guide, and flyers that will provide information about the project, its planning and implementation. Districts will also receive information on team solutions to solving learning, behavior, and health problems, and innovations and best practices in stopping school violence.

- A Technical Assistance Support Program and an IRSP Resource manual that will be available in February 1999 to help schools implement Intervention and Referral Services programs.
3. Tip Sheet -- A two-page quick reference document prepared by the Violence Institute of NJ at UMDNJ that will tell teachers what patterns of behavior to look for and what action should be taken with a student that exhibits potentially violent tendencies. (Copy of tip sheet is attached.)
 4. Uniform Emergency and Trauma Protocol for Victims of Youth Violence (DHSS component). The Governor called for the Emergency Medical Services Children's Advisory Board in coordination with the Trauma Council to recommend a standardized protocol for providing intervention services to victims of youth violence. This protocol will be piloted in trauma centers over the next year.
 5. Commission to Deter Criminal Activity -- The Governor called for the rejuvenation of this commission, which is spear-headed by the Attorney General's Office, to, among other things, develop a peer-based campaign against youth violence. Research indicates that participation by children in anti-violence campaigns is effective in reducing the rate of youth violence.
 - The commission was established in 1983 to educate and advertise NJ criminal statutes and the consequences of participating in criminal activity.
 6. Model Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Education and Law Enforcement Officials -- Currently, the model MOA details how school officials can work cooperatively with police and prosecutors to report incidents and share information and how law enforcement agencies should conduct themselves within the school environment. The Governor called for the revision of this document by the Attorney General's Education-Law Enforcement Working Group to reflect statutory and societal changes since 1992. This partnership is the first of its kind and is being replicated by states across the country.
 - The Working Group is comprised of education and law enforcement representatives and meets on a monthly basis to discuss issues of mutual concern. It has undertaken and completed a wide range of projects designed to enhance communication and cooperation at the local level of government and to make certain that all schools remain safe havens for children.
 7. The Safe Schools Resource Officer Program -- a partnership between schools and law enforcement which provides increased security and decreased violence, weapon, drug, and gang activity through the presence of a police officer. The Governor announced the release of a guide that instructs schools and communities in establishing safe schools programs that are tailored to the needs of a particular community.

The Governor participated in a roundtable discussion on ways to stem the tide of youth violence with a panel that included experts in the fields of education, law enforcement, behavioral health care, local school officials and the religious community. A list of panel participants is attached.

Panel Participants

Education Commissioner Leo Klagholz
 Acting Human Services Commissioner Michele Guhl
 Attorney General Peter Verniero
 Dr. Leah Ziskin, NJDHSS
 Dr. John Clabby, UMDNJ University of Behavioral Health Care
 Dr. Michael Greene, Violence Institute of NJ at UMDNJ
 Dr. Paulette Moore Hines, UMDNJ University of Behavioral Health Care
 Diane Cooper, president, East Orange Board of Education
 Eva Nagy, president, Franklin Township Board of Education
 Charles V. Reilly, president, NJ School Boards Association and member, Ridgewood Board of Education
 Ciro Scalera, Association of Children of NJ
 Reverend Buster Soaries

Moderator

Dr. Robert Johnson, director of the division of adolescent and young adult medicine, UMDNJ

