

# Office of the Governor

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Governor Attends Anti-Violence Event With Joe Piscopo; Stresses Communication in Keeping Children Safe**

With school opening and students returning to New Jersey schools, Governor Christie Whitman today joined entertainer Joe Piscopo at Pleasantville High School for a back-to-school anti-violence program. Piscopo is the founder of the Positive Impact Foundation, a group whose goal is to produce television programming highlighting successful young people in a positive and educational manner.

The program featured performances by four student groups that have taken on violence in their neighborhoods and schools, using entertainment and creativity to get out messages denouncing violence. The Governor applauded the performers and thanked them for their commitment to promoting such an important message.

"Communication is always the best weapon in preventing violence," said the Governor. "That's why it's wonderful that with Joe Piscopo's leadership, all of you are communicating such a powerful message."

"A school is still one of the safest places for a young person to be and we shouldn't lose sight of that fact," Gov. Whitman continued. "But we can't be complacent. Everyone has a role to play in preventing violence."

Parents and teachers have to talk with students - and listen hard to what they are saying. Law enforcement and school administrators have to work together. And, of course, most of all, we have to rely on young people to keep the lines of communication open."

The Positive Impact Foundation has already produced three, 30-minute installments of Positive Impact Television, a series that shadows young people, primarily from New Jersey, as they deal with life's challenges in their daily life.

Gov. Whitman's Safe Schools Initiative includes the Zero Tolerance for Guns Act which requires that any student carrying a weapon in school is immediately removed. It also requires the development of county-wide alternative programs that provide a way to keep disruptive or violent students in school, but away from the students they were disturbing.

New Jersey has also designed the Intervention and Referral Services Project to help schools be more effective at reaching troubled kids. In addition, the Violence Institute at the University of Medicine and Dentistry has created a Tip Sheet to help teachers and parents know what patterns of behavior should send warning signals and what to do with students who may be at risk for violent behavior.

Included in today's program were; National Stop the Violence, a peace trooper program at Woodrow Wilson High School In Camden that presents anti-violence seminars for other students; The Unity Community Center from Camden which sponsors an award- winning drill team, percussion group and dance troupe; Students Against Violent Encounters-Ignoring Trouble, a group from Pleasantville that focuses on decreasing school violence and enhancing educational opportunities; and the Positive Latino Association, a group from Jersey City and Union City that works to keep teens in school and out of gangs.

## **Keeping Kids Safe Governor Christie Whitman's Initiatives to Reduce Youth Violence**

### **Intervention and Referral Services Project**

This initiative, developed by the Department of Education was designed the to help schools develop more effective intervention programs. Every New Jersey school is already required to provide intervention services; this program will help ensure that these services meet the needs of students.

### **Gun Locks**

Governor Whitman has placed \$175,000 in the state budget to help new gun owners pay for gun locks to eliminate children's access to weapons. The Governor has also proposed legislation to require that every gun sold in New Jersey either have smart gun technology or a gun lock.

### **Tip Sheets for Recognizing Violence**

Prepared by the Violence Institute, the tip sheet tells teachers, parents, and other students what patterns can signal potentially violent tendencies and what actions should be taken when a student exhibits them.

### **School Search Manual**

Regarded by the National School Boards Association as one of the best resources available to help school officials keep guns and dangerous weapons out of schools.

### **Safe Schools Initiative**

This program helps prevent violence, disruption, and drug and alcohol abuse in schools. It includes the Zero Tolerance for Guns Act, which the Governor signed to require the immediate removal of students who bring weapons to school, and the development of countywide alternative education programs as a way to keep disruptive or violent students in school but away from other students whose education was being disturbed.

### **Uniform Emergency and Trauma Protocol**

A Uniform Emergency and Trauma Protocol is being developed for the young victims of violence. By reaching out to young victims or witnesses of violence, further violent behavior can be discouraged.

## **Crisis Intervention Units**

The Crisis Intervention Units in each of the 21 county Family Courts will be expanded to include jurisdiction over children who are identified as being at risk for behaving violently, under a proposal offered by Gov. Whitman.

## **Commission to Deter Criminal Activity**

Governor Whitman reactivated this Commission under the direction of the Attorney General, which is developing a peer-based violence prevention program. The Attorney General is also encouraging school officials to work with law enforcement agencies to ensure that our schools are safe places for our children to learn.

## **School Based Youth Services**

These programs operate in 30 New Jersey school districts and are run by the Department of Human Services. The School Based Youth Services Program has a proactive approach that attempts to reach kids before it is too late. The program provides comprehensive services directly at the school sites. One aspect of the program is a new approach that involves kids building a "fight-free" school. Called SAVVY for "Students Against Violence and Victimization of Youth," it has resulted in a 93% reduction in the number of fights in one participating school. (Essex Vo-Tech in Newark)

## **Children's Mental Health System of Care**

The Department of Human Services is developing a Children's Mental Health System of Care initiative, a major reform of our state's system for dealing with children with serious emotional disturbance. This initiative will help us to manage our current mental health and child welfare services more effectively and to expand the range of services available for children and families. It will close gaps in the current system and give families real options when they need them most.

## **Center for Youth Policy and Programs**

This initiative will provide resources for agencies and organizations that foster personal responsibility among youth. The Center will establish a statewide youth advisory commission, with representatives from such organizations as the New Jersey Youth Corps and the Work Incentive Board youth councils. It will also develop a youth leadership training institute, a mentor program, and a best-practices component that will spotlight successful youth programs.