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Reformation in Practices and Policies Regarding Public School Safety

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Big iDeas at SMU

<http://www.smu.edu/bigideas/>

1. Title of Project: Reformation in Practices and Policies Regarding Public School Safety

2. List of Student Participants

Student name: James Petersen
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Year of Study: First

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Major(s): Mechanical Engineering
Year of Study: First

3. Faculty cooperators

Chief of Police Richard Shafer
Lee Arning Director of Emergency Preparedness & Business Continuity

4. Statement of the problem or issue, proposed methodology, and rationale.

It goes without saying that safety in and around cities is a well-known priority to citizens and leaders alike. However, metropolitan areas often struggle to turn the tide on crime in their growing cities. While Dallas is certainly a great city with a stable base and a bright future, it has been known as one of the most dangerous cities in the nation. Due to the rapidly growing population of Dallas, large amounts of crime can be traced to the heavy urban areas. With increases in population, more crime is nearly inevitable. The thought that one could eradicate crime in a city such as Dallas is erroneous. However, it is a viable goal to make public schools safer for the children of Dallas. This can be accomplished through various new technologies and educational outreaches.

Among the many sections of Dallas, SMU's campus is definitely one of the safest. Many contributing reasons for this include the active police force and campus security. Besides the manpower, the campus has a safe feel, which stems from many other secondary precautions that the school has taken. An example of these precautions is the emergency text messaging and email system, which allows for the quick spread of vital information. In the wake of the tragic Virginia Tech shooting, SMU took a strong step toward protecting its students and faculty with this system. The effect of this system could be felt at local Dallas high schools where danger is still quite a possibility. Most high school teachers have access to cell phones and computers during the day. During an emergency situation they could be alerted of a threat quickly and silently.

Another of the safety tools SMU has effectively implemented is the emergency stations' positioned throughout campus. Many of Dallas's high schools could benefit from the proper placement of these devices. Large, high traffic areas such as parking lots or sports complexes that are difficult to monitor would prove to be ideal locations for emergency stations. Because many students maintain hours before or after the standard school day due to extracurricular activities, these devices would provide them with protection while the school is relatively empty. Not only that but the presence of the stations alone is a strong deterrent to crime.

To enhance these safety precautions, students should also have a firm grasp on how to recognize and reach to any dangerous situation. Whether it is suspicious behavior, a personal attacker, gang activity, or an active shooter, students should be prepared and know how to act. To help achieve this a school could implement self-defense classes, informative videos, and safety lectures by professionals. These efforts

would have a broad impact due to their wide reach and relatively minimal cost. The courses would provide students with a healthy base of knowledge to protect themselves and coupled with the security devices create a much safer atmosphere.

Recent research has also shown the low cost to large benefit of safety “flip charts”. These are very simple packets that provide classroom teachers with an appropriate course of action for any number of events. They help teachers react in the proper manner in a situation, which may be chaotic or disorienting. We are endeavoring to ensure that this simple piece of equipment is implemented in schools throughout Dallas.

5. Proposed Timeline This does not need to be precise and to the day. But please set out the stages or steps that you expect to follow, how long you expect these to take, and when you will begin to reach conclusions.

May 2008: Through research find schools, which could benefit from phone alert system and emergency station locations.

August 2008: Gain approval from districts to begin training on programs for schools, begin promotion of safety awareness. Search for grants to begin construction on emergency stations.

November 2008: After research and approval, break ground on first emergency stations. Also start safety education and training programs at “test” schools.

Feb 2009: Complete installation of first round of emergency stations. Begin looking for new areas of need. Continue until sufficient amount have been placed.

May 2009: Assess the success of programs.

6. Anticipated Budget¹ Complete in detail the following:

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Supplies and equipment (e.g., pH meter, video camera) | |
| ___Unknown Cost of Alert system and Emergency Stands | _____ |
| Travel | _____ \$100 _____ |
| Copying or printing expenses | _____ \$300-600 _____ |
| To send out or hand out fliers about the efforts | |
| Mailing expenses | _____ \$100 _____ |
| Total anticipated budget: | _____ \$500- \$800 _____ |
| Person responsible for funds: | _____ James Petersen _____ |
| Signature of person responsible for funds: | _____ |

¹ The budget is subject to SMU policies relating to grant expenditures—thus, for instance, purchase of computer or video equipment requires specific justification and a statement of how the items will be used, and these funds may not be used for purchase of phones.