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Press Conference to Be Held to Announce Violence Free School Zones

ANTELOPE VALLEY – Officials from the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster will join together for a series of press events on Tuesday, Jan. 15 starting at 9 am at Pete Knight High to kick off the implementation of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise’s Violence Free School Zone (VFZ) efforts at Pete Knight and Eastside high schools. The VFZ is an intensive, adaptable, school-based initiative that makes use of youth advisors/peer mentors to identify and work with a small percentage of the school’s student population that cause the most disturbances. The goal of the VFZ is to reduce youth crime, violence and gang activity within the specific target school and immediate surrounding area.

“The Violence Free Zone Initiative is a proven program, and I think it is a great fit with our Partners for a Better Palmdale program,” said Palmdale Mayor Jim Ledford. “I believe this will help us in our efforts to reduce crime and to build stronger partnerships in our neighborhoods and in our schools,” he added.

“We have high hopes that this program will make a positive difference in our schools,” said Lancaster Mayor Henry Hearn. “The Violence Free Zone Initiative is an innovative solution to a pervasive problem, and we have found that innovative solutions often succeed where other methods have failed.”

Both the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster have collaborated with the Antelope Valley Unified High School District (AVUHSD) to implement the program on a pilot basis for the

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VFZ Initiative 2/2/2/2

remainder of the 2007-2008 academic year. On December 14 the AVUHSD Board voted to approve the implementation of the CNE VFZ Initiative, and allocated up to \$150,000 to partially fund the program at Knight High School in Palmdale and Eastside High School in Lancaster.

The Lancaster City Council voted to contribute up to \$75,000 towards the cost of the implementation at Eastside High in Lancaster, and the Palmdale City Council approved contributing \$75,000 for implementation at Pete Knight High in Palmdale.

It is possible that the cities and AVUHSD could eventually secure government and/or private foundation grant funding to offset the cost of the program. At full implementation, this is an ongoing, year-round program that works in the schools and in the immediate surrounding community.

The VFZ Initiative partners with community service providers and other local nonprofit and faith-based organizations to provide services to the targeted students. Selection of six to 10 youth advisors and a site supervisor from the community for each site is critical to the success of the program. Murrell's Farm and Boys' Home is the local agency that has contracted with the school district to implement the Violence Free School Zone Initiative.

The VFZ Initiative is an outcome-based program and, as such, is focused on gathering applicable data, establishing goals and tracking points and reporting on results. The program has shown measurable results in the 21 schools and six cities where it is currently in place. The six cities are Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Milwaukee, Prince George County in Maryland and Washington, DC.