



# Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

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## Baylor University Study Details VFZ's Positive Impact

Researchers from Baylor University have concluded that the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise's Violence-Free Zone program in Milwaukee high schools is demonstrating an immediate effect in three areas: improved safety within the schools, increased presence of students in school, and improved academic performance

After a study examining 11 high schools that implemented the VFZ programs between September, 2005 and November, 2007, a research team led by Dr. Byron Johnson and William Wubberhorst said, "What we can safely conclude from the current study is that we have found ample evidence of potential linkages between the Milwaukee VFZ initiative and a number of important outcomes."

The Baylor researchers grouped the VFZ schools into two categories: one the large single administration high schools (South Division, Bay View and Custer), and the second the subdivided high schools that have two or three 'mini' high schools with separate principals (Marshall, North Division, and Washington). These subdivided schools pose special challenges as Youth Advisors respond to each of the principals in each separate school.

Some of the findings reported in the case study:

- Violent Incidents in the large high schools decreased by 32%, and by 8% in the high schools that have several subdivision schools. These improvements compare with a 3% increase in violent incidents in the high schools that did not have the Violence-Free Zone.
- Suspensions decreased by 37% in the large VFZ high schools and 44% in the subdivided schools, compared with an increase of 6% in suspensions for all Milwaukee Public Schools high schools.
- While the Violence-Free Zone program is not an academic program, it motivates students to study. GPA actually increased by 3.82% in the large VFZ high schools and 4.56% in the subdivided schools. The rest of the MPS schools that did not have the VFZ remained even in average GPA.

"Interviews with Milwaukee school officials, teachers, and other relevant stakeholders indicate widespread agreement regarding the linkages between the implementation of the VFZ initiative and subsequent improvements in a number of outcome areas," the study said.

The study examines the history, goals, activities, and impact of the VFZ youth violence reduction program at the six Milwaukee high schools that had the program for the full 2007/2008 school year. The Baylor team analyzed the record of violent and non-violent incidents, and suspensions before and after the Violence-Free Zone program was introduced in the schools. They also conducted extensive interviews of school, foundation, and VFZ program officials and analyzed the responses to climate survey questions about feelings of safety as expressed by students and parents at the six schools. The evaluation team compared data from VFZ schools to that of non-VFZ schools in Milwaukee.

The Violence-Free Zone program was created and is directed by the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise and implemented in Milwaukee schools by CNE's community partners, Latino Community Center and Running Rebels Community Organization. The VFZ Youth Advisors work full time in the schools as hall and cafeteria monitors, role models, and mentors to high-risk students. They work closely with MPS School Safety Officers, teachers, and counselors to provide a complete support system for students. The VFZ also works closely with the Milwaukee Police Department.

The VFZ is funded by MPS and had additional support from 11 Milwaukee foundations in the 2007/2008 school year. The program has been extended to eight high schools for the 2008/2009 school year: Bay View, Bradley Tech, Custer, Madison, Marshall, North Division, South Division, and Washington High Schools.