



Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

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MEDIA RELEASE

Officials Praise Successful Youth Violence Reduction Program

With youth violence impacting students and schools across the country, the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE) will hold a briefing November 16 in Washington, DC on a program that has produced measurable results in reducing incidents and making schools safe for education. Results data and testimonies about the impact of CNE's Violence-Free Zone youth violence reduction program on public schools and surrounding communities will be presented by educators, law enforcement officials, and evaluators who have experience with the program.

The event, titled "Presenting the Evidence: A Successful Solution to Youth Violence," will be hosted by CNE President Robert L. Woodson and moderated by Pulitzer-Prize winning columnist Clarence Page of the Chicago Tribune. It will be held in the Georgetown Ballroom, Hilton Garden Inn Downtown, 815 14th Street, NW on Monday, November 16, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The reports will be made to an audience of U.S. government officials and educators, law enforcement, foundation and business executives from a variety of cities.

Among those who will be testifying are:

Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent William Andrekopoulos will tell how the VFZ program has been making substantial reductions in violent and non-violent incidents, suspensions, and trancies for several years in eight Milwaukee high schools. In a recent radio interview, Andrekopoulos said, "I'm not even going to say it's a program, it's really a cultural shift, an emphasis on bringing the community into our schools and embracing our children. We saw instant improvement in suspensions, instant improvement in class disruptions, in fact, talking with the principals, they have told me they don't know how they could be a principal without the program in the schools. So it's been a very positive experience. The data presents itself. It's actually changing lives of children." He will be joined by former **Milwaukee Principal Mark Kuxhause**, who will talk about how South Division High School, once one of the city's most dangerous schools, became one of the safest.

Richmond, VA Assistant Chief of Police David McCoy, who has reported that the Violence-Free Zone program in one Richmond High School has reduced police arrests at the school from

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107 to just a couple this year, and reduced the truancy rate from 60% to 19%. Motor vehicle thefts around the school have dropped by 61%, which he attributes to the program keeping young people in school and out of trouble.

Milwaukee District Attorney John Chisholm has said “Since this program has been in place – there clearly have been other factors as well – but this is one of the key factors – we’ve seen the largest reduction in violent crime in Milwaukee’s history in the last 25 years. And that’s how deeply I feel that this isn’t just a luxury, not just a good program, this is a necessity that we need to have in our community if we are to going to continue creating a safe environment, a place where people know that their kids are going to be able to go to school in safety...”

Baylor University Evaluators Dr. Byron Johnson and William Wubbenhorst will present data from their study of six high schools that have the Violence-Free Zone program, with before and after comparisons. Among the findings: Three large Milwaukee high schools with the VFZ had a 32% reduction in violent incidents and a 37% reduction in suspensions.

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Senior Research Analyst Dr. Ivory B. Toldson, author of *Breaking Barriers: Plotting the Path to Academic Success for School-age African American Males*, will point to the relationship between safety and school performance, particularly for black males. While black students are nearly 500% more likely to pass through a metal detector when entering school, he notes, black males are significantly more likely to feel unsafe at school than other students. “We cannot provide realistic solutions to improve academic success among black males without first addressing the deplorable acts of violence plaguing youth throughout America,” he says.

Young people whose lives have been changed by the community-based Violence-Free Zone (VFZ) program will also talk about how and why they turned away from violence and disruption, along with the **VFZ program staff** responsible for those changes. Cities represented will include Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Milwaukee, and Richmond, VA.

Robert L. Woodson, Sr. and the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE) created the Violence-Free Zone initiative to address youth violence in schools and communities. The VFZ is directed by CNE, and is implemented by community-based organizations at 32 public middle and high schools across the country, including Atlanta (6), Baltimore (4), Dallas (13), Milwaukee (8), and Richmond, VA (1).

The approach is unique in that it utilizes young adults from the same neighborhoods and backgrounds as students in the schools. Called Youth Advisors, they are able to prevent violence, resolve conflicts, and motivate students to responsible behavior and academic achievement. The Youth Advisors act as hall and cafeteria monitors, mentors, counselors, and role models, and establish trust relationships with the students. In addition, teachers assign groups of high risk students to the Youth Advisors, who meet with them at lunch or other times to discuss and work out the issues that trouble them. The community-based organizations also offer after-school, weekend, and summer programs, creating 24-7 relationships with young people. CNE’s community-based partners implementing the VFZ are: Atlanta – Visions Unlimited; Baltimore – New Vision Youth Services; Dallas – Vision Regeneration; Milwaukee – Latino Community Center and Running Rebels Community Organization; and Richmond – The Richmond Outreach Center (The ROC).

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise was founded by Robert L. Woodson, Sr. in 1981 to help low-income Americans address the problems of their communities. CNE has provided technical assistance and training to more than 2600 leaders of community-based organizations in 39 states. Major programs include the Violence-Free Zone, Training and Technical Assistance, and Adult Financial Literacy. In partnership with HSBC, CNE and its community partners have brought financial literacy education to more than 25,000 low and middle-income adults across the country.