



# Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

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**November 19, 2009**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise's Violence-Free Zone program not only has reduced violence in schools in five urban centers, but also has had significant impacts on crime rates in surrounding communities. Schools with the VFZ program also are showing improvements in student educational achievement, officials reported at a briefing November 16 in Washington, DC.

Some highlights of testimonies by law enforcement and education officials from Milwaukee, Dallas, and Richmond, and from the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation:

- Violent incidents dropped 32% in three Milwaukee large high schools and 8% in three multiplex schools. Suspensions decreased 37-44%. GPA levels in the six schools rose from 4-5% reported Baylor University evaluators who studied the Violence-Free Zone impact in six Milwaukee high schools.
- The city of Milwaukee had the largest drop in crime in the past 25 years. The VFZ program, while not the only factor, was a key factor, according to the Milwaukee District Attorney. Milwaukee Superintendent of Schools William Andrekopoulos noted that 20-25% of Milwaukee's high school students are now in schools with the VFZ, and it impacts the entire city.
- In Richmond, VA, motor vehicle thefts dropped 61% around the school that had the Violence-Free Zone. Assistant Police Chief David McCoy reported. Arrests at the school dropped 99%. In Milwaukee, motor vehicle thefts around the six VFZ schools dropped 25%, significantly surpassing the city average,
- Dallas schools with the program not only saw reductions in gang activity and violence, but achieved increases in educational achievement, reported Dallas School Board member Ron Price.

"Superficial safety measures such as metal detectors and security guards do not improve academic achievement among black males. In fact, they serve to further alienate students, by causing feelings of insecurity, lack of respect, and rigidity," Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Senior Research Analyst Dr. Ivory Toldson, told the briefing.

"By contrast, the VFZ offers an approach that taps into students' natural will to find peaceful solutions to conflict, and their potential to contribute in very positive ways to the school

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environment." Toldson is the author of *Breaking Barriers: Plotting the Path to Academic Success for School-age African American Males* published by CBCF.

The Violence-Free Zone program is a full-time mentoring approach that marshals the knowledge and influence of young adults from the same communities and experiences as the students in the schools. Called Youth Advisors, because of their backgrounds they are able to win the trust and confidence of the students. Not only do they provide mentoring, violence- prevention, conflict mediation, and character-coaching, during the school day, they are available on a 24/7 basis to children who may be facing crises or need someone to talk to in evenings and weekends. CNE's community partner organizations who employ them offer after-school activities. The program is currently implemented in 32 schools in Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Milwaukee, and Richmond, VA.

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. Major programs include the Violence-Free Zone, Training and Technical Assistance for Community-Based Organizations, and Adult Financial Literacy.

## 11/19/2009