



# Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

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## The Violence-Free Zone at Bladensburg and Largo High Schools How It Works

At Bladensburg and Largo High Schools, the VFZ Youth Advisors act as monitors in the cafeteria, hallways, and school grounds. There are five lunch periods at Bladensburg, and four at Largo, offering the Youth Advisors the opportunity to reach out to student opinion leaders as well as those whose behavior is most troubling in the classroom. The Youth Advisors also assist the teachers if they request help in managing classroom behavior, and assist with the in-school suspension room when requested. They develop relationships with the students that inspire their trust and respect, making students receptive to their guidance and discipline.

Because they come from the same backgrounds as the students, the Youth Advisors understand and can be a listening ear when home and community issues cause a student's negative behavior in school. The Youth Advisors also are able to break up or resolve conflicts before they erupt into violence. Because students regard the Youth Advisors as big brothers and sisters or friends, they are willing to share confidences with them without feeling that they are "snitching." Valuable information about potential trouble can then be passed on to school authorities. If requested by school authorities, the VFZ team engages in follow-up responses.

### Examples of VFZ Youth Advisor Actions

(Period from school start in late August through mid-October)

- During the first seven weeks of school, VFZ Youth Advisors in the two schools broke up 4 conflicts in progress, participated in pre and post-conflict intervention more than 100 times, and provided assistance to teachers in managing classroom order approximately 20 times.
- An ongoing conflict between two female students was erupting into fights at home and in school. VFZ staff joined school administration staff in a meeting with their parents, and then received permission to convene a meeting of the parents, older brothers, and the two young ladies involved. After hearing from both their families and the VFZ staff that their behavior needed to cease, the young ladies agreed to drop their concerns and stay away from each other. The parents expressed gratitude to the VFZ staff and expressed confidence that the conflict was over because it had been dealt with in such a direct and team-oriented manner with the school staff, parents, VFZ staff, and students together.

- Two VFZ Youth Advisors entered a classroom where students were extremely rowdy, standing on chairs and otherwise disrupting the teacher's ability to teach. The team immediately calmed the classroom, allowing the teacher to regain control.
- A male student was disrupting the lunchroom. A Youth Advisor walked in the hallway and talked with him to ascertain the roots of his problem. The student confided problems at home. The Youth Advisor is following up with the teacher and student to support conduct change.
- A Youth Advisor learned that a student may have been carrying a knife, which he disposed of before encountering the security staff. The Youth Advisor learned that the incident was connected to an ongoing gang conflict. Principal Hughes convened the students suspected of participating in the conflict and the VFZ team assisted her in facilitating a formal intervention and subsequent follow-up monitoring of student behavior.
- Students in a class at Largo were setting off ring tones and otherwise socializing during class. The instigators of this behavior were pulled into the hallway for counseling by the VFZ staff, and the teacher has reported that the situation is improving.