



## PRESS RELEASE



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### **PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY FOR VIOLENCE-FREE ZONES**

A unique program being piloted by Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) at two high schools to address youth violence and other problems that often originate in communities is producing positive results, school officials reported at a conference held today at Bladensburg High School.

The principals at Bladensburg and Largo High Schools have partnered with the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE) to utilize its Violence-Free Zone program for reducing disruptions and incidents involving youth.

"We appreciate the unique work of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, which brings communities together around the common goal of providing a safe learning environment for all students," said Dr. John E. Deasy, Chief Executive Officer. "This program has the potential to maintain a climate where students respect one another and are focused on the acquisition of a high-quality education."

The program began with a conversation between the Honorable Samuel H. Dean of the Prince George's County Council, Dr. Beatrice P. Tignor, Prince George's County Board of Education Chair, Pastor John K. Jenkins, Sr. of the First Baptist Church of Glenarden, and CNE founder and president Robert L. Woodson, Sr. Following a trip to Baltimore to observe Violence-Free Zones in that city, PGCPS entered into a memorandum of understanding with CNE and the East Capitol Center for Change in April 2006 to initiate the Violence-Free Zone program at Bladensburg HS last school year, and commenced the program at Largo HS this school year.

"Since that time, we have seen a decrease in unruly behavior, conflicts, and suspensions in those schools, and we are extremely pleased by the return to a safe and orderly learning environment," Dr. Tignor said.

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The Violence-Free Zone program is unique in that it utilizes the experiences and talents of young adults from the same backgrounds as the students. These young adults, called Youth Advisors, act as hall and cafeteria monitors, mentors, counselors, conflict resolvers, and role models. Because they have faced and overcome the same challenges, the Youth Advisors receive the students' trust, respect, and confidences, and are often able to defuse incidents and resolve conflicts.

Evidence from schools around the country that have the Violence-Free Zone initiative indicates significant reductions in suspensions, code of conduct violations, fighting, and gang incidents. The goal of the Violence-Free Zone initiative is to support the school administration and teachers and create a climate in which education can thrive.

The Violence-Free Zone initiative is directed by the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, and is implemented in the District of Columbia and Prince George's County Public Schools by the East Capitol Center for Change.

The Violence-Free Zone initiative had its roots in Washington, DC, when in January of 1997, the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise and a grassroots organization negotiated a truce between the warring Avenue and Circle youth factions in the Benning Terrace public housing development, known then as "Simple City." Programs of job training and employment, life skills and volunteer-led sports activities have sustained the peace, which has been maintained over the past nine years with no crew-related killings. CNE exported the principles of the Benning Terrace success to other urban centers in crisis. In Dallas, the VFZ was brought into the public schools, where it had almost immediate success in stopping violence. In Dallas' Madison High School, for instance, gang incidents were reduced from 113 to 0. Other cities with Violence-Free Zones in the public schools include Atlanta, Baltimore, Milwaukee, and Washington, DC. (See attached Results and School Information.)

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise was founded in 1981 by Robert L. Woodson, Sr., to help residents of low-income neighborhoods address the problems of their communities. CNE provides training and technical assistance and linkages to support to community-based organizations such as East Capitol Center for Change. ECCC was founded by Curtis Watkins in 1996 and has implemented the Violence-Free Zone program in five DC public schools and is currently working in Kelly-Miller Middle School. ECCC also provides after-school, weekend, and summer programs for youth and families.