

School District No. 42's Anti-Vandalism Task Force

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School District No. 42 Anti-Vandalism Task Force

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Overview

he focus on vandalism prevention in School District No. 42 Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows started with a single question asked by a trustee. "How much is vandalism costing the district?"

The short answer was that no one could say for sure. So the Board of School Trustees instructed staff to find out. That required an overhaul of how the district kept track of its direct and indirect vandalism costs. When the answer came in, it shocked everyone. The actual cost of vandalism was \$450,000 per year.

With that information in hand, the Board decided it was time to take action. The Board established a broadly based community task force which determined that the root causes of vandalism were the community's high tolerance for vandalism of all kinds and an attitude that nothing could be done to prevent it. Changing this mind-set became the task force's primary goal. Vandalism was viewed as a community problem requiring a community solution.

With this goal in mind, the task force developed a multi-faceted vandalism prevention program and established a steering committee to oversee its implementation.

Now in its fifth year the task force's work is paying off with a substantial reduction in vandalism costs. Last year vandalism repair costs decreased by \$70,000 from the previous year. The number of incident dropped from 920 to 779.

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Anti-Vandalism Task Force

he School District's Anti-Vandalism Task Force is made up of representatives from the following organizations and agencies: the RCMP, Citizens on Patrol, Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association, District Parent Advisory Council, Canadian Union of Public Employees (Local 703), the Corporation of the District of Maple Ridge, the Corporation of the District of Pitt Meadows, Parks and Leisure Services, the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows Times Newspaper, and the Maple Ridge Fire

Department. The task force is also cooperating with Crime Prevention Coordinators, Community Policing Committees and Coast Mountain Bus Company Crime Prevention Unit.

Task force members reviewed their practices and strategies and inventoried their resources. They discovered that much good work was being done, but there was a need for more organization, coordination and communication.

The task force also invited students from every school in the district to a conference to gather student views and suggestions. A group of students helped to develop a discussion guide and poster which schools are using to make students aware of the problem and to get them involved in helping prevent it.

The task force developed a logo for the program depicting a community engaged in the protection of its schools and set up a vandalism hotline to serve as the nerve centre of a response and tracking system and as a means of engaging the community. The task force then developed a comprehensive four-part vandalism prevention program.

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Four-Part Vandalism Prevention Program

The program was launched at a major community event attended by representatives of all the partner groups, provincial and local political leaders, students, teachers and parents.

A public awareness campaign followed, which included the wide distribution of a poster highlighting the magnitude of the problem. The poster raised awareness in the community and many citizens were shocked at the cost of vandalism to local schools. To maintain a high level of community awareness, daily vandalism reports are distributed widely, including to the news media. When a significant act of vandalism occurs, a Vandalism Alert is distributed as a newspaper insert to the neighbourhood where the incident took place.

Strengthening and Extending Partnerships

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School District, the RCMP and Citizens on Patrol worked out a plan to make the most efficient use of their resources. All calls to the hotline go to a 24-hours operator who immediately dispatches a School District security runner to the scene. The security runner calls the RCMP if their presence is needed. On the weekend instead of calling a security runner, the operator calls Citizens on Patrols to be the first responder.

The RCMP also receives daily school vandalism reports to help identify "hot spots" which require special police attention. RCMP School Liaison Officers follow-up when appropriate.

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School District has also partnered with Ridge Meadows Parks and Leisure Services. Both organizations share the same hotline number and security response system. In addition, they have partnered on a number of community initiatives, including:

- the establishment of an after-school Kids Klub at two elementary schools;
- In cooperation with the Youth Services Society, the establishment of a late night youth drop in at a secondary school which is vandalised frequently.
- In cooperation with the Golden Ears Soccer Club, the installation of field lights at an elementary school which suffers from frequent vandalism. The lights are on even when there is no organized activities to give local children a place to play in the evenings.

The School District has also formed a partnership with the Fire Department which provides the district with weekly reports on all fire incidents. The Fire Department also works with students exhibiting fire setting behaviour and delivers fire awareness programs to district schools. School principals inform the Fire Department of any evidence of fire setting.

The Coast

Mountain Bus Company and the School District's school bus operator, Laidlaw, have distributed to their drivers a key tag displaying the hotline number and asked them to call the number if they see something suspicious or an act of vandalism in progress.

The Municipality of Maple Ridge has passed an anti-graffiti bylaw requiring all property owners to remove graffiti in a timely manner.

The District also participates in community events whenever possible to raise awareness of school vandalism and coordinate strategies with other organizations and agencies dealing with property crime. For example, District officials participated in a Town Hall property crime meeting sponsored by the Mayor of Maple Ridge.

The School District also hosted a provincial Vandalism "Best Practices" Conference in Maple Ridge which drew over 200 representatives from school districts, municipalities, law enforcement agencies and businesses. The conference was co-sponsored by RCMP "E" Division Community Policing Services, the School Plant Officials' Association of BC, the BC Schools Protection Program and Ridge Meadows Parks and Leisure Services. This webportal is an outgrowth of that conference.

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Mobilizing the School Community and Engaging Its Neighbours

The task force recognized the need for every school in the District to participate in the Anti-Vandalism Program. So it developed a list of "universal" initiatives applicable to all schools. Schools with serious vandalism problems are "targeted" for special attention; if these measures are insufficient, "intensive" initiatives are applied.

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Universal Initiatives

The universal initiatives include a student discussion guide and poster to make students aware of the vandalism program and to encourage them to actively participate in it. Students who participate in a vandalism prevention initiative receive a waterbottle bearing the program logo and hotline number. Each school also receives logo decals for display in prominent place throughout the

school and key tags and fridge magnets bearing the hotline number for distribution to school neighbours. (see video clips below). Other universal initiatives included poster contests, textbook covering projects, grounds clean up campaigns and regular vandalism reports in school newsletters. In addition, the School District has established a mural assistance fund of \$5,000 annually to encourage schools to undertake wall murals.

Targeted Initiatives

Targeted

initiatives are applied at schools with serious vandalism problems that persist after the implementation of the universal initiatives. The first step is to meet with the school community and neighbours to determine the causes of vandalism and to develop specific solutions. One school that was targeted for special attention was Fairview Elementary. It had become a favorite after-hours partying spot disturbing neighbours and leading to frequent acts of vandalism at the school. After meeting with the school community and neighbours, security patrols were increased and neighbours made frequent use of the anti-vandalism hotline. Perimeter lighting was increased and an "alert" warning light was installed so neighbours were aware when there were people near the school after dark. A water deterrent system called Vandal Soak was also installed to discourage loitering around the school.

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a result of these measures, the community became very involved and developed a strong sense of ownership of the school. In the first year of implementation the number of vandalism incidents dropped to 18 from 34 the previous year. Glass repair cost dropped by two thirds, from \$3,000 to \$1,000. Incidents and costs continue to decline and neighbours remain amongst the most active and engaged in the community.

Another school targeted for special attention was Glenwood Elementary. It suffered frequent window breakage and graffiti. Two factors contributed to the problem: (1) the school site is a natural pedestrian corridor and much of the school is hidden from public view. A number of measures were implemented, including the installation of Vandal Soak and window shutters, removal of an unused portable, increased perimeter lighting and the installation of a fence and a gate with a magnetic lock. The students, parents and staff also painted a mural on one of the school's exterior walls. The result vandalism has decreased.

Another

school had a large mound of earth removed so neighbours could have a clear view of the school. The District also reactivated a large fountain at another school to make it an attractive place for students and neighbours to gather after school hours and to make it an unattractive place for those with mischief in mind.

Intensive Initiatives

Intensive

Intensive school initiatives are required for schools which continue to experience significant vandalism after the universal and targeted initiatives have been implemented. There is one "inner city" elementary school that falls into this category. It is located on a property that serves as a natural pedestrian corridor between the downtown and nearby neighbourhoods. The school is a hangout for those with the greatest difficulty participating in society, including the chronically homeless and those involved in gang-related behaviour. Targeted initiatives at this school included increased security patrols, the installation of window shutters and increased perimeter lighting. The school's all-weather playing field was also lighted thanks to a partnership with a local soccer club and Parks and Leisure Services. These lights have transformed the school grounds into an inviting place for neighbours to be with their children after dark, rendering the site uncomfortable for negative behaviours. Despite these measures, vandalism continues to be a significant problem and additional measures are being contemplated.

Successes Featured in Video Clips

Following are two video clips featuring successful efforts to mobilize the school communities and their neighbours (Your computer must have Flash Player to view the videos. If you don't have it, you can download it for free by clicking here.)

{playerflv}http://www.vandalismsolutions.org/images/video/antivandal-1.flv|450|337.5|#000000|false{/playerflv}

{playerflv}http://www.vandalismsolutions.org/images/video/antivandal-2.flv|450|337.5|#000000|false{/playerflv}

Enhancing Physical Deterrents

he School District also uses a number of physical measures to prevent vandalism, including window shutters, increased lighting, fencing and gates, climbing barriers, window film, lexan panels and improving neighbours' site lines to their neighbourhood school. The district developed an innovative water deterrent device called Vandal Soak which emits a fine spray when activated by a motion detector. [Chick here](#) to learn more about the device. In addition the district uses a webcamera surveillance system and is testing three other high tech devices: Q-Star, the Mosquito and Tripwire.

Following is a video clip of some of the physical deterrent measure undertaken by the district:

{playerflv}http://www.vandalismsolutions.org/images/video/vandal_proof-2.flv|450|337.5|#000000|false{/playerflv}

What's Been Achieved

here have been a number of significant achievements:

- The general public is now aware of the magnitude of the school vandalism problem and is becoming engaged in resolving the problem.
- The District has established strong working partnerships with community groups, organizations and agencies.
- School communities and their neighbours have become sensitized to the problem and are becoming increasingly engaged.
- Vandalism repair costs on a District-wide basis are declining.

The Board of School Trustees is committed to protecting our student learning environment and to using the dollars currently consumed by vandalism to support student achievement. The results that have been achieved to date provide strong evidence that we are on the right path. However, there is still much more to be done to achieve our

goal: a community with a zero tolerance for school vandalism. The District is confident this goal can be achieved.

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