

HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD 2008

REDUCING GANG VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

Milpitas Police Department
Police Community Relations Unit
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SUMMARY

The City of Milpitas was incorporated in January 1954 and has a mid-sized police department, which serves approximately 67,000 residents. In 1992, the agency adopted a Community Oriented Policing philosophy and building a partnership with the community including the Milpitas Unified School District.

SCANNING:

During the 2003-2007 school years, there had been a steady increase in school-related violence with over 148 assaults being committed on campus. Several of these incidents were gang related. The negative influence of gangs, on school campus, not only affected the safety of the students but also contributed to the rise of other crimes associated to schools.

ANALYSIS:

A thorough analysis was conducted, by a full-time crime analyst, due to the increased calls for service at the high schools. In 2005, the department responded by assigning two full-time School Resource Officers to monitor the two high schools. A follow-up analysis was then conducted and determined the influence of gangs was still a contributing factor to the reported violence on campus.

RESPONSE:

In partnership with the school district and community, the police department initiated an innovative approach to prevent campus violence and eradicate gang violence on campus. The project consisted of a multifaceted approach, which proactively combats gang violence by incorporating a “zero-tolerance” enforcement policy and crime prevention strategies via special training and education. This requires a collaborative effort between the schools, community resources and law enforcement.

In August 2007, the Milpitas Police Department met with the Milpitas Unified School District and created new standards/procedures to address the gang issues. Specialized training was given to school staff members and the School Resource Officers. Community education was conducted via live presentations and the distribution of literature. A “zero-tolerance” approach was taken and gang members were identified, arrested and/or expelled. As a result of this unique collaboration, there was a destabilization of gangs on campus and a dramatic reduction in crime at the high school.

ASSESSMENT:

Since the inception of this program, over the last year, there has been a 75.7% decrease in gang-related incidents and a 50% decrease for the total amount of incidents overall. The new policies and procedures have been such a success there have been several requests from other school administrators within the district to establish these policies citywide.

REDUCING GANG VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

The City of Milpitas was incorporated on January 26, 1954. The police department is a mid-sized agency, employing 118 full time employees, (88 sworn and 30 civilians). The police department services a community of approximately 67,000 residents. The police department has been deeply involved in the community since its incorporation in 1954. The community is affluent and ethnically diverse with a median household income of \$98,979. Asians constitute a majority with approximately 52% of the population. The rest of the balance is comprised of Caucasians at 24%, Hispanics at 17% and African-Americans at 3%.

In 1992, the Milpitas Police Department implemented the Priority Policing model of Community Oriented Policing, which places a special emphasis on Problem Solving while working in conjunction with the community. The Department established a mission statement, which reads:

“The Milpitas Police Department is committed to the protection of lives and property by working with our community and providing professional and responsive police services.”

The Milpitas Unified School District has the jurisdiction of two high schools within the City of Milpitas. The Milpitas High School and the Calaveras Hills continuation school are two miles apart from each other and together serve a student population of approximately 3,050 students.

SCANNING

During the 2003-2007 school years, there had been a steady increase in school-related violence with over 148 assaults being committed on campus. Several of these incidents were gang-related. As defined by the California Penal Code, a gang is any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more criminal acts, having a common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members, individually or collectively, engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal activity. During the years, an increased sign of gang presence began to emerge on campus. Originally, the signs were covert, however they seemed to be emerging to the point where they were blatantly being displayed on open campus grounds. Some of the most common signs were:

- **Gang Attire:** Many gang members wear distinctive clothing styles. Since Milpitas high schools do not have assigned uniforms, regular clothing becomes their street uniform. Gang colors help identify peer and rival gang members.
- **Body Modifications:** Some gang members purposely scar their bodies instead of applying tattoos. Some burn themselves with cigarettes on their hands, arms and legs to show they are a member of a gang.
- **Monikers:** Gang members commonly have a nickname or moniker. The name may highlight a real or imagined physical, personal or psychological trait.
- **Graffiti:** Gangs use graffiti to identify themselves and their territory. With graffiti, they mark their territory or turf, declare their allegiance to the gang, advertise the gang status

or power and challenge rivals. Graffiti is also used to intimidate the other students who may congregate or eat lunch in a gang controlled area.

- **Hand Signs:** Hand signs are used in greeting other peer gang members, to challenge a rival gang and as a form of intimidation to non-gang members. Commonly, letters of the alphabet or numbers are formed by using the fingers and hand.

- **Gang Slang:** Many gang members have adopted a verbal code that applies to their gang. Using a specific gang term does not by itself determine gang membership.

There were also behavioral patterns associated to the involvement with gangs being reported by school staff, friends and family members. Some of these signs included:

- Decline in grades.
- Change of friends.
- Truancy.
- Staying out late.
- Alcohol and drug use.
- Developing major attitude problems with parents, teachers, and others in positions of authority.
- Withdrawing from family.

The initial level of diagnosis recognized a need for a multifaceted approach due to the involvement between students, school staff members, family members and the police department.

ANALYSIS

Police management, community leaders and school staff members began taking a serious interest in the increased gang activity, due to the notoriety and a past gang-related homicide of a Milpitas high school student. The problem was initially identified by utilizing a computerized crime analysis model, called CompStat, to track crime statistics and recent trends.

Compstat was first developed in New York in 1994 in response to a very specific set of immediate needs regarding the increasing crime rate. It is an effective, adaptable management model which emphasizes the collection and analyzation of data to predict crime trends. It also requires performance accountability at every level of the organization. A full-time crime analyst collects data and through the use of the program analyzes the dates, times, methods of operations and types of crime consistent with the Uniform Crime Report or otherwise unknown as the FBI Index Crimes. With the information gained through CompStat, the Police Department can formulate timely tactics and action plans to combat the current crime trends. This information can be charted and graphed making it easier to understand and visually track the effectiveness of the project. The department regularly holds meetings to discuss and evaluate this information. These meetings consist of the Chief of Police, Division Commanders, Lieutenants and other members of various units in the Department. During these meetings, the action plans can also be altered to fit the desired needs of the program to ensure success.

For years, gangs had been present on school campuses in Milpitas. There are several motivations and issues dealing with the reasons why these juveniles feel the need to join gangs. Many children feel the need to be socially accepted and are drawn to the respect, recognition and power of a gang. Others look at gangs as a social avenue to meet girls, gain access to drugs or invitations to parties. Many of the gang members joined due to a lack of family stability and feel the need to be cared for or treated as an extended part of a family. Some students began associating with gangs for protection because they are either picked on or are raised in a gang-infested neighborhood.

Originally, the police department began dealing with the gang problems by taking a reactive stance. In other words, officers responded and took action after an incident had already occurred. As the problems slowly increased, the department took more of an aggressive stance. There were many attempts to curb the gang violence utilizing general deterrence practices, such as high visibility patrols during lunch hours and after-school patrol with marked and unmarked vehicles. However, the problems continued to exist and there were many assaults occurring, both on campus or on adjacent properties to the campuses. In March 2005, the Milpitas Police Department responded to the uprising of violence on campus by assigning two full-time School Resource Officers to monitor activity at both campuses. Although there was an impact at the school, the influence of gangs was still a contributing factor to the reported violence on campus.

During 2003-2007, there were approximately 148 assaults on school grounds and many of them were gang-related. In the school year 2006-2007, there were a total of 96 suspensions due to fights/assaults. Of those 96 incidents, approximately 37 of them were gang-related. Majority of these incidents involved boys (64.8%). There were

approximately 100 arrests during the school year for a variety of offenses. A secondary on-site analysis was then conducted by members of the Milpitas Police Community Relations Unit. The second analysis revealed there were other underlying conditions that precipitated the problems. Some of the situational information came to light as far as locations of occurrence and lack of policies and procedures prohibiting certain types of behaviors or dress attire. It was obvious there was a need for change in order to reduce gang violence on campus.

RESPONSE

The Police Department decided to create a project to significantly reduce the gang influence on campus. This particular project was chosen due to the increase in school violence throughout the country and in light of the recent campaign against school violence. The primary goal was to decrease the number of gang-related incidents and through enforcement tactics validate and expel gang members who violated the law.

The secondary goal was to educate the public, school and police staff members regarding gang awareness. Through this education, students and parents will be informed of the negativity associated with street gangs. Officers and school staff members will be well-informed regarding the recognition and identification of gangs and gang members. Some of the evaluation criteria taken into consideration, prior to the enactment of the action plan, dealt with the legality of contacting students on campus and the practicality of these contacts during school hours. Another factor was the feasibility of changing procedures within the Milpitas Unified School District and persuading non-police personnel to cooperate with the plan.

In August 2007, the Milpitas Police Department held a meeting with representatives from the Milpitas Unified School District to create new standards and procedures in response to the ongoing gang violence. The program required a collaborative effort from both the community and law enforcement thus keeping consistent with the department's mission statement. This new program was designed to reduce gang violence on campus by using a multifaceted approach, which included education and enforcement.

Education

Police-Based

- All School Resource Officers were given in-house gang training. The training included recognition, prevention and legal updates regarding gangs.
- All School Resource Officers attended a one-day training regarding Campus Security and School Violence held at the Alameda County Sheriff's Department in Dublin, California.
- Gang training was offered/presented to all members of the Milpitas Unified School District Staff.
- A Spanish-speaking Milpitas Gang Detective gave several Gang Presentations at the school and throughout the community. The Milpitas School District Latino Community Liaison coordinated the meetings.
- Gang awareness pamphlets were created and circulated to the parents within the school district. These pamphlets are also given to parents each time a student is involved in any gang-related incident. The pamphlets contain information regarding gang recognition and what to do if parents suspect their children are involved in gangs.

- The Milpitas Police Department holds monthly meetings with the school district at the police station. During these meetings, roundtable discussions regarding recent activities at the school campuses take place. Preventive measures are also reviewed and revamped as necessary.
- The police department helped draft an anti-gang dress code and a bus stop abatement policy.

School-Based

- The Milpitas Unified School District coordinated an in-service day for gang training to the high school staff.
- Milpitas High School hired two independent gang counselors to assist students with gang-related issues and an outreach program.
- The school administration helped draft an anti-gang dress code and bus stop abatement policy.
- The school administration sent out letters to the parents/guardians of all students informing them of the new gang dress policy and the repercussions for any violations of the policy.

Enforcement

Police-Based

- All School Resource Officers reviewed current laws relating to schools and adjacent properties. A “zero-tolerance” approach has been enacted and all violations will result in citations or arrests.

- All School Resource Officers patrol the campus and proactively identify students exhibiting gang-affiliated clothing, associating with known gang members or participating in gang-related activity.
- School Resource Officers contact students in violation of school policies and escort them to the administrative office.
- School Resource Officers immediately contact an administrative staff member when a student is in violation of policies/procedures or law.
- School Resource Officers contact parents via phone or in person to explain the gang-related activity and offer educational services including pamphlets.
- School Resource Officers document their contacts and refer all reports to the Special Investigations Unit.

School-Based

- School administrators initially give warnings to students in violation of the gang dress code policy.
- A second violation warrants school administrators to seize the prohibited items and place the student on a contract prohibiting the student from wearing the prohibited item(s) to school.
- A third instance and each instance thereafter result in a suspension.
- All students from the continuation high school are prohibited from congregating at the bus stop in front of Milpitas High School. All violators receive a suspension for each incident.

Members from several divisions of the police department participated in the project. This included officers from the Police Community Relations Unit and Patrol. It also included

detectives from the Investigation Bureau and Gang Unit. There were also several members from the Milpitas Unified School District involved including the superintendent, principals from both high schools and multiple assistant/associate principals. Private security guards hired by the school district were also educated and primarily used as extra observers.

Based on the collaborative efforts and willingness to succeed, there were no difficulties encountered during the response implementation stage.

ASSESSMENT

Since the inception of the new dress code policy in 2007-2008, there have only been 40 suspensions (as of 2/08). However, majority of these incidents involved girls (70%). Out of the total number of suspensions, only 9 incidents were considered gang related and only one of these incidents involved boys. There have been only 62 arrests (as of 2/08).

The degree of change for the total amount of incidents has been reduced by 58.3% (see Appendix A).

The degree of change for the number of gang-related incidents has been decreased by 75.7%. It is projected the number of arrests will also be significantly reduced as well. There were 13 documented gang informational reports during the 2003-2007 school years. Since the inception of this program, there has been over 33 similar reports. These 33 reports are directly related to the School Resource Officers and their ability to identify and officially validate street gang members. Gang validations are extremely important in aiding criminal prosecutions of gang-related offenses. When comparing the number of assaults from the previous years with the number of gang information reports, it is obviously clear there is a direct correlation between the two (see Appendix B).

Increasing the contacts, identifying gang members and documenting such incidents causes a reduction in assaults on campus. In fact, by increasing the visibility of police officers on campus and proactively enforcing the new procedures, there were dramatic decreases in several types of crimes consistent with school campuses (see Appendix C & D). The implementation of the new gang dress code and bus stop abatement policy significantly reduced the number of suspensions due to fights/assaults. It has also reduced the number of arrests occurring on campus. There has also been a general deterrence factor due to the notoriety of the policy and its strict enforcement. This, coupled with extensive education provided to the officers, school staff and public dramatically impacted the safety of school campuses and helped maintain a positive learning climate in Milpitas. Since the inception of this program, there have been several administrators from middle schools and elementary schools wanting to adopt this policy citywide. Since both high schools have adopted the exact same policies/procedures, there hasn't been a displacement of the problems from one school to another. The schools have adopted this new policy into their orientation to ensure the principles of this project become engrained as standard operating procedures to incoming students. Since high schools have a constant student body rotating in and out, due to graduations, the police department will have to continually monitor the new arrivals to maintain the results. Eventually, these procedures will become standard and the gang problems will be eradicated from the school campuses making a safer environment for all.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

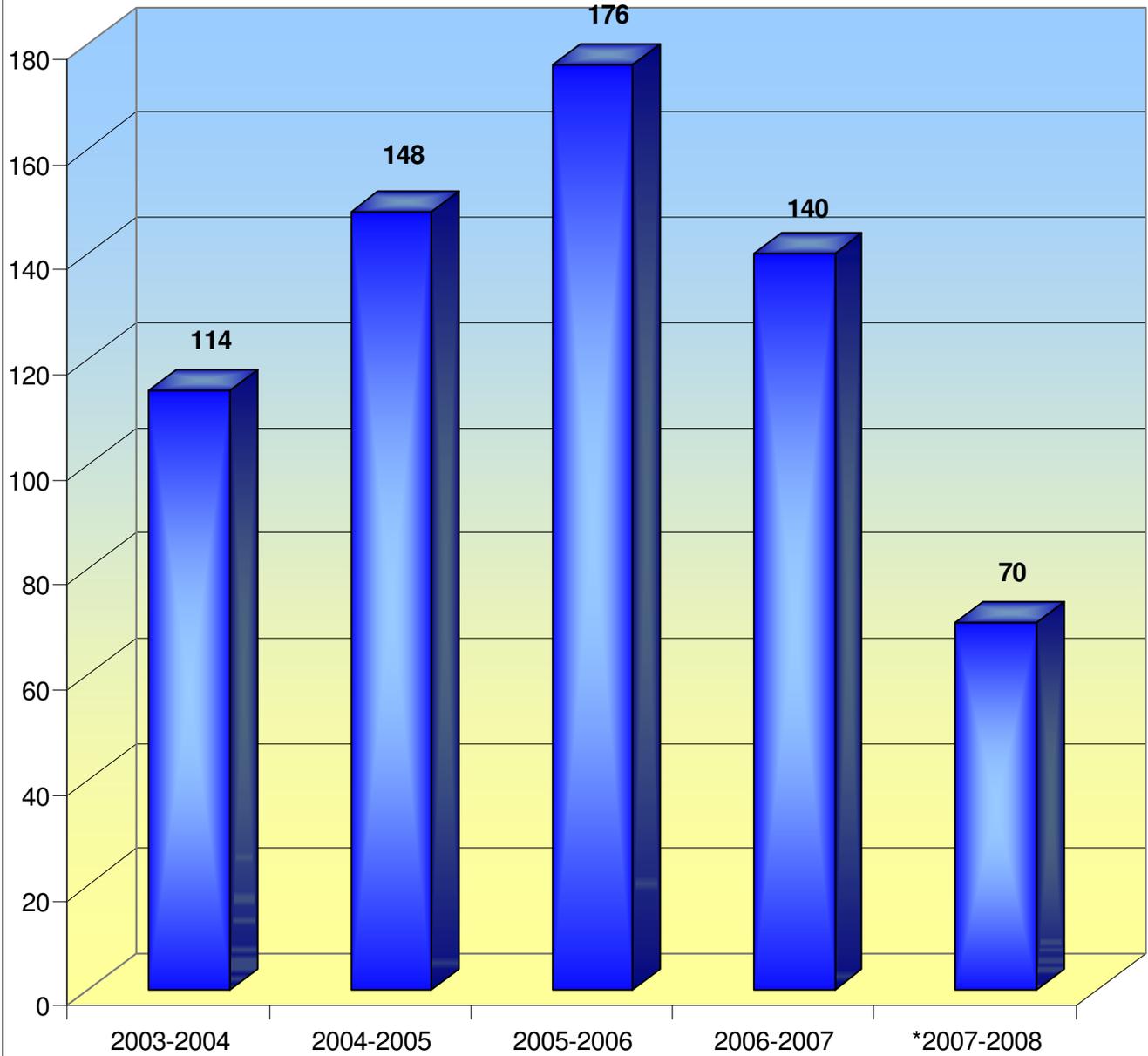
While the entire Milpitas Police Department was involved with problem-solving efforts in regards to gang suppression in the City of Milpitas, the primary officers in this project were the members from the Police Community Relations Unit (PCR). The supervisor of the unit and one of the resource officers have had prior experience working as gang detectives in the Special Investigations Unit. As court certified experts in gangs, they were able to train other members of PCR and the school staff members. Since this project is directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the School Resource Officers, there are no additional resources or financial incentives required to achieve the objectives. Problem-oriented policing and community-oriented policing have been the adopted philosophies of the Milpitas Police Department for many years. Officers, from all divisions, have been trained and accept these philosophies as part of their everyday worklife.

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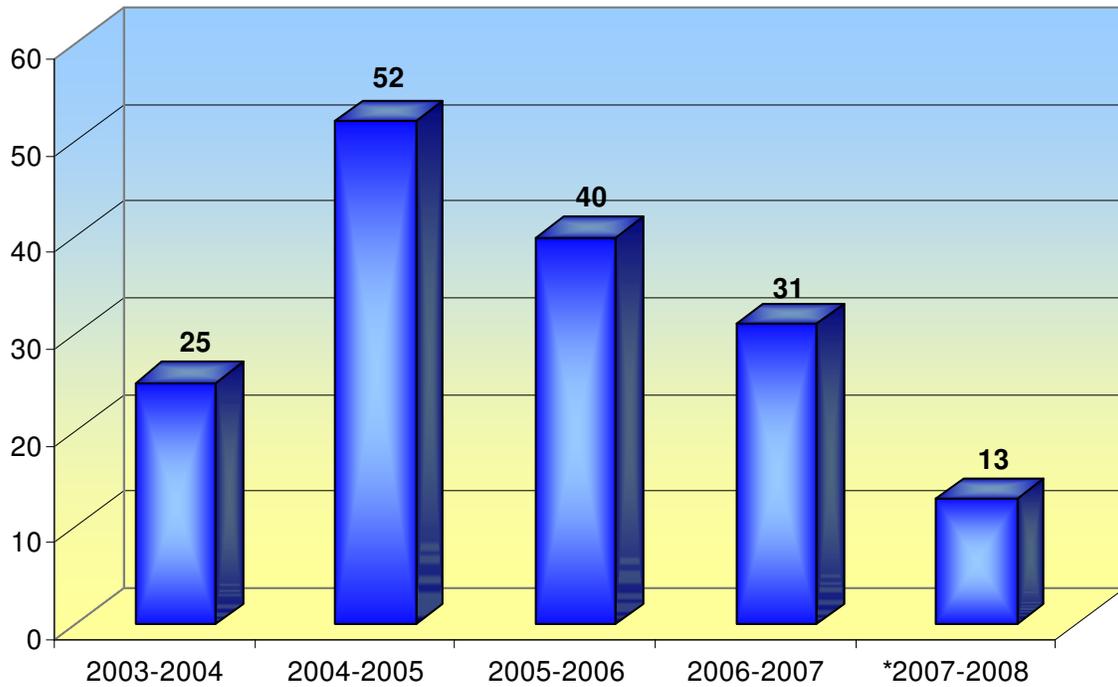
Appendix A

Total Incidents at Milpitas High School

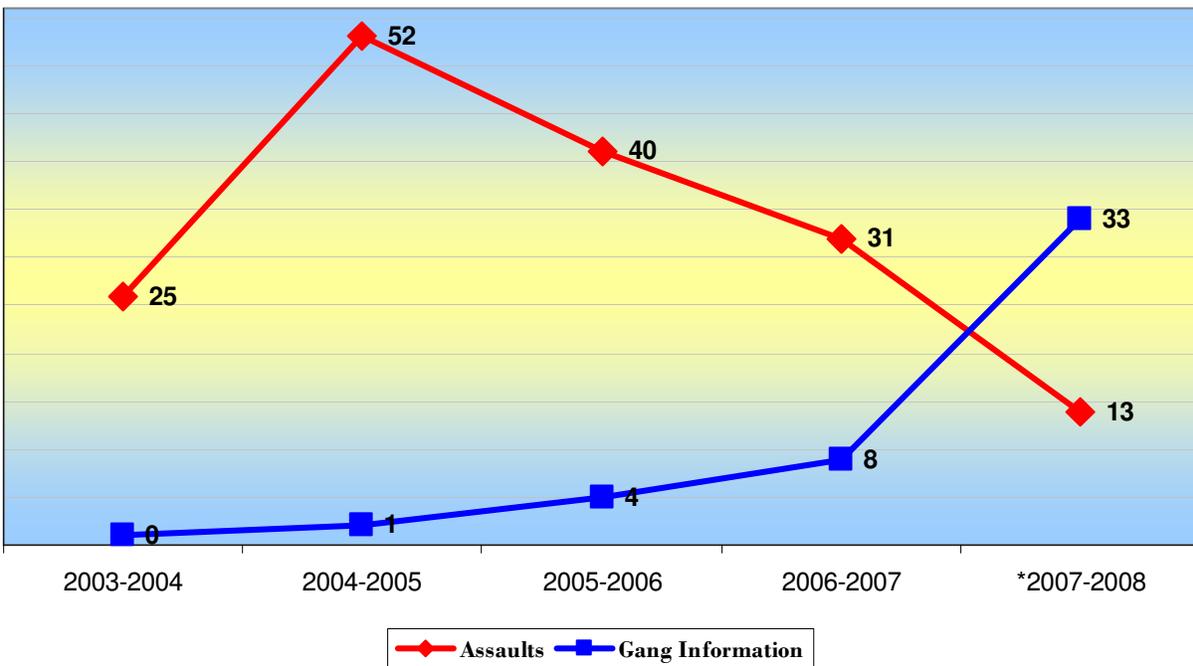


Appendix B

Assaults Reported at Milpitas High School

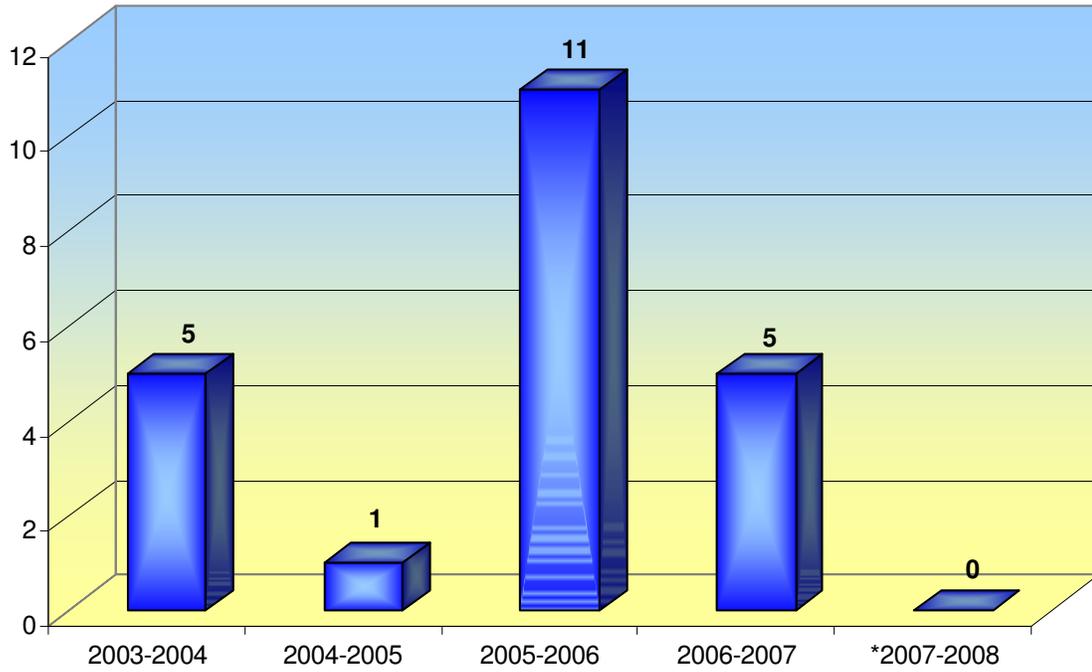


Assaults Decrease As Gang Info Reports Increase

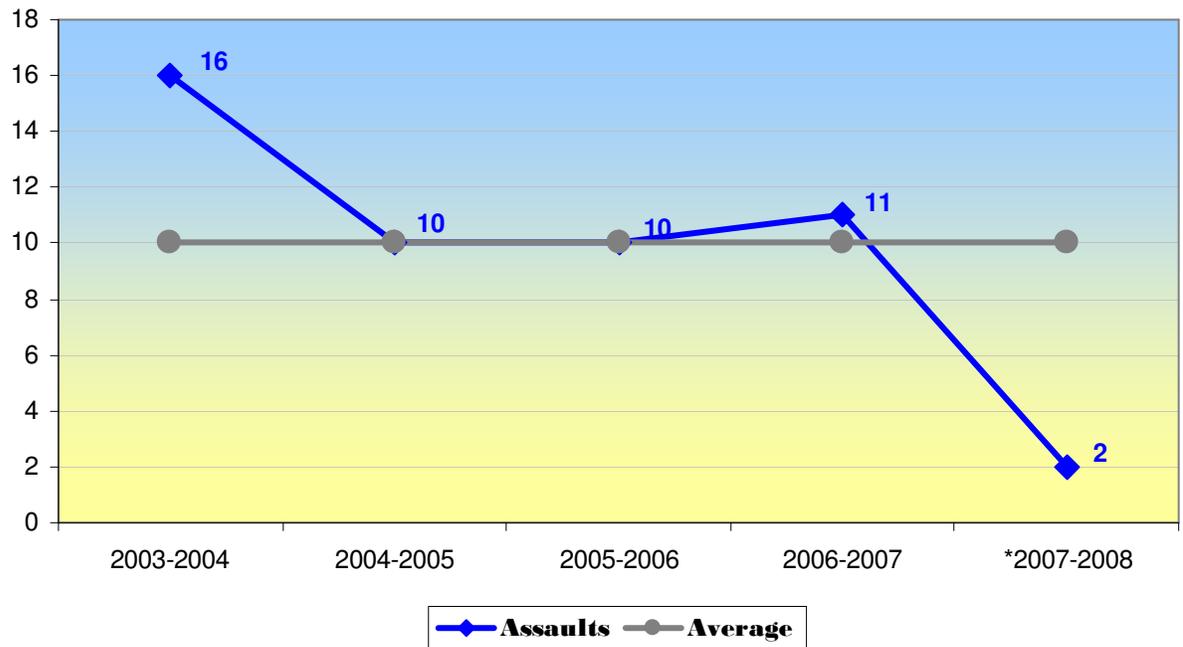


Appendix C

Truancy Reports at Milpitas High School

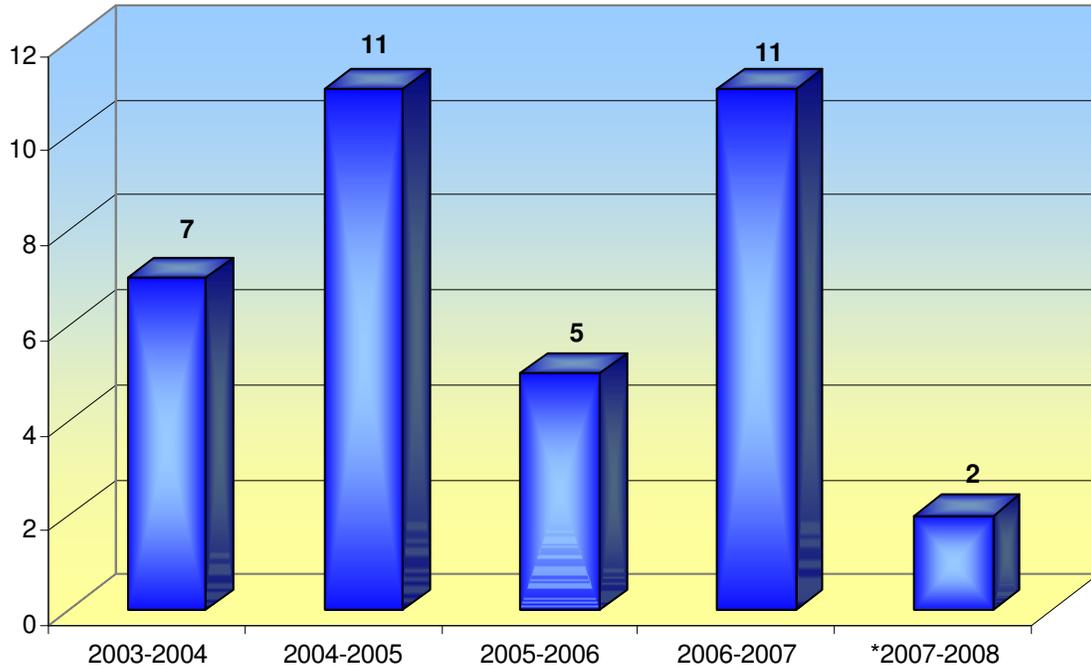


Below Average Number of Other Types of Juvenile Problems at Milpitas High School



Appendix D

Vandalisms Reported at Milpitas High School



Thefts Reported at Milpitas High School

