

Miller Park Center Project- Merging POP with the Schools and the Mental Health Community

In August 2009, the Lee's Summit, MO School District opened a K-12 school for emotionally disturbed students. On average, there are 15-20 students enrolled in the school. This building was two stories and also housed some offices on the second floor. The school had the entire first floor. This school was the last chance for many of the students to receive their education in the formal school setting while still living at home, instead of being sent to a group home to live and receive schooling away from their family. In addition, based upon the type of school, Miller Park Center has a no suspension rule. They will not suspend a student, but will attempt to get them back on track by working through the problems on scene.

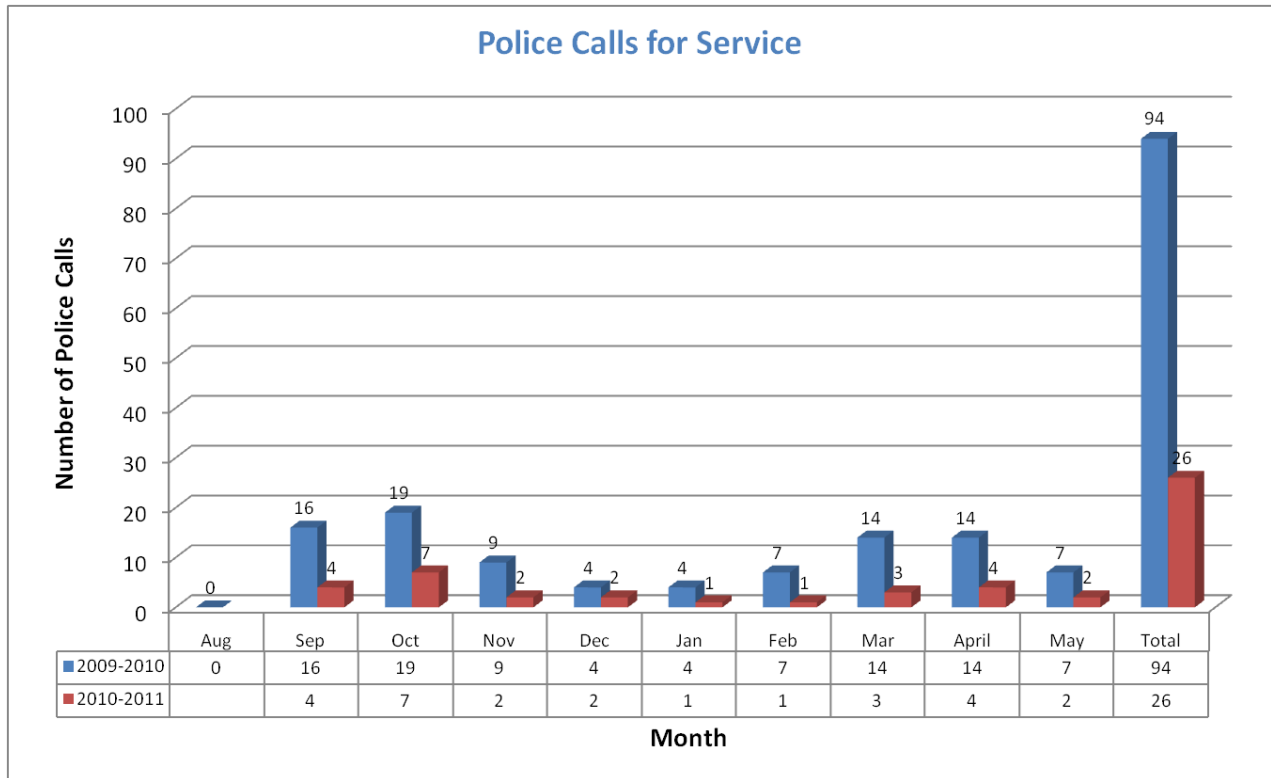
Before the school opened, no one had alerted the Patrol Officers, and immediately we started receiving calls for service in which officers were dealing with juveniles with a history of mental illness. A lot of them were either disturbances, property damage or assault calls. The (then) Director of the School would typically refuse to prosecute, leaving officers to wonder why the call for service had been placed. It became obvious something needed to change.

Scanning: In January 2010, Sgt. Dave Schumaker and MPO Mark Wiesemann decided to take action on the issues. Based on the previous five months of calls and comments from officers who had responded to calls at the school, several issues were identified:

- Several violent students needed additional mental health treatment, even though they were as young as eight years old;
- Students being allowed to roam out in the hallway, unsupervised, even if they had previously assaulted another student; and
- Damaged property not immediately fixed; magnifying the property damage problem.

Analysis: We began to analyze the issues by using statistical information. (It should be noted all statistics were done using a school calendar year running from August to May. So 2009-2010 denotes

August 2009- May 2010 and 2010-2011 denotes August 2010- May 2011.) We also sought input from other police officers and from employees of the school. A school of the same type, located in Jacksonville, IL, was used as a resource.



It was obvious from the data we received that assaults (26 reports), disturbances (15 reports), and property damage (8 reports) were the main crime concerns at the school. However, we needed to take into account the students were suffering from emotional disorders such as Reactive Attachment Disorder, Oppositional Defiant, Bi-polar, ADD, Autism, Aspergers, and Depression. Add into the mix the stress at home and at school and many of these students when stressed out would become suicidal or homicidal. These tendencies would then surface at the school and the school knew they had to call the Police to help with these issues. Together, we needed to figure out a way to work together to do what was in the best interest of these students.

From the interview with the officers and employees, many thought one of the contributing factors to the problem was students being allowed to roam in the hallways unsupervised. (It should be

noted the Director was the person in charge of this and she thought it was better for them to be unsupervised as they were being monitored on video camera.) Many of the staff would only speak about the issues anonymously due to fear of losing their job. The employees who were in the offices on the second floor were also concerned students had access to the stairs and were often seen on the second floor hallway.

On one occasion when MPO Wiesemann responded to the school on a student out of control, he encountered an eight year old student standing on top of a file cabinet in the hallway on the second floor outside of the offices. The student had already kicked one staff member in the face and had torn up the ceiling tile. He was hitting the staff with the tile when they tried to approach him. When he was removed by MPO Wiesemann the student hit Wiesemann with the tile, kicked, tried to bite, and tried to pinch him after being handcuffed to control him.

On another occasion, a nine year old student approached an officer with a trash can above his head as if he was going to hit the officer with it. This student was out walking unsupervised in the hallway. When taken to the ground, the student continued to scream, holler, cuss, bang his head on the floor, and cry. This was the second incident with this particular nine year old student and his out of control behavior.

These two incidents also reinforced the departments need to look at an alternative approach to dealing with calls at this school and in this environment. No one likes to handcuff a child, but in these two incidents that was the necessary action to prevent harm to other staff, officers and the student themselves. Finding an alternative solution would also make it safer for everyone and help the department build a partnership with the parents and the school. On several occasions after taking the students to the hospital for a mental health assessment, after the student had calmed down, they were much like any ordinary young child. Officer Wiesemann reported that it was heartbreaking to see these young children in need of treatment; however he realizes it was in their best interest they receive the treatment.

The other glaring fact was when walking into the school; you could see walls that had been damaged as there were holes everywhere. The holes were not being fixed immediately. In one instance a student had removed a dry wall screw from a damaged portion of the wall, which had not been fixed for weeks, and tried to commit suicide by cutting his wrists with it.

Finally, the former director did not want to prosecute or remove any of the dangerous students from the school - even if only temporary. Police Officers were used merely to calm the situation and then leave. Consequently, reports were required, leaving many officers wondering why the police were called if they did not want any action taken. As a result, many officers began being short with the staff and not taking the necessary paperwork when we responded on a call. This further strained our relationship with the Director and the School District.

Contact was also made with the Director of a comparable school in Jacksonville, IL after it was learned this was the model the Lee's Summit School District used to set up their school. In speaking with the school in Jacksonville, it was learned the Lee's Summit School District was using was a 15 year old model taken off the internet. There was no direct contact with the Jacksonville school and the Director in Jacksonville, stated they no longer use that model as some of their practices were now unlawful.

Another area we felt that we could utilize was the Police Department Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Officers. These officers attended a 40 hour class partially taught by the mental health community training them deal with mentally ill subjects and identifies other resources that can be utilized. Because of this class the CIT officers also receive greater standing at the mental health facilities and this can also help in obtaining services for the client. Since all students at the school are suffering from mental illness, it was decided that calls to the school should involved the CIT Officers. The utilization of the CIT Officers would also allow some interaction with the parents to make sure the students were receiving and taking their medications as prescribed by the doctor.

We also set up a meeting with the Director of Miller Park Center and the Lee's Summit School District Director of Special Education. This meeting was attended by our Patrol Major, Sgt. Schumaker, and MPO Wiesemann.

Last, the department and the school district had both utilized the State's Division of Social Services (DSS), which is the agency responsible for investigating Child Abuse and Child Neglect allegations. They were notified when abuse issues arose or when it appeared the parents were neglecting to give the prescribed medication to the students. Both felt the DSS was often slow to act and typically only met with the families and provided some information for them. They rarely forced any compliance onto the parents.

Response: Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." It was clear the calls at Miller Park Center were affecting the officers and our relationship with the School District as we continued to do the same thing over and over.

Sgt. Schumaker assigned MPO Wiesemann to the project with the goal of him being the main contact with the school. Wiesemann also had over 25 years of police experience, was one of the department's Crisis Intervention Team Officers, and had just returned to Patrol in January 2010. Additionally, the school was in his assigned district. Further, while the project was progressing Officer Wiesemann was able to attend a training session called CIT for Youth, which targeted the population of the school and the project.

Sgt. Schumaker also instructed our communications personnel to dispatch CIT Officers to the school if one was available to respond. Because of their training CIT Officers are more aware of situations which might warrant taking a subject into custody and transporting him to the hospital for a mental health assessment. Also, because of the training CIT Officers are taught to try and solve the problem in the long term and not just solve it for now. So, these officers typically take longer on the call as they are trying to find a long term solution and not just a quick fix so they can leave. For example, the

regular patrol officer might just respond to the school and take a report and leave. Only to have to come back later and deal with the same subject again. Whereas, the CIT Officer will take the report, but will also look at why this is happening. The CIT Officer will try to assess if there is some type of mental illness and if it has been diagnosed. The CIT Officer will try to determine if the subject is taking his medications as required and if he is currently under the care of a doctor. He will take the necessary steps to make sure the subject is hooked up with treatment by either calling his doctor or his place of treatment. Sometimes the CIT officer will follow up to make sure everything is going well. The CIT program has allowed subjects with mental illness to trust the CIT Officers thus allowing us to help them help us. By building this trust we are able to more efficiently handle our calls for service with those with mental illness.

In looking at the data, several students had been responsible for more than one assault on the school property. Sgt. Schumaker directed all patrol officers to take the necessary reports when they responded to the school (if MPO Wiesemann was not available), even if the director did not want to prosecute. Schumaker and Wiesemann also decided the students who were being violent were going to be removed from the school and taken to a mental health facility for a mental health assessment. State Law in Missouri allows Police Officers to take someone into custody if they are a danger to themselves and/or others. Several students were taken to a mental health facility to receive further assessment, adjustments of medicines, or in some cases they were placed in a different treatment program outside of the school. The nine year old and eight year old mentioned earlier are two students who were transported more than once to a mental health facility. At least one other student has been taken four times. This practice has helped ensure the student's medical treatment is up to date.

Schumaker and Wiesemann also recommended the students not be allowed to roam the hallways unsupervised. However the former school director did not want to change that operation of the school. Schumaker and Wiesemann then conducted a security review of the building. Since the school director wanted to allow the students to walk out in the hallway unsupervised, they

recommended the school put in at least two doors in the hallway with card key access. This would confine the student into one smaller area which would be easier to manage. It would also provide a safer environment for everyone by separating the elementary from the secondary students. They also recommended the school district repair damaged walls as soon as it occurred. They felt by leaving the wall unrepaired, it was encouraging other students to do the same. This was also manifested by one parent who told Wiesemann that she had never had any problems with her son kicking holes in the walls until he started school there and the walls were not fixed. The school district did install two doors in the first floor hallway which are controlled by key fobs, restricting access to staff only. The school district also fixed the holes and even covered all the walls with thick plywood, unable to be damaged by kicking. The school district also installed doors with key fobs on the stairwells which go upstairs, thus making the employees there feel safer. Another recommendation which was made was to allow the police department to have key fobs. Since the outside door was secure, on several occasions officers had to stand outside and wait a few minutes before being allowed inside after they had called the police. The key fobs would allow officers instant access and would also allow entry into the hallways when the hallway doors were installed. This request was granted by the school district. One key fob was given to MPO Wiesemann and the other was made available to other patrol officers.

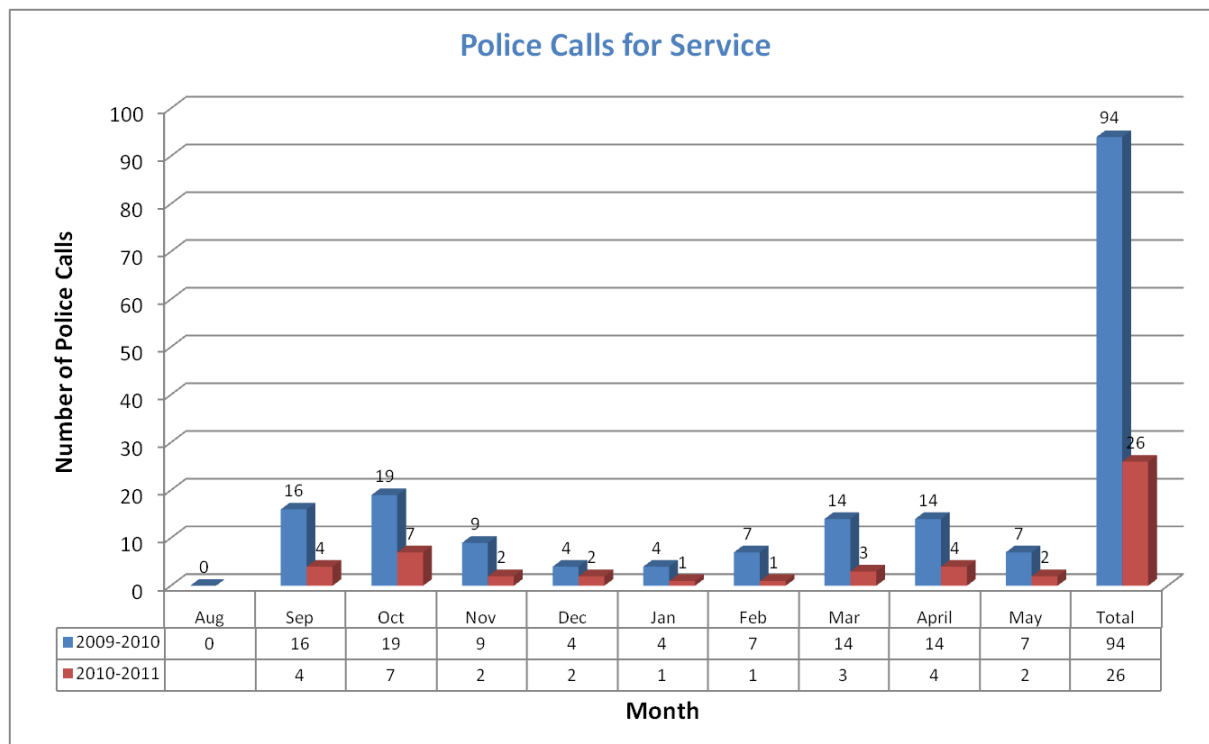
It should be noted the first director of the school left in May 2010 and was replaced by the current director, Rebecca Julian, who previously worked at the school as the behavioral therapist. Schumaker and Wiesemann immediately established a good working relationship with the Julian. She was open to several suggestions we made, including the suggestion the students not be allowed out into the hallway unsupervised. She implemented several of the things we talked about in our meetings for the school year 2010-2011. In several meetings with her during the summer of July 2010 we also clarified what her expectations of the police department were and our expectations from the school. We also agreed to work together as a team to decide the course of action in the best interest of the student.

MPO Wiesemann was also able to connect the school with a community resource that sponsors a parenting program called Love and Logic. Love and Logic is a program that teaches parents how to hold their children accountable for their poor decisions. However because some parents are afraid their child will see them as being mean, they often excuse the bad behavior, finding it easier to hold someone else including themselves responsible for their children's decisions. The idea was to provide the parents of these challenging students some additional resources and to help better manage the students at home. Wiesemann thought this might offer some stability to the students and allow them to be more successful at school. We are hopeful that program will get started at the start of the school year in the fall.

As the school year progressed, Officer Wiesemann was also able to utilize the Jackson County Family Court. This court has jurisdiction over juveniles who have been charged with a crime and also with foster child placement. Once under the jurisdiction of the court there were typically some stringent guidelines required for the juvenile and the family. If the child was in need of more therapy the court could enforce it. If it was not being completed then the court could remove the child and find an alternative place for the child where he would receive the needed help. This resource was able to remove several students and find an alternative place for them that was better suited for their behavior.

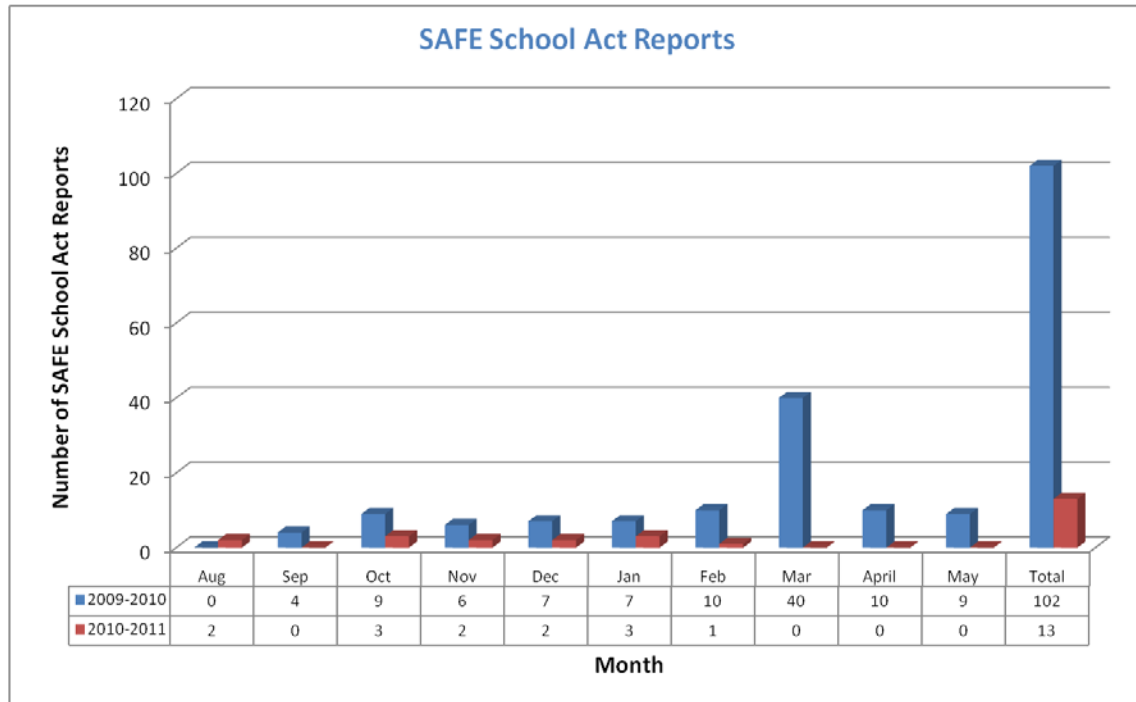
Assessment: Due to the nature of the school we realize the school will never be 'call free' at the school. However, when we look at calls for service and assault reports we have to characterize the project as a success. Calls for service have dropped about **72%**, from 94 down to 26. So we feel our initial goals have been achieved. Assaults this school year are down from 20 to 6 representing a decrease of **70%**. We feel this is based upon a better understanding of each other's function, not allowing the students to roam the halls freely, having students who are doing better because of continued medical treatment, and the schools consistent enforcement of their rules. Of the calls this year we had five students who were responsible for 18 of the 26 calls. Another 8 students were called on one time during the school

year. Again we are dealing with mostly juveniles with mental illness and we continue to work with the parents and the school for these juveniles who are generating most of the calls.

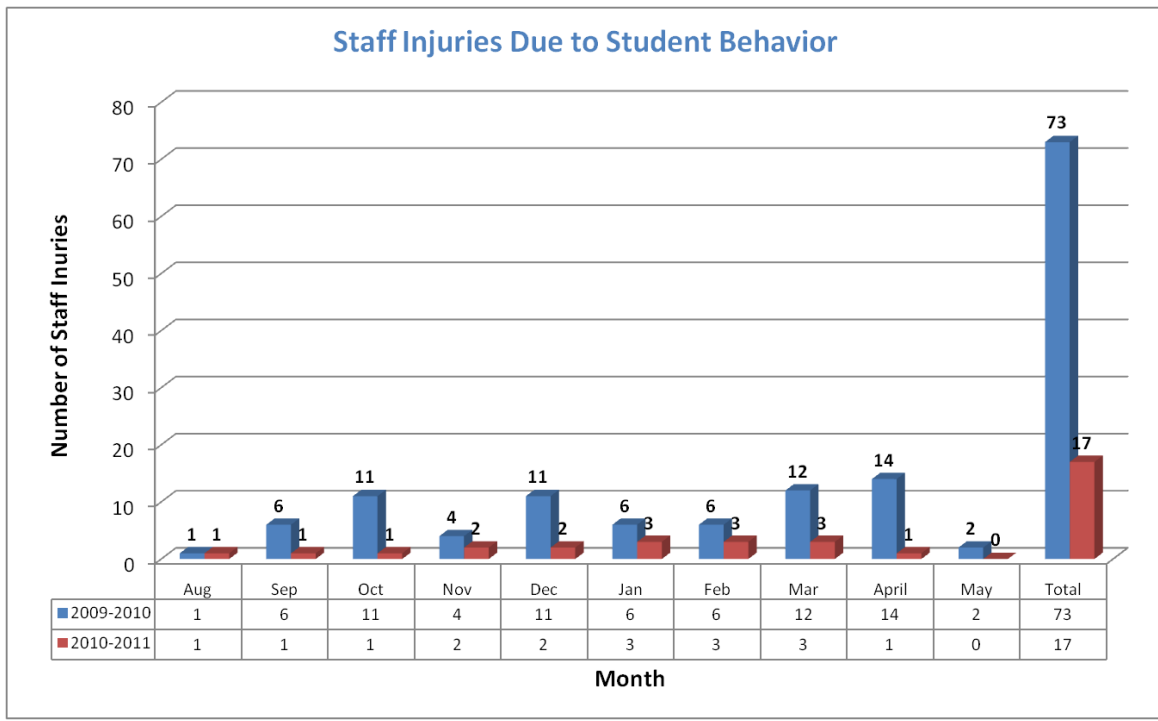


However, there were some really good consequences we hadn't included in our goal that we feel really make this project extremely successful. Safe School Reports dropped from 102 to 13, representing an **87%** decrease. Safe School reports typically involve some offensive contact (not sexual) such as when a student shoves another student, when two students get involved in a shoving match and there are no injuries. By State Law these have to be reported to the Police Department and in Lee's Summit, MO are typically done on a one page form and faxed to the Police Department to satisfy the law requirements. If the assault is more severe, the school always has the option to call the Police and have them respond. We think this drop can be attributed to the fact the students are always supervised by an adult and not left to roam the hallways. The adult can typically intervene and prevent the contact from occurring in most occasions. On one incident the previous year, Officer Wiesemann was called to the school to deal with an angry student. While he was speaking with the student he learned the student was angry because another student had been calling him names. While Wiesemann was talking

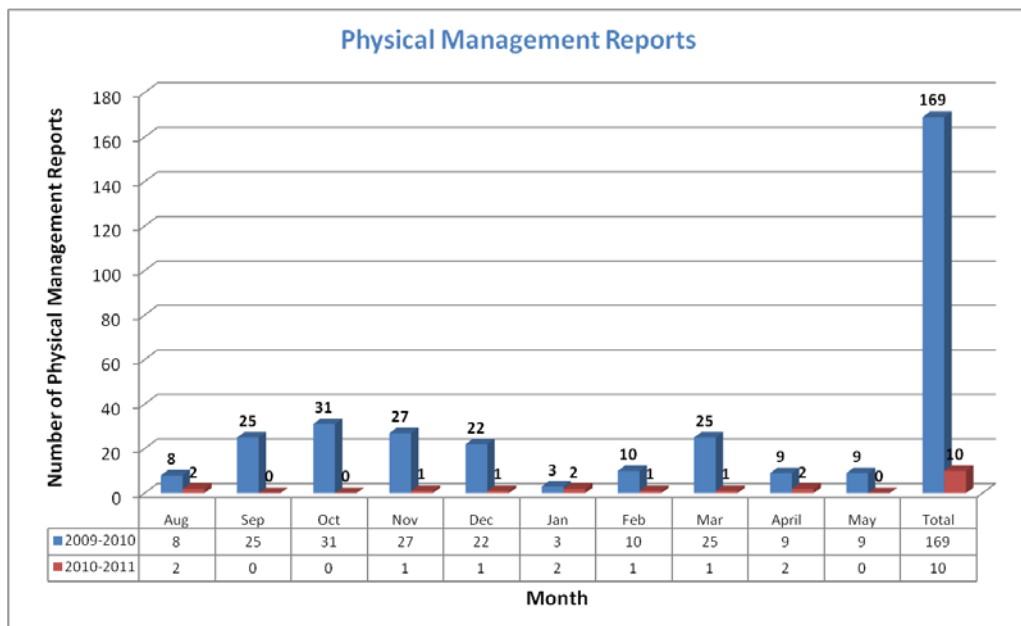
with this student, the other student who had been the cause of the problem, and who was walking in the hallway unsupervised, walked up to the student and tried to continue the confrontation.



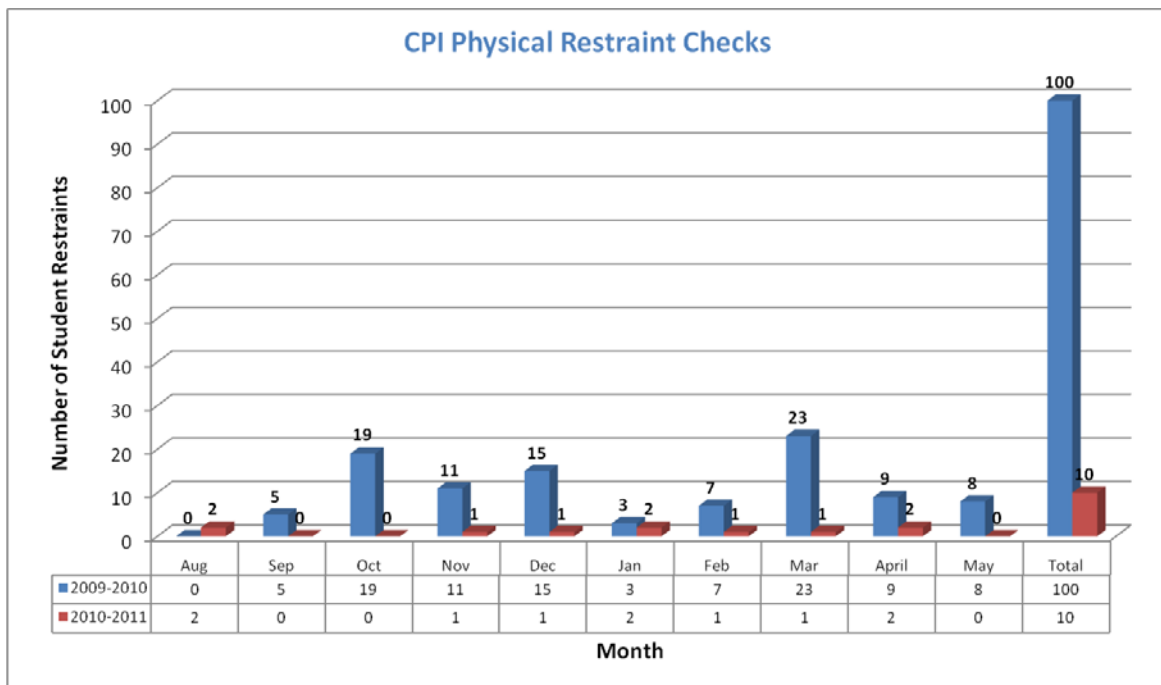
Another benefit derived from our project was the number of victim injuries. Injuries to school staff and other students dropped from 73 to 17 - a decrease of **77%**. But more importantly, this saves the community money for the lost wages and costs associated to treating the injured. We think this can be attributed to the partnership of the police Department and the school. Working together they have been able to obtain additionally mental health treatment for some students. In some occasions this has involved the student being removed from the school because of his violent behavior and being placed in a group home. In other occasions it has involved working with the parents and obtaining more mental health services after a visit to the hospital. This might involve increasing the amount of medicines the student is currently taking or placing the student on different medicines which has helped with their mental illness.



Third, the school also experienced a decrease in the number of times they had to physically manage an out of control student. This involved the number of times they had to supervise a student who was out of control and was out in the hallway to “cool” down. They dropped from 169 to 10 which is a **94%** decrease. When these incidents dropped then the staff did not spend time out in the hallway but could spend more time in the classroom focused on teaching the students. We feel again this is mostly due to the students being mentally equipped to deal with the situations at school as a result of their mental health treatment.



Fourth, the school also saw a dramatic decrease in the number of Crisis Prevention Intervention restraints they had to use on out of control students. CPI is a technique which is taught to school personnel on the proper way to restrain a student thus reducing the likelihood of injury to the student and or staff member. The physical restraints by staff dropped from 100 in the school year 2009-2010 to 10 in 2010-2011 – a decrease of **90%**. Again we feel some of this drop was based upon the supervision of the students out in the hall and the school not going “hands on” so soon. The school feels like some of it was because the students know the school would not hesitate to call the Police if needed. We also feel that properly medicated and counseled students helped with the decrease as well.



The Police Department cannot take all the credit for these numbers. The school director, Julian and staff deserve a lot of credit for buying into our partnership, working with us, and making the suggestions, changes, and recommendations work. We continue to sit down and meet with Julian to talk about changes we need to make or to address problems that may arise.

Because of this project we, again, have a good working relationship with our school district. We have also been able to help the parents of these mentally challenged students and along the way we

have made the school environment much safer both for the students and the staff. We will continue to monitor our progress and make adjustments as needed.

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