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PROFILE

Dean increases security without additional funds

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Alfred W. Dean

From his existing security department, Dean formed a task force of 14 officers to serve as a response team that could be called to any crisis in the school district. The members of the task force were chosen on the basis of their intelligence, experience and motivation.

The idea of beefing up a school's existing security capabilities without increasing the number of security officers or the financial resources of the department may seem like a fairy tale to many. Alfred W. Dean is by no means "one of the many." He has created a very real program that enhances the security of Philadelphia schools without increasing the budget.

Dean is director of the Office of Security Operations for the Philadelphia school district. The Philadelphia district is believed to be the fourth largest district in the country. In addition, many of its schools, which encompass a 125-square-mile area, are located in extremely volatile sections of the city.

A security vacuum was being created within the Philadelphia schools as a result of crisis situations springing up throughout the district. When a crisis situation arose at one school, the security officers from a neighboring school were called in to help control the situation. But removing officers from one school to respond to the crisis situation of another did not prove to be the most effective solution. Schools that offered their security officers found their own safety greatly at risk. At first glance, the simple solution was to increase the number of officers at each school. However, a lack of funds necessitated a more innovative approach.

"Overall, our philosophy regarding school security is to be proactive — not simply to react to problems, but to anticipate them to ensure the safety of students and staff, and the protection of schools and facilities," Dean commented.

Dean believes in creative management — managers must rely on their immediate resources to bring about the most productive results. He was convinced that reappportioning — not expanding his existing staff — was a more prudent solution to the security problem facing the Philadelphia schools.

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The strength of this rapid-response team lies with its high level of visibility and its ability to quickly mobilize to diffuse crisis situations at varying locations throughout the district. To date, the task force has experienced overwhelming success. Previously, the district's security force only was able to cover about 50 percent of the schools on a daily basis. The task force has enabled the remainder of the schools to be secured.

Dean always has been one to assess "the writing on the walls," but he never has been one to accept it. Such has been the case with the city's incessant graffiti problem. Dean established the Anti-Graffiti Network in 1984, making it increasingly difficult for gangs to stamp their painted identification on the walls in and around Philadelphia schools. Network members, school personnel

and, more appropriately, the perpetrators themselves are responsible for the removal of gang graffiti as soon as it appears. The job begins with the removal of the graffiti using a high-pressure process, followed by the application of a graffiti-resistant, clear-coating seal.

This kind of project, Dean stresses, must be undertaken by both school officials and parents in the community. This cooperative effort involves not only the restoration of the walls, but also the patrolling of areas which recently have been restored to ensure that gangs do not reapply the graffiti. Dean commented that the battle will continue to be waged on a day-to-day basis, but that Philadelphia has established control of a problem that once seemed insurmountable.

Armed with innovative ideas as well as the courage and tenacity to see them through to completion, Dean is making a profound difference with the safety of a school district that, at one time, may have been written off.