U.S. Department of Justice
Law Enforcement Assistance Administration
National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice

School Crime: The Problem and Some Attempted Solutions

SCHOOL CRIME: THE PROBLEM AND SOME ATTEMPTED SOLUTIONS

The figures are grim.
In the Safe Schools Study, the National Institute of Education reported to Congress in 1978 that

- Over 61,000 teachers were physically assaulted in 1976.
- Each month an estimated 282,000 junior and senior high school students are attacked and 112,000 are robbed.
- Although teenage youth aged 12 to 19 spend 25 percent of their waking hours in school, 40 percent of the robberies and 36 percent of the assaults (on them) occur while in school; for the 12 to 15 year age group alone these figures are 68 percent and 50 percent.
- The estimated annual costs of school vandalism range from $50 million to $600 million, with most estimates clustering at $100-$200 million.
- School principals feel isolated from outside sources of help: in large cities only 31 percent of the principals say they receive "very much support" from the school system central office; 29 percent say the same for the police; and only 8 percent say the courts are of much help.

Equally alarming:

- *Instructor* magazine surveyed its readership and found that 84 percent of the more than 9,000 teachers responding believe that "there are health hazards in teaching," and only 39 percent feel that the principal "takes an active role in helping teachers stay physically and mentally happy."
- A California psychiatrist evaluated some 250 teachers who were experiencing symptoms of either physical trauma or prolonged psychic stress and concluded that they were suffering from a syndrome comparable to "combat neurosis."
- National Education Association president John Ryan reports that the number of teachers with 20 years or more experience has dropped by half since 1961—most of the decline occurring in the last 5 years.

But is it really serious?
When *Blackboard Jungle* was published in 1955, the public was shocked. Was it a forecast of a coming tidal wave of school crime? Or was it the beginning of an attempt to acknowledge and address a problem that has long existed in the schools?

Contrary to popular beliefs about crime, a recent LEAA study, *Myths and Realities About Crime*, indicates that the increase in crime, nationally, does not significantly exceed the population increase; most people feel safe in their neighborhoods even at night; and youth victimization rates are much higher than those of the elderly. While this report does not comment specifically on the extent of school crime, its conclusions seem to suggest that our current concern about crime in general may be exaggerated.

It takes several years for commonly accepted definitions to emerge and standardized data gathering mechanisms to be implemented.

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There is a tendency for individuals intimately involved in a controversial issue to be reluctant to admit that a problem exists until it is culturally acceptable as one. In schools students often fear retaliation by their peers if they report incidents, and both teachers and school administrators have real or imagined fear of being charged with incompetence if they acknowledge less than complete control over their students. Is is quite possible that even our current statistics seriously understate the dimensions of the problem.

Indepth longitudinal studies of vandalism and school crime must be based on long-term hard data, and few school systems have kept long-term data on vandalism and school crime. After surveying 15 school systems in 1975, Bernard C. Watson of Temple University stated, "While the incidence of vandalism has been fluctuating over the past five years, the overall trend in the cities for which long-term data are available has been downward." However, the study is careful to note that such trends show considerable variations between districts and are often altered seriously by changes in school policies and programs.

The NIE study, while it is the source of some unsettling statistics, challenges a number of widely held assumptions about the magnitude of school crime.

- Only 8 percent of all school administrators report *serious* problems (*serious* defined as approximately 7 incidents occurring in school during a 1-month period).

- Most administrators believe that the problem of violence and vandalism, which increased during the sixties and seventies, has leveled off in the last 5 years.
- Outsiders are *not* responsible for most problems of violence in the school.
- The fear of crime is more pervasive and damaging than actual criminal acts.
- Program and policy changes *can* and *do* bring about a reduction in the problem.

What causes school crime?

There is as little agreement on the causes of school crime and vandalism as there are on the causes of crime in general. Everything from the phases of the moon, the physiological makeup of offenders, the collapse of the family, and the decline of the West—all these factors have been suggested as contributing influences. But there is something special about a school: it is both a building and a small society. Its climate is affected by the people who work and study there. Teachers and students have little control over the out-of-school factors that contribute to antisocial conduct, but the disproportionate amount of victimization that occurs within schools suggests that there are aspects of the school environment which either encourage or fail to discourage such behavior. Changes in the physical environment or the social climate within the school may result in at least some attitudinal changes in both teachers and students. There is much evidence that this can be done successfully.

What are some of the attempted solutions?

A broad range of strategies, each with its own strengths and weaknesses, is available to school personnel. A successful strategy in one school can not always be replicated in another because of differences in the student population, community values, and regional history. Any method of improving security and reducing vandalism should be reasonably consonant with community values as they are expressed in the curriculum and general educational objectives of the school.

In this brief review, the approaches are grouped to reflect the philosophical biases and different assumptions about the origins of the school crime and vandalism.

The HARDWARE APPROACH assumes that crime in the schools is simply crime that is committed in school, and that such antisocial behavior is basically a response to influences outside the school. In this view it is the role of teachers to teach and the role of the police to enforce the law. Some administrators take measures to enhance building security and enlist the aid of the police in curbing illegal behavior. Property should be secured against theft, the police should handle illegal conduct, and the offender should be prosecuted.

This approach relies heavily on the use of anti-intrusion and silent alarm devices designed to capture — not frighten or deter — the perpetrators. Target hardening and the use of student and staff identification badges are often stressed. Police officers may be permanently assigned, security officers may be employed, or volunteers or low-paid security aides may be recruited to provide surveillance in the heavily trafficked sections of the school.

With this process many considerations are involved: the location, utility, reliability, and expense of the hardware; whether security personnel should be armed or unarmed, uniformed or in plainclothes; and how much training should be provided. It may also be necessary to decide whether or not student informers should be used, and whether parents should be held liable for the damage caused by their children.

A pilot project in Portland, Oregon, using both a test group of 11 schools and another similar control group, installed silent-alarm and anti-intrusion devices. Over a 2-year period, results showed a 42 percent reduction in property loss, a 27 percent reduction in frequency of burglary, and an increase in the number of crimes solved.

The major advantage of this approach, if adopted in the pure form described here, is that it requires no attitudinal changes by either teachers or students. The most serious drawback is that few student vandals from within the school are ever caught and fewer still are prosecuted. Neither prosecution nor restitution are really viable means of reducing vandalism in this case; it is an after-the-fact approach that makes no effort to get to the roots of the problem.

The PREVENTIVE APPROACH assumes that the problem of student vandals will disappear if it can be appropriately deterred. Administrators place emphasis on high visibility of surveillance personnel and hardware. The concepts of defensible space and attention to the "aesthetics of vandalism" are employed where sufficient funds are available. "Block watch" programs are developed among the school's neighbors; the school is used for community purposes outside the usual classroom hours; and the hours of custodial personnel are shifted to hours when the school building would otherwise be vacant.

The Broward County, Florida, school system's use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is one example of the preventive approach. CPTED is based on the premise that proper design and effective use of the physical environment can be combined to reduce crime and the fear of crime. For example, unused courtyards on school grounds that were often a source of assaults, bicycle thefts, and vandalism, were transformed into miniplazas that attracted informal social gatherings. Ticket sales were placed in problem spots to provide natural surveillance and increased activity. An isolated student parking lot was relocated to the driver education range adjacent to the school, and the driver education sessions were relocated to provide good natural surveillance and improved security for

the adjacent parking.

While it may be as costly as the hardware approach, as well as impractical in some settings, it is more subtle, avoids the use of the formal mechanisms of the law, and reduces the amount of physical destruction.

The CORRECTIVE VIEW holds that there may be aspects to the school's social environment which contribute—or at least fail to deter — student misbehavior. Attention to or revision of its disciplinary procedures and curriculum may have a positive impact on the school climate. These school administrators place strong emphasis on the importance of a clear understanding and consistent application of discipline. Procedure manuals and legal handbooks are developed for distribution to teachers and students covering such areas as the rights of students, due process, corporal punishment, suspension and expulsion policies, bomb threats, and rumor control.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals has identified six areas often deserving attention:

- inconsistent enforcement of school rules by teachers and administrators
- inconsistently applied consequences for breaking school rules
- failure of school personnel to make students aware of the rules
- failure of school personnel to confront minor problems before they become major ones
- failure of school personnel to deal with misbehavior in a prompt

and individualized manner

- failure of school personnel to involve parents in the resolution of discipline problems

The NASSP has designed a Systematic Management Plan for School Discipline to remedy such deficiencies.

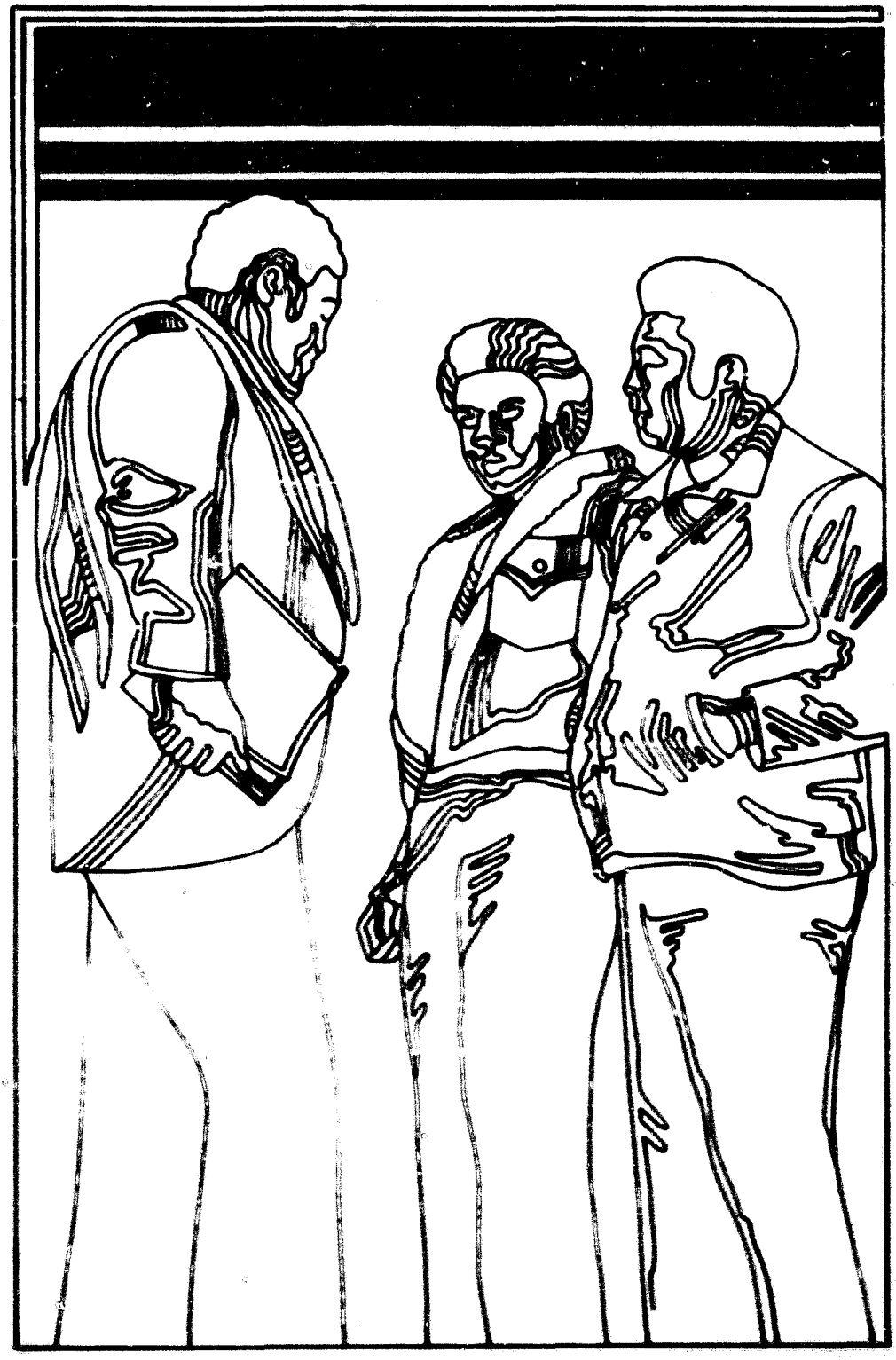
Other program innovations using the corrective approach include the development of an early identification program, a crisis room (or center), or an alternative school for identified predelinquents.

A clear advantage of this approach is that it may require no extra funds; however it does require substantial commitments of time, effort and thought by many school personnel.

In the INTERAGENCY APPROACH, the school joins forces with other public or private agencies to provide services to youth so the many social services attempt to address all of the students' social service needs. The school is recognized as only one of many service agencies. Staff from other agencies, working by themselves or in teams with school personnel, provide their usual services but within the school setting. Paraprofessionals working with local recreation or parks departments function as "roving leaders" who stay with the action, in the hallways, on the school grounds, or in the larger community. Teachers deputized as probation officers working after school hours carry caseloads of students who are on probation or likely to become entangled in court. Police officers, functioning more as counselors than law enforcers, work along with school personnel in defusing, negotiating, or resolving conflict. The school building itself may be used as an all hours community resource center, staffed by both school and nonschool personnel, to provide a full range of educational, recreational, and cultural activities.

The advantage of this approach is that extra staff are borrowed from other agencies and little or no extra funds are required. Drawbacks are found in the interagency arrangements that sometimes have confusing lines of supervisory control and interagency rivalries that inhibit cooperation. Furthermore, when faced with budget limitations, agencies tend to limit themselves to "essential activities."

The most novel, the INTEGRATIVE APPROACH, is to turn school conflict into a learning experience and a subject for study. Administrators in these schools view the school as an institution comparable in significant respects to others with which students will have to deal in later years. The "New Model Me" curriculum, developed by the Office of Education in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare provides teachers and students with a framework for classroom discussions about why people behave as they do, how to handle feelings of frustration and aggression, and how to make responsible decisions in everyday life. The curriculum is suitable for a semester course; its units may also be integrated into other social science courses or used as the basis for group counseling sessions.



Law-related education is a similar technique; students are taught the basic concepts of law, such as authority, justice, responsibility, due process, and property. Law is studied as an alternative to confusion, frustration, or violence in responding to conflict.

School conflict may also be used to educate students in the skills of negotiation and conflict resolution, with emphasis on verbalizing of anger and identifying self-interests as preliminaries to opening negotiations. Many authors stress the importance of involving students as well as parents and the larger community in the decisionmaking process concerning the operation of the school. This has the multiple, if also complicating, effects of enriching school life, educating students in institutional management, and redirecting troublesome students' energies into more constructive channels.

The Integrative Approach requires teachers to have a broader range of skills and interests than those required in traditional educational settings. Training in the processes of experiential learning may be necessary. It is risky to assume that students must be intellectually sophisticated to be receptive to complex ideas. Many youngsters in conflict with school or with the law have more accurate perceptions of, and acute interest in, conflict resolution than individuals who have never been in such conflicts. When skillfully taught, such courses can be highly rewarding to both students and school personnel.

SOME STEPS TO TAKE IF YOU THINK CRIME IS A PROBLEM IN YOUR SCHOOL:

- Gauge the actual nature and extent of crime in your school. Develop clear definitions of terms beforehand; e.g., should a waste basket fire be considered arson or vandalism?
- Consider the overall educational objectives of your school and determine how any given method, or combination of methods, will further or inhibit the accomplishment of those objectives. It is reasonable to assume that an approach toward security will be all the more effective if it is consistent with your other objectives.
- Involve all interested segments of your community in the development of your plan. Even if it is only financial, support of others will be necessary to implement and maintain the system you choose. At least one survey concluded that people may be more important than mechanical devices in providing security. Remember that most damage is *not* done by outsiders in most schools.
- Calculate the costs involved in alternative approaches. It could be that what appears to be an effective approach may be more expensive than the problem it is designed to prevent. Consider the nonmonetary impacts of such aspects as teacher burn-out and student morale.
- Find out what other schools like yours have done—what works and why? Imaginative ideas are being developed in many areas.
- Contact the newly established School Resource Network, funded by the LEAA Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to provide training, technical assistance and information through four regional centers.

REFERENCE LIST

Controlling Crime in the School: A Complete Security Handbook for Administrators. By S. D. Vestermark and P. D. Blauvelt. West Nyack, N.Y.: Parker Publishing Co., 1978. 354 p. (NCJ 51093)

Written for school administrators responsible for school security, this volume details the development and reinforcement of a basic security plan and outlines responses to major security problems.

Corporal Punishment and Alternatives in the Schools: An Overview of Theoretical and Practical Issues. By I. A. Hyman, E. McDowell, and B. Raines. Philadelphia: National Center for the Study of Corporal Punishment and Alternatives in the Schools, 1977. 13 p. (NCJ 52428)

The historical role of corporal punishment, its physical and psychological effects, and race and class issues are discussed and alternatives are suggested.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design: Process Case Studies Report. By H. M. Kaplan et al. Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, 1977. 96 p. (NCJ 49205)

The relationships among events, participants, and the process of planning and implementing crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) demonstrations are analyzed in three types of environment, one of which is a public school.

"Curriculum Approach — Solving Discipline Problems Through Law-Related Education." By D. Thomas. *National Association of School Principals*, v. 60, n. 397:15-19 (February 1976). (NCJ 51368)

Courses that teach students how to live effectively and successfully within the legal system are described as important elements of high school programs to achieve stability.

Growing Pains — Uses of School Conflict. By J. P. DeCecco and A. K. Richards. New York: Federal Legal Publications, 1974. 269 p. (NCJ 37685)

Based on a research project on civic education, this text suggests ways to resolve school conflicts and channel student expressions of anger.

Identifying Your School's Crime Problems — Simple Steps That Precede Costly Action. By R. J. Rubel. College Park, Md.: Institute for Reduction of Crime, 1978. 32 p. (NCJ 49757)

This monograph presents guidelines for school officials involved in identifying and analyzing crime problems and in evaluating security programs.

Models of Linkage Between Juvenile Courts and Public Schools. By J. A. Hill. Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, 1974. 120 p. (NCJ 19151)

This study compared five programs to determine their effectiveness in reducing recidivism, school truancy, school suspensions, and improving academic achievement of school-age delinquent youth.

"New Model Me." By F. Beatty. *American Education*, v. 13, n. 1:23-36 (January/February 1977). (NCJ 45937)

Positive preventive approaches to discipline problems, violent crime, and vandalism are featured in a new high school curriculum funded by the Office of Education.

School Suspensions — Are They Helping Children? Cambridge, Mass.: Children's Defense Fund, 1975. 257 p. (NCJ 34881)

This critique discusses the extent and nature of school suspensions in the United States and explores alternative disciplinary approaches which do not remove children from school.

"Systematic Management Plan for School Discipline." By D. L. Duke. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, January 1977, p. 1-10. (NCJ 51416)

A comprehensive, schoolwide discipline program is outlined that emphasizes the use of rewards for obedient students, conflict resolution mechanisms, team approaches, and inservice education.

Violent Schools — Safe Schools: The Safe School Study Report to The Congress, Vol. 1. Edited by M. R. Asner and J. Broschart. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978. 381 p. (NCJ 45988)

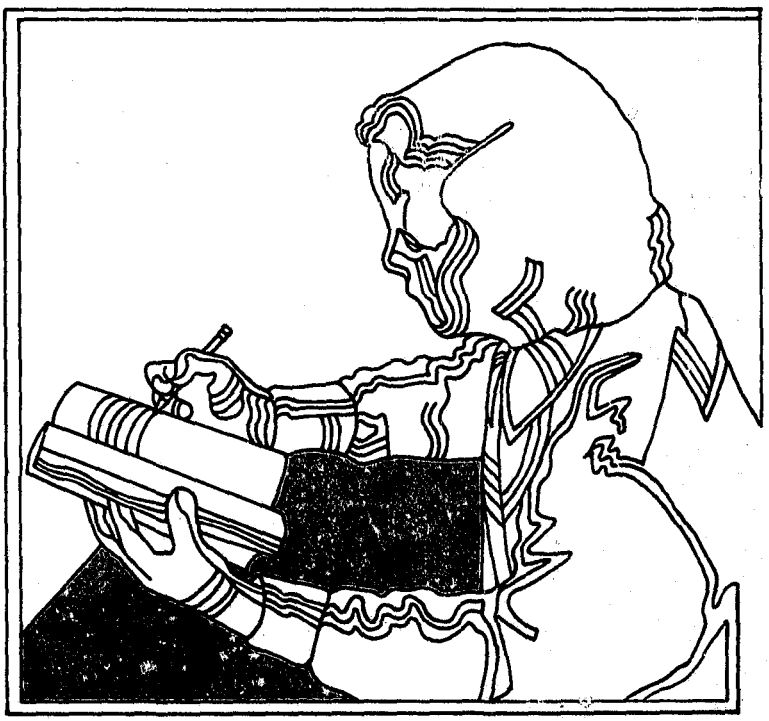
This narrative report augmented by charts and graphs presents the findings of a study to determine the number of schools affected by crime or violence, the type and seriousness of the crimes, and suggestions for preventing school crime.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO SCHOOLS

CADRE (Collegial Associates for Development and Renewal of Educators)
Colorado Department of Education
201 East Colfax
Denver, CO 80203
(303) 839-2111
Eugene R. Howard, Director
(Addresses school problems by effecting changes in the school climate)

Center for Improved Learning Environments
Institute for the Reduction of Crime
Box 730
College Park, MD 20740
(301) 935-5400
Robert Rubel, Director
(Specializes in prevention and reduction of school crime and violence)

Community Relations Service
U.S. Department of Justice
550 11th Street N.W.,
Washington, DC 20530
(202) 724-7352,-7386
Gilbert G. Pompa, Director
(Provides conciliation services for racial and ethnic conflicts in schools)



ABA Special Committee on Youth Education for Citizenship
1155 E. 60th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
Norman Gross, Director
(Clearinghouse for law-related education programs)

National Center for the Study of Corporal Punishment and Alternatives in the Schools
833 Ritter Hall South
Department of School Psychology
Temple University
Philadelphia, PA 19122
(215) 787-6091, -6093
Irwin Hyman, Director
(Consultation in corporal punishment and alternative methods of school discipline)

National Committee for Citizens in Education
Suite 410
Wilde Lake Village Green
Columbia, MD 20740
(800) NETWORK; (301) 997-9300
William Rioux, Director
(Specializes in parental involvement in the schools)

National Education Association
1201 16th Street, NW.
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 833-4267
John Cox, Director, Teacher Rights Division
(Advises teacher groups on techniques of preventing or reducing school violence)

National Educational Strategy Center
1 Niles Street
Hartford, CT 06105
(203) 246-9041
Jim Barnes, Director
(Provides assistance in racial and sexual discrimination)

Open Road — Student Involvement Project
Citizens Policy Center
155 9th Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 864-5180
Ken Nochimson, Director
(Specializes in a student-centered approach to school issues)

National School Resource Network
Center for Human Services
5530 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20015
Richard A. Batterton, Director
(Training, technical assistance, and information about prevention/control, security, governance, student involvement, and school-parent-community cooperation)

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