

# • NGC NEWSLETTER •

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The National Gang Center (NGC) is jointly funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. NGC conducts research on street gangs and serves as a clearinghouse for individuals and agencies seeking information, technical assistance, and training in the areas of gang prevention, intervention, suppression, and reentry.

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## WELCOME TO THE NGC NEWSLETTER

The National Gang Center (NGC) is pleased to present the inaugural issue of the NGC Newsletter! Ever since NGC's inception in 1995, we have recognized the demand for relevant and timely gang research and information on effective gang prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies. This publication aims to educate and inform practitioners, researchers, law enforcement, and others with a shared interest in gangs on current trends such as injunctions, significant court decisions, emerging gangs, gang

trainings, and strategies being used in communities to deal with gangs.

The newsletter will be published on a quarterly basis and made available as an online exclusive to the NGC Web site. It is our hope that this publication will serve as an educational and informational tool for those engaged in efforts to reduce gang involvement and crime in communities.

Sincerely,

The National Gang Center

## Challenges to Schools' Anti-Gang Policies

In 2008, Jaime Salazar earned a three-day suspension for violating his Oregon high school's anti-gang policies by wearing a rosary to school. Salazar's mother sued the school district for First Amendment violations. The case was settled, and the judge in the case ordered that Salazar be readmitted to school—with his rosary—because the school's gang policy did not mention rosaries or explain



the relationship between the symbol and gang involvement. During 2010 and 2011, this situation was repeated in Texas, New York, Nebraska, and Illinois, resulting in challenges by civil liberty and religious freedom advocates. In almost every instance, the policies were

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# Gang Activity and the Falling Crime Rate



Nationally, violent crime and homicide rates have declined by approximately 50 percent over the past 20 years (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011), and violent crime arrest rates for adult and juveniles alike are at their lowest levels in 30 years (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011). Yet, in comparison to these historic trends, one notable dissimilarity is the continued presence of gangs and gang activity across many jurisdictions in the United States.

Recent analysis of three key indicators in the annual survey conducted by the National Gang Center (NGC) suggests that gang trends are notably diverging—if not independent—from overall crime trends:

- The percentage of jurisdictions reporting gang activity increased from approximately 25 percent to 34 percent over the past decade. That is, gang activity is more widespread now than it was ten years ago (though not as widespread as it was in the mid-1990s).
- In the largest cities across the United States (populations over 100,000), where gang violence is largely concentrated, the number of gang-related homicides increased approximately 10 percent from 2008 to 2009 and then again from 2009 to 2010.
- A recent NGC publication found that a significant percentage (29 percent) of all large cities in the study experienced consistent and high gang-homicide prevalence rates from 1996 to 2009. Annually, in this subgroup of cities, around 40 percent of the homicides were determined to be gang-related. See: <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Bulletin-6.pdf>

These results demonstrate that gang activity and gang crime are not necessarily a microcosm of the overall crime problem in the United States. At a time when most cities are experiencing their lowest levels of violent crime in a quarter of a century, gang activity remains broadly distributed, and, for a sizeable number of large cities, gang activity remains a potent problem in terms of serious and violent crime. Knowledge and awareness of these distinct and separate trends allow for a more specific, less generalized discussion on the intersection of gangs and crime. ■

## Anti-Gang Policies

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overturned in court or voluntarily rewritten by the school districts.

The lack of constitutionally required specificity in anti-gang policies posed problems in *Tillman v. Gwinnett County School District* (Georgia, 2005); *Copper v. Denlinger* (North Carolina, 2008); and *D.G. v. Desoto County Public Schools* (Mississippi, 2009). As part of a settlement in *D.G.*, the DeSoto schools were required to draft a more explicit anti-gang policy:

[http://www.aclu.org/files/assets/DeSoto\\_County\\_School\\_Districts\\_New\\_Gang\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.aclu.org/files/assets/DeSoto_County_School_Districts_New_Gang_Policy.pdf).

Based on these precedents:

Gang policies should be specific and linked to a demonstrable threat to school safety. Schools should revise their anti-gang policies annually or biannually and work closely with local law enforcement to incorporate specific information about gangs that are present in the school and surrounding community. The cases suggest that broad, general policies are vulnerable and unenforceable.

If the gang policy covers religious items, the role that these items play in gang affiliation locally should be addressed in the school's written policy, preferably with supporting evidence from local law enforcement.

In addition to carefully crafting these policies, schools should ensure that these policies are regularly provided to parents in an easily accessible format.

Many legal aspects of anti-gang policies have not been resolved. However, schools should carefully consider these policies to ensure specificity and constitutionality and the protection of both the rights and safety of students. ■

## Bullying in Schools: An Overview



The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) released a Juvenile Justice Bulletin in December 2011, “Bullying in Schools: An Overview.” This bulletin is part of OJJDP’s Bullying in Schools series and provides an overview of the OJJDP-funded studies, a summary of the researchers’ findings, and recommendations for policy and practice.

Click [here](#) to read the bulletin. ■

## North Carolina’s Approach to Youth Gangs

In 2008, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the North Carolina Street Gang Prevention and Intervention Act, which mandated that the Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils in each county assess the level of gang activity, address youth involved in gangs and/or those at high risk for gang membership, and establish appropriate evidence-based programs and practices. The Act also mandated the establishment of community-based alternatives to commitment and detention and the conduct of a joint study of gangs by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP).

The mandated study contained recommendations to fill educational and service gaps for gang and high-risk youth. In response, the DJJDP adopted the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Comprehensive Gang Model. The National Gang Center (NGC) provided county councils with training to guide the assessment of gang activity and implementation of evidence-based practices and programs. The DJJDP also implemented



a governor-led pilot project in two geographic (catchment) areas for gang members reentering the community from Youth Development Centers. A gang intervention curriculum is taught by the center’s staff, and community-based services such as job training, job placement, outreach, and other transition reentry services are provided upon a youth’s release. The NGC provided training to the center’s staff and community providers.

A fact sheet, “Prevalence of Gang-Involved Youth in NC,” reviews the 2008 Act, the initiatives, and progress to date. The fact sheet can be downloaded at:



DJJDP Gang Fact Sheet Publication Dec

## G.R.E.A.T. Initiative in Central America



Families Trainings, G.R.E.A.T. Officer In-Service Trainings, and a bilingual Web site.

To date, 135 officers from six Central American countries have been certified to teach the G.R.E.A.T. curriculum in middle and elementary schools, and around 12,000 students have graduated from the Program. A seventh country—Costa Rica—is slated to join the initiative in the spring of 2012.

Jim Rose, Regional Gang Advisor for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, U.S. Department of State, recently reported that G.R.E.A.T. is quickly becoming a success, and with its current progress in the region, he foresees a day when every student in Central America will be exposed to the Program during elementary and/or middle school.

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<http://info-you-need>

# Did You KNOW?

The MGC has a Gang-Related News Articles page that is updated daily. It includes news from the U.S. and Canada. Click [HERE](#) to visit the page.

## NGC Products and Services

Surveys and Analysis

Training and Technical Assistance

Comprehensive Gang Model

Law Enforcement Anti-Gang Training

Gang News

GANGINFO Mailing List

Legislation

This collaboration recognizes that street gang activities transcend age and other structural and jurisdictional boundaries. Thus, strategies ranging from prevention through intervention, suppression, and reentry are needed to combat them.

## G.R.E.A.T. Initiative

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Commissioner Pedro Rodriguez Argueta, the Second Chief of the Juvenile Affairs Division of the Nicaraguan National Police, reported that he has completed teaching at two public schools and provided curriculum to 133 students in Granada, Nicaragua. Commissioner Rodriguez stated, "We believe that the kids have learned skills to say no to violence. We know that drugs and violence are linked to organized crime." He said that G.R.E.A.T. is a way to work on the serious problem of juvenile violence "not with a heavy hand, or a soft hand, but with an intelligent hand, to continue getting safer cities in Nicaragua."

According to a recent BBC News article, "**Central America drug gang violence at 'alarming levels'**," there are currently 900 street gangs and 70,000 members in Central America. ■

## Interested in Anti-Gang Training?

Check out the links below for dates and locations:

### Training and Conferences

<http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/About/Other-Training-and-Conferences>

### Law Enforcement Anti-Gang Training

<http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Training-and-Technical-Assistance/Law-Enforcement>

**To subscribe to the NGC Newsletter, visit:**

<http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Newsletter/Subscribe>



[www.nationalgangcenter.gov](http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov)

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