

Juvenile Assessment Center  
of Lee County  
2117 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.  
Fort Myers, FL 33901  
(239) 344-5100  
www.swfjac.org

June 2009

# The JAC Perspective



*The Juvenile Assessment Center of Lee County ... assisting youth and their families to seek the treatment and programs they need to lead productive, crime free lives.*

## CALENDAR

### **Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board Executive Committee Meeting**

June 3  
1:30 p.m.  
Family Services Center  
21450 Gibraltar Dr., Suite 1  
Port Charlotte

### **Lee County Juvenile Justice Council**

June 4  
1:30 p.m.  
Joseph P. D'Alessandro  
Office Complex  
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165  
Fort Myers

### **Prevention Network**

June 12  
10:00 a.m.  
Lee County Human Services  
2440 Thompson Street  
Fort Myers

**Law enforcement should call ahead to**

**344-5161  
or 344-5171**

**when bringing an arrested youth to the JAC.**

## Law to Add More Tolerance to School Policies

Bringing a plastic butter knife to school, drawing a picture of a gun, throwing a crayon...all of these behaviors have resulted in children being arrested in Florida under the state's school zero tolerance statutes. This could change. The Florida Legislature passed SB 1540 which deals with zero tolerance policies in the schools. The bill was signed by Governor Crist and will take effect July 1, 2009.

Present Florida law requires school districts to adopt a zero tolerance policy for crime, substance abuse, and victimization of students. However, the current law does not require a school district's policies to distinguish between petty offenses and those of a more serious nature. Advocates for the bill point out that zero tolerance policies have had unintended consequences by creating a fast track into the juvenile justice system for some children who do not belong there. The consequences can follow the youth into adulthood. Contrary to the common belief that juvenile criminal records go away once a youth turns 18, a juvenile arrest remains a stain on the youth's record into adulthood.

According to the Department of Juvenile Justice, more than half of school related referrals for delinquency (arrests) in 2007-08 were first-time offenders. The most serious charge for 69% of school-related referrals was a misdemeanor. SB 1540 revises the requirements for zero tolerance policies by requiring school districts to define

and distinguish acts that pose a serious threat to school safety as opposed to petty acts of misconduct. SB 1540 states that "zero-tolerance policies are not intended to be rigorously applied to petty acts of misconduct and misdemeanors, including, but not limited to, minor fights or disturbances."

The bill also provides that "zero-tolerance policies do not require school districts to report petty acts of misconduct and misdemeanors to a law enforcement agency, including but not limited to, disorderly conduct, disruption of a school function, simple assault or battery, affray, theft of less

than \$300, trespassing, and vandalism of less than \$1,000." The bill's stated intent is to encourage school districts to use alternatives to expulsion or referral to law enforcement for misbehavior that is not a threat to school safety by addressing the disruptive behavior through restitution, civil citation, teen court, restorative justice boards, or similar programs.

The JAC estimates that it receives, on average, 176 school related arrests for misdemeanors each school year. \*



*Statewide 15% of delinquency referrals were school based in 2007-08. For Lee County, 9% of delinquency referrals were school based during 2007-08.*

*Source: Department of Juvenile Justice*

\* Based on three-year average.

## When it Comes to Underage Drinking...Be the Wall

A father from a neighboring county was arrested in May for hosting a post-prom party where it is alleged that alcohol was provided to dozens of youth. The father claimed that his intent was to provide the kids a safe place to go after the prom. He even took away the kids' car keys so they would not drink and drive. Although most adults know that it is against the law to provide alcohol to minors, some adults are ambiguous about underage drinking. This is often based on notions that the use of alcohol by teens is a rite of passage, that most teens use alcohol, and that alcohol does no harm. Organizers of "Be the Wall," a multi-media campaign recently launched in Lee County, would like to change those perceptions. Adults who think that most youth use alcohol are misinformed. In fact, surveys of teens indicate that most *do not* drink alcohol.\* However, when parents allow alcohol at teen parties, non-using teens who are at the party are more likely to use

alcohol in the future. Also, research shows that the teenage brain is still developing into the mid-20's. This is one of the reasons that teens are more likely to be impulsive and less likely than adults to consider the consequences of their actions. Add in the use of alcohol or other substances and it is a recipe for youth to do some very stupid and risky things, some of which may have lasting, negative consequences. According to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) more young people die from alcohol-related causes than from all other illicit drugs combined. Parents and other adults in the community are the key to preventing underage drinking. The "Be the Wall" campaign encourages parents, retailers and others to be firm, clear, and consistent when it comes to teens and alcohol. The "Be the Wall" campaign in Lee County is a partnership between the Safe and Drug-Free



Schools of the School District of Lee County, local law enforcement agencies, Southwest Florida Addiction Services, the United Way, the Lee County Health Department, the Department of Children and Families, and the Florida Office of Drug Control. An interactive web site is available at [www.bethewall.org](http://www.bethewall.org). It includes text messages that parents can send to their teens, tips for chaperoning teen parties, humorous posters, community displays, and other marketing strategies to reduce underage drinking. Local businesses and agencies wishing to display campaign posters can contact Lisette Rosales at (239) 931-9814. For more information about the "Be the Wall" campaign in Lee County, contact Jean Campbell at (239) 337-8348.

\* According to the 2008 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey, 70% of Lee County youth had not used alcohol in the past 30 days.



The JAC welcomes Merritt Blandford of Lutheran Services of Florida who recently joined the JAC team. She provides counseling to non-arrested youth and their families. To access these services call 344-5109.

## Juvenile Court To Move

The new Lee County Justice Center addition, located between the JAC and the Suntrust Building, is scheduled to open June 1. With its opening, Lee County's juvenile court will move to the sixth floor, courtroom A in the new ten-story tower. The entrance to the new building will be accessible from both Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Main Street. A bus stop will be available in front of the building on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.



*The JAC of Lee County is operated by the Lee County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and the Department of Juvenile Justice.*