

More Than Crossing Streets

Training, Policies and Procedures for School Crossing Guards in New Jersey



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Prepared for:
State of New Jersey Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

Date:
May 2012

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U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document discusses the results of research on the state of school crossing guard training and work conditions in New Jersey, and current best practices in use throughout the country. Several research tasks were undertaken to examine adult school crossing guard training and placement criteria in New Jersey and throughout the nation. Research efforts included: a thorough resources overview to determine current best practices; interviews with crossing guard supervisors throughout New Jersey to examine current hiring, training, and supervision standards and procedures; focus groups to discuss the daily experiences of school crossing guards; and formation of a stakeholder working group comprised of transportation and law enforcement professionals to discuss the essential elements and development of a successful crossing guard training program. Based on information gathered from these efforts, a draft Model Municipal School Crossing Guard Policy was developed (see Appendix E).

One of the initial focus areas for research was crossing guard placement. Researchers looked for placement guidelines in use in other states, noted the placement guidance available in the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), and included questions on placement in the crossing guard supervisor interviews. No universally applicable criteria were available. A proposed School Zone Design Guide will address the issue of placement.

The research team interviewed crossing guard supervisors to ascertain the policies and procedures that guide hiring, training and supervision of school crossing guards in municipalities across New Jersey. Results of these interviews showed inconsistencies in crossing guard training and standards for hiring and supervision. Several supervisors voiced support for the idea of a comprehensive training program and guidance manual.



Crossing guards who participated in the focus groups provided insights regarding their training and relationship to the municipal police department, and their daily experiences and relationships with the children, school system and other community members. Their responses supported the development of the Model Municipal School Crossing Guard Policy and will contribute to the design of a comprehensive training program.

A stakeholder working group comprised of New Jersey transportation and law enforcement professionals discussed the research results and developed a list of recommendations to address crossing guard training and work conditions.





As noted above, research results were used in the preparation of a Model Municipal School Crossing Guard Policy. This document will serve as a guide for municipal police departments and, specifically, for crossing guard supervisors in the hiring, training and management of their employees. The intent of the policy is to clarify the role of school crossing guards and to encourage consistent supervision to improve job performance and safety. In addition, the research conducted for this study will help frame the future development of a school crossing guard training program, a train-the-trainer program, and/or a crossing guard web-based resource center.

II. INTRODUCTION - CROSSING GUARDS IN NEW JERSEY

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, New Jersey has the highest employment ratio of crossing guards in the United States at 1.43 per thousand jobs, and the fourth highest number of crossing guards. As of May 2010, an estimated 5,390 crossing guards were employed in the State of New Jersey assisting pedestrians “at such places as street crossings, schools, railroad crossings, and construction sites.”ⁱ This number represents a decrease of 580 crossing guards since 2007 when the estimated total statewide was 5,970.ⁱⁱ The reasons for this decline are not known.

New Jersey’s high concentration of crossing guards corresponds to the State’s high number of pedestrian friendly neighborhood schools. There is no definitive data on the number of New Jersey municipalities that employ school crossing guards. State regulations require busing if a student lives “remote from school,” (i.e. more than two miles from their elementary or middle school or two and a half miles from their high school). Due to budgets issues, many schools have eliminated or reduced courtesy busing of students living within these limits.¹ As a result, some

communities have experienced greater numbers of students walking and biking to school and increasing numbers of parents driving students to school.ⁱⁱⁱ These shifts contribute to the potential for conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians within school zones.

According to the Municipal Excess Liability Joint Insurance Fund of New Jersey (NJMEL), the position of school crossing guard is one of the more dangerous in municipal government. The insurance fund, which represents more than 60 percent of New Jersey’s municipalities, reported a 65 percent increase in crashes involving crossing guards between 1996 and 2006.^{iv} According to the New Jersey Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation (NJFACE) Project conducted by the New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services (NJDHSS), 14 adult crossing guards were struck and killed by motor vehicles while at work in the period between 1993 and 2008.^v During the same time period, there were a total of 771 nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses involving days away from work for crossing guards in New Jersey. Only 121 (15%) of these

¹ Boards of Education are not required by law to provide busing for students who are less than remote from school even for safety reasons. At their own discretion and expense, School Boards are permitted to provide transportation for students who live in areas where walking or bicycling to school is dangerous and unsafe which is commonly referred to as hazardous busing. According to a survey conducted by the New Jersey School Boards Association in March 2010, 36.5% of school districts said they anticipate cutting transportation expenditures. This is a significant response because many of the districts that answered “no” to this

question (63.5% of the respondents) do not provide any busing – mandatory or non-mandatory. Of the districts that anticipated the transportation cut-backs, 26.6% of them said they would reduce or eliminate courtesy busing. 72 of the 117 (61.5%) school districts who responded indicated that they do not offer courtesy busing or do not plan to reduce or eliminate the service. If busing is eliminated or reduced for students, school districts must work closely with their municipality to plan for how students will get safely to school. (Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2012).

injuries were motor vehicle related. Other injuries fell into the following categories: slips, trips, and falls resulting in sprains, strains, and fractures. Median days away from work are a key measure of the severity of an injury or illness. During this period, median days away from work for crossing guards almost always exceeded the statistic for all local government occupations combined.^{vi}

Inconsistencies among crossing guard training programs and lack of guidance on crossing guard placement may leave

crossing guards without the skills or knowledge they need to effectively protect their students and themselves, or to inspire a safety culture among their students, or to provide road safety for the greater community.

Without state or national standards, training requirements and programs for adult school crossing guards vary substantially among New Jersey municipalities. In addition, municipalities generally determine crossing guard placement without benefit of guidelines.

III. RESEARCH PROJECTS

Resources Overview

The resources overview uncovered few articles or reports that are directly applicable to crossing guards in New Jersey or in the nation. The overview was conducted using a number of methods. First, a variety of Rutgers University Library electronic databases and indexes were utilized including PAIS International and Archive, Social Sciences Full Text, Project MUSE, Academic Search Premier, TRIS: Transportation Research Information Services, Web of Knowledge, Google Scholar, and LexisNexis Academic. These databases identified a number of academic and non-academic resources. Second, the research team conducted direct searches of internet resources using select keywords and phrases to identify any additional and pertinent resources.

This resources overview identified several articles, reports, and surveys that include brief mentions of crossing guards. These references were often limited to one sentence in studies related to traffic safety, law enforcement and types of infrastructure (i.e., a crossing guard as comparable to a speed bump or sign). These resources did not address crossing guard training or placement. A catalog of articles reviewed is available in Appendix A.

The article *Traffic Safety and Safe Routes to Schools, Synthesizing the Empirical Evidence*, by Eric Dumbaugh and Lawrence Frank notes briefly that “while the use of school crossing guards would appear to be beneficial to child pedestrians, not a single study was found...that evaluated them for their effects on either children’s safety or behavior.”^{vii} These authors did report on one study from 1977 that “found

crossing guards to be more desirable than a full traffic signal, at least from an operational perspective.”

The most relevant report found was *Child Pedestrian Safety in Hartford, Connecticut: A Survey of Hartford Crossing Guards*, a 2005 Masters thesis prepared by Louise LaChance-Price.^{viii} This document presents data and a discussion of crossing guard demographics, training, opinions on pedestrian safety, and job-related hazards.^{ix} The Connecticut Children’s Medical Center Injury Prevention Center developed and distributed a survey to 93 crossing guards employed by the City of Hartford, Connecticut; 58 of the crossing guards responded to the survey. Approximately 67% of the respondents reported that they felt that they were in danger always or most of the time on the job. Approximately the same percentage reported that the children were in danger always or most of the time. A similar percentage reported that drivers speed through their intersections either all or most of the time, and approximately 55% noted that drivers disobey traffic signals all or most of the time. Some of the Connecticut survey report findings are echoed in the current study’s crossing guard focus group results.

After reviewing the Connecticut survey results, LaChance-Price proposed changes to improve pedestrian and crossing guard safety. These recommendations included: strict enforcement of speed limits and other traffic laws; ticketing of motorists for failure to stop for crossing guards and children in pedestrian crossings; a state ban on cell phone use while driving; adoption of standards for training,

evaluation and certification of crossing guards; consideration of environmental modifications to streets to enhance child pedestrian safety; pedestrian safety training for parents, and evaluation of this training.

Researchers conducted an extensive review of training material currently in use in New Jersey and other states, including guidance for crossing guard classroom and field training materials as well as for train-the-trainer programs. The Florida crossing guard training program, initiated in 1993 and modified over the past two decades, has served as a model for several state training programs, but other states also provide strong examples of online training courses and guidance manuals. In general, these training manuals address topics such as traffic hazards and control devices; traffic laws; characteristics of children in traffic; crossing techniques; orientation to the municipal police department; emergency procedures; and public image. One example of a municipality-specific reference manual for everyday use by crossing guards includes contact numbers, post locations and times, municipal and school calendars, payroll schedule, and do’s and don’ts. Guidance on gap assessment and calculation of stopping distance appeared in several manuals.

Manuals are available in various formats including PowerPoint and SlideShare presentations, video, and pdf versions. A summary table of guidance material can be found in Appendix A.

This training material helped to define information that should be included in a model municipal policy. In addition, examples of assessment tools for

classroom and field training, sample job descriptions, interview questions for hiring, and crossing guard program and post observation report forms were collected and reviewed. NJMEL provided several of these documents, and as a result of crossing guard supervisor interviews, two municipalities provided material developed by their traffic safety departments.

Crossing Guard Supervisor Interviews

The research team interviewed 28 crossing guard supervisors from communities across New Jersey to compile information on factors including hiring and training practices, required uniform, employment conditions, post protocols, reporting structures, and placement criteria. Twenty-one municipalities, or one municipality representing each New Jersey county, were chosen randomly to be interviewed. Generally, the Traffic Safety Division of the municipal police

department is responsible for the training and supervision of crossing guards. If the traffic safety officer failed to respond after several attempts, another municipality in that county was chosen randomly. This process continued for each county until a positive response was received. In addition, 15 urban centers were contacted, 9 of which participated in the interview, and four of these responding communities represented their counties. Researchers oversampled urban municipalities to support the New Jersey Safe Routes to School program's emphasis on prioritizing underserved populations and to collect information on areas that employ large numbers of crossing guards. Interviews were also conducted with traffic safety officers from the two focus group communities, the City of Paterson and Hamilton Township. (See Table 1 and the map on page 10). Responses were tabulated and analyzed to form the basis of the Crossing Guard Supervisor Interview Summary included in Appendix B.

Table 1. Municipalities Represented by Interviews

County	Municipality	Regular Crossing Guards	Substitute Crossing Guards
Atlantic	City of Ventnor City	4	3
Bergen	Hillsdale Borough	18	4
Burlington	Moorestown Township	12	0
Camden	Cherry Hill Township*	52	8
Cape May	City of Cape May	1	1
Cumberland	City of Vineland*	34	0
Essex	Montclair Township*	42	2
Essex	City of Newark*	152	0
Essex	West Orange Township	40	0
Gloucester	Washington Township	22	6
Hudson	City of Hoboken *	33	1
Hudson	City of Jersey City*	187	0
Hunterdon	High Bridge Borough	4	1
Mercer	West Windsor Township	3	2
Mercer	Hamilton Township**	49	5
Middlesex	Piscataway Township	39	16
Middlesex	City of New Brunswick*	30	0
Monmouth	Long Branch Township	21	0
Morris	Parsippany Township*	35	12
Ocean	Toms River Township*	30	5
Passaic	City of Paterson**	101	0
Passaic	Ringwood Borough	2	0
Salem	Woodstown Borough	5	0
Somerset	Branchburg Township	4	1
Sussex	Hamburg Borough	4	2
Union	City of Linden	45	5
Union	Town of Westfield *	53	6
Warren	Town of Hackettstown	13	3

*Urban Locations

**Crossing Guard Focus Group Municipality

Observations drawn from these interviews are summarized as follows:

- Criteria for hiring vary across the state. Physical requirements, in particular vision and hearing tests are essential to job performance, but infrequently included in the hiring process.
- In general, crossing guards are given a safety vest and STOP paddle, and, in 20 of 28 municipalities, a jacket. Some municipalities provide a full uniform (i.e.,

shirt, pants, jacket, etc.). Badges are required by the state, but are not used by a large percentage of the communities interviewed.

- Classroom and field training, including the amount of time devoted to training and the materials used, vary widely across the state. Although most communities engage in retraining, this annual exercise appears generally to be limited to the classroom and the same material is used annually.
- Few formal opportunities exist for crossing guards to receive feedback on their job performance.
- Supervisors noted that some crossing guards are dissatisfied with the STOP paddle and some supervisors are unaware that use of the STOP paddle is required.
- Confusion among supervisors on the appropriate means of communicating with pedestrians (verbal signals only) and motorists (hand signals only) often leads to incorrect training of crossing guards.
- Crossing guard placement varies widely across the State. As municipalities deal with budget issues, criteria and procedures for prioritization of posts are essential.

Inconsistencies in training and support of crossing guards could be addressed through implementation of a comprehensive training program, updated materials and access to a model municipal policy and other resources for crossing guard trainers and supervisors. These resources would be particularly helpful to those officers who are new crossing guard supervisors.

Crossing Guard Focus Groups

For this study, the research team conducted two crossing guard focus groups - one in Hamilton Township, a suburban community in south central New Jersey, and the other in Paterson, one of the largest cities in northern New Jersey. Focus group participants were recruited using printed fliers distributed by the crossing guard supervisors in both municipalities. The first focus group, comprised of 14 crossing guards,

was held on November 15, 2011 at Hamilton Township Police Headquarters, and the second focus group, comprised of 9 crossing guards, was held on November 29, 2011 in Paterson Public Safety Building. The focus groups were designed to elicit input about their experiences and performance on the job and the effect of municipal crossing guard policies on performance. Summaries of these meetings are provided in Appendix C.

Table 2. Focus Group Municipal Demographics

	City of Paterson	Hamilton Township
Total Population	146,199	88,464
Population Density	17,347/sq. mile	2,190/sq. mile
Population - Age 5 years to 17 years	29,094	14,139
Race and Ethnicity - % of population		
White	34.7%	78.4%
Black or African American	31.7%	11.8%
Hispanic or Latino	57.6%	10.9%
American Indian, Alaska Native	1.1%	0.2%
Asian	3.3%	3.3%
Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.1%
Some Other Race	23.9%	4.3%
Two or More Races	5.3%	2.0%
Median Household Income	\$32,068	\$69,217

U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

Leigh Ann Von Hagen, Senior Research Specialist at the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center moderated the focus groups. For both sessions, crossing guards completed a pre-focus group questionnaire that addressed demographics and basic aspects of their employment, such as post times and uniforms. A topic guide, approved by the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT), informed the remainder of the session. Participants were asked about job conditions, job safety, training, employer policies and

performance review, and were given the opportunity to discuss other issues at the end of the session. In addition, the groups were shown a series of photographs of crossing guards at their posts and were asked to identify positive and negative aspects of crossing guard behavior the crossing guard post area. Each session lasted approximately two hours.

Pre-Focus Group Questionnaire

At the beginning of each focus group session, a questionnaire was distributed to participants to obtain demographic as well as basic information related to their work. Questions included: How satisfied are you with your crossing guard job? Are you a municipal or private employee? What times do your work shifts start and end on a typical school day? How do you get to your post? A table detailing demographic information can be found in Table 3, and a copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix C.

Every crossing guard in both groups reported that they were “very satisfied” with their job.

In both communities, crossing guards are municipal employees hired by the police department. In Paterson, a union provides uniforms, while in Hamilton the town provides a stipend to purchase them. In both communities, the uniform includes at a minimum a pair of pants, a shirt, a hat, and a jacket. All of the participants were provided equipment including a safety vest and STOP paddle.

Most of the crossing guards drive to their posts and are assigned to the same post. Only two participants float from post to post as needed. Paterson crossing guards have a one hour shift in the morning and a one hour shift in the afternoon. In Hamilton, shifts vary from one half hour up to one and one quarter hours.

Overall the crossing guards who participated in the focus groups included older individuals with low educational achievement and household incomes. Less than 5% are aged 35-44, approximately 44% are evenly divided between 45-54 and 55-64 years of age, and 44% are 65 years of age or older. The majority, 41%, have not graduated from high school. Just over 13% have a high school diploma or GED, and 27% have some college education. Those who have earned a two- or four-year college degree account for 9% of the population. Nearly 64% of the crossing guards have an annual household income of less than \$50,000. English is spoken in over 86% of households, while Spanish is spoken in over 18%, with some respondents declaring that both languages are spoken at home.

Table 3. Focus Group Demographics (n=23)

	%	#
Gender		
Male	31.8%	8
Female	63.6%	15
Age		
18-24	0.00%	0
25-34	0.00%	0
35-44	4.3%	1
45-54	21.7%	5
55-64	21.7%	5
65+	43.5%	10
Level of education achieved		
Less than high school graduate	39.1%	9
High school graduate (or GED)	13.0%	3
Some college (or technical vocational school/professional business school)	26.1%	6
Two-year college degree (Associate in Arts)	4.3%	1
Four-year college degree (BA or BS)	4.3%	1
Graduate work, but no advanced degree	0.00%	0
Graduate degree (Masters, PhD, lawyer, medical doctor)	0.00%	0
Language most often spoken in household		
English	82.6%	19
Chinese/Mandarin	0.00%	0
Spanish	17.4%	4
Hindi	0.00%	0
Korean	0.00%	0
Portuguese	0.00%	0
Polish	0.00%	0
Urdu	0.00%	0
Other	0.00%	0
Estimated household income for 2010		
Less than \$25,000	21.7%	5
\$25,000 to less than \$50,000	39.1%	9
\$50,000 to less than \$100,000	21.7%	5
\$100,000 to less than \$200,000	4.3%	1
\$200,000 or more	0.00%	0
Marital status		
Single – never married	26.1%	6
Married/civil union	52.2%	12
Divorced	8.7%	2
Widowed	4.3%	1
Living with a partner	0.00%	0
Race/Ethnicity		
White Hispanic	17.4%	4
Black Hispanic	8.7%	2
White not Hispanic	39.1%	9
Black not Hispanic	21.7%	5
Asian	0.00%	0
Native American	0.00%	0
Two or more races	0.00%	0
Other	0.00%	0

Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2010

Discussion

Job Conditions & Safety

Discussion at each session began with participants describing conditions at their respective crossing guard posts. Hamilton crossing guards assisted children from pre-kindergarten age through eighth grade, while the Paterson crossing guards assisted children from pre-kindergarten through high school. Hamilton crossing guards felt that their intersections were adequately covered and there were enough guards in the vicinity. Some Paterson crossing guards noted that they like to work alone and others stated that they could use help at the busiest intersections and during the busiest times. Typically, guards from both municipalities cross pedestrians even when school children are not present.

Hamilton crossing guards are often employed during the summer to assist at special municipal events. Paterson crossing guards are not employed during the summer.

Crossing guards in both groups reported that the children are the best part of the job. They and the children develop relationships of mutual regard. Children voice concern if a crossing guard is absent for a day. Crossing guards come to know the habits of the children at their corners (i.e., chronically late to school, walking alone, etc.).

Other job attractions reported include a way to get out of the house, meet people, work a schedule suited to a stay-at-home parent, and a means to keep active.

In terms of safety concerns, crossing guards in both groups stated that the most significant daily challenge was distracted drivers. The crossing guards reported that they and the children they cross are in danger every day as a result of driver carelessness. Drivers often talk on cell phones, text, drink coffee, speed, run red lights, listen to loud music and cannot hear the whistle, and otherwise behave as if they were unaware of the crossing guards. In some cases, drivers are aware of the crossing guard but do not like to be detained at the intersection and proceed through it.

Parents dropping off and picking up their children at school contribute to dangerous conditions by speeding, and stopping or parking too close to the crosswalk or within the crosswalk.

Guards reported that children listening to music or talking on cell phones cannot hear instructions given by the crossing guards. High school students tend to cross the street themselves. Both focus groups mentioned that parents set bad examples for their children by not listening to the crossing guard. The morning rush hour is particularly difficult.

None of the crossing guards reported being hit by vehicles, but several had experienced close calls. Hamilton crossing guards also reported problems with school bus drivers on cell phones ignoring the crossing guard. Paterson crossing guards did not report problems with school bus drivers, but noted that some NJ TRANSIT bus drivers did not pay adequate attention to crossing situations. One Hamilton guard noted

that the crossing posts have remained unchanged for 30 or 40 years and need updating with improved signage or warning lights.

In a discussion of whether children and others are respectful of crossing guard authority, Hamilton crossing guards reported that generally children listen to the crossing guards, although seventh graders were reported to be the least respectful. In Paterson, children up to high school age are generally respectful, but high school students choose to cross themselves and most often disregard the crossing guard. In contrast, many younger children depend on the crossing guards. Some parents are appreciative of the crossing guards, while others ignore them, setting a poor example for their children. Paterson participants added that their uniform contributes to their effective job performance and gives them an air of professionalism, contributing to the public perception of them as authority figures deserving respect.

Photo Exercise

Eight photos of crossing guards in typical crossing situations in random New Jersey communities were shown sequentially to the focus groups to elicit discussion. In general, these photos were chosen because they provided examples of both positive and negative aspects of the depicted crossing guard's preparedness and behavior and the physical conditions of the crossing guard post.

Observations expressed during the photo exercise typically centered on the uniform, equipment and deportment of the crossing guard, the location of the

crossing guard in the intersection, and characteristics of the intersection. The initial responses to photos usually described a deficiency in the crossing guard such as the lack of a uniform, retroreflective vest, or STOP paddle, and failure to hold the STOP paddle or hands up properly to keep traffic stopped.

Criticisms of the crossing guards pictured included leaving the intersection before crossing is complete, sitting at the post, not grouping the crossers, and taking up a position in the intersection before allowing the children to cross. These photos prompted some disagreements about crossing procedures, most commonly, where the crossing guard should stand when in the intersection and which direction he or she should be facing in relation to the children crossing and oncoming traffic.

Signs and crosswalk indicators, curb cuts and crosswalk striping were also topics of conversation. Clear delineation of the crosswalk was appreciated but the zebra-style striping was noted as slippery when wet. The snow in one photograph prompted discussion in both groups about snow and ice as hazards at the intersections. Crossing guards often shovel walks and spread ice melt for the early morning shift, before the municipality has had a chance to clear intersections. It was also noted that not only do pedestrians and crossing guards slip, but cars can also slip on the ice.

Other maintenance issues raised included the presence of potholes. In one focus group, guards related incidents involving potholes. The crossing guards also discussed seeing a mother break an ankle, a grandfather

twist an ankle, a crossing guard break her knee, and children fall. The guards noted that they cannot watch traffic while they are looking down to avoid falling.

Interestingly, crossing guards pointed out that their posts were their responsibility and that, in a sense, they “own” their corners. This sense of responsibility seemed to give them some leeway in deciding what was appropriate to their situations, even though their decisions might contradict what was discussed in training. For example, one participant noted that positioning himself in the middle of the intersection allowed him better control of the intersection, although training specifies that only traffic officers should place themselves in this location.

Training

Discussion on this topic addressed the frequency and effectiveness of training. Participants in both groups had initial classroom training, field training and annual retraining. In classroom training, Hamilton crossing guards noted watching the same video each year and reported that “the videos do not review enough scenarios.” They would welcome material that is more relevant to their situations. In Paterson, crossing guards watch a video but also discuss photographs of everyday situations and find the exercise useful.

Participants from both municipalities felt that they learned more from the field training than the classroom training. Crossing guards in Hamilton had two weeks of field training with an experienced crossing guard, while Paterson crossing guards reported

having a few days of training with an experienced crossing guard. One individual in Paterson did not receive field training. Retraining in both communities is limited to classroom review.

Communication of Incidents

Crossing guards from both groups reported using their cell phones to report emergencies and incidents. In Hamilton incidents are reported to various entities. Emergencies are reported to 911, while non-emergency issues, including traffic problems, are reported to the general police phone line. Road maintenance issues are reported to HamSTAT, a call center where requests for service are registered and referred to the proper office for resolution. Crossing guard complaints do not receive priority status. Sometimes there is confusion regarding where complaints should be directed, particularly if the issue involves a county road. In Paterson, crossing guards call 911 for emergencies and report incidents to their supervisor. Some guards will contact municipal departments directly. One crossing guard noted that it may be difficult to receive a response from the Department of Public Works (DPW) and so she flags down a patrol car to report an issue. Crossing guards note that it is difficult to report information on a motor vehicle violation and cross children at the same time.

Performance Review

Neither municipality has a formal review process that assesses a crossing guard’s skills and understanding of the job or that provides feedback on

performance. In Hamilton, an award is given to the crossing guard of the year. In Paterson, the local government does not grant an award, but crossing guards noted that members of the public often show their appreciation by giving the crossing guards hot chocolate, coffee, or soda and sometimes the police come by and complement them on doing a good job. Patrol cars frequently check posts in both communities, but no feedback is given to the crossing guard. Participants made the assumption that police officers are checking if the guard is on the post and in uniform.

Conclusion

The focus groups provided a forum for crossing guards to discuss concerns and experiences inherent to their work and provided invaluable information to the research team. Crossing guards in both groups expressed that every day they and the children they assist are in danger from distracted drivers. The focus group discussions suggest the need for improvements in three main areas:

1. Education of children and parents on school crossing issues and procedures

School-based programs addressing safe street crossings, and opportunities for crossing guards to speak to children while in the school would reinforce the role of, and encourage respect for, crossing guards. Outreach to parents is necessary to educate them on how to cross the street safely, the role of the crossing guard, and traffic laws in school zones. Crossing guards need to

learn how to communicate with parents and others who violate traffic laws. A broader awareness campaign could be put into effect to alert motorists to increases in pedestrian and bicycle traffic during the school year.

2. Physical improvements within school zones

Physical improvements to school zones might include speed bumps, posting lower speed limits, improved signage to indicate pedestrian crossings, flashing lights, use of cones, and clear delineation of crosswalks. The issue of slippery pavement warrants further research with the goal of identifying a cost effective solution. Other improvements include the prioritization of school zones for municipal snow shoveling and road sanding, leaf collection, storm drain maintenance, and repair of cracks and potholes. Increased police presence during post times would discourage traffic violations.

3. Uniform training and retraining of crossing guards

A uniform statewide training program should be developed and made available to all municipalities. A structured retraining program should include a review of procedures and new protocols, and material (including videos) to elicit discussion on issues that are relevant to crossing guards on a day-to-day basis. Resources such as tip sheets should be made available

to reinforce the techniques and procedures learned in training.

The information gathered from the Hamilton and Paterson discussions has supported the development of a Model Municipal School Crossing Guard Policy and will contribute to a School Crossing Guard Guidance Manual that will serve as the basis for a uniform statewide training program.

Developing the Model Municipal School Crossing Guard Policy

A draft Model Municipal School Crossing Guard Policy was drafted to provide crossing guard supervisors in police departments throughout the state guidance related to hiring, training, assessing, and supervising crossing guards.

The research team referred to several sources to inform development of the policy. A general Internet search yielded several examples of municipal crossing guard policies. In addition, information on essential policy elements was gathered from the Federal Highway Administration Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices website, New Jersey statutes, NJMEL, AAA Mid-Atlantic, and numerous online state training or guidance manuals including those used in Florida, Utah, Iowa, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and North Carolina.

The model municipal policy will serve as a template that may be adapted to the conditions of employment for crossing guards in any community and altered as needed to provide consistency with other municipal policies. This flexibility is essential to address the variations

between municipalities, including the number of crossing guards employed, budget and personnel available for training and support, crossing guard turnover rates, and/or the presence or absence of crossing guard unions.

The model policy addresses gaps and inconsistencies in policies and procedures, evaluation, supervision, and training identified during the crossing guard supervisor interviews and focus groups. Examples of issues that were raised and the means by which these issues can be addressed through a municipal policy include:

- Participants in both focus groups reported confusion or frustration in reporting road maintenance issues and receiving a timely response in the form of repairs. A local policy should detail effective reporting procedures for crashes, traffic problems and other maintenance issues to assist the crossing guards in improving conditions at their posts.
- Two police supervisors noted that not all crossing guards like to use the STOP paddle, implying that use of the paddle was not mandatory in that municipality. A local policy should communicate the required use of a STOP paddle, thereby providing supervisors with the information necessary to enforce compliance.
- Several traffic safety officers reported driving by crossing guard posts to ensure that guards were present at their posts and in uniform but no other performance review was undertaken. A local

policy should detail the schedule for performance review and provide assessment tools.

- Crossing guards in one focus group questioned how long they should remain at their posts past their assigned times to wait for late children. A local policy should stipulate the responsibilities of crossing guards in relation to their post time, and the provision of appropriate assistance to children and to other members of the public.

The draft policy defines crossing guard duties, hiring and training procedures, performance review, post protocol, and reporting structure. Appendices to the final model policy will include resources that a municipality may find useful to adopt such as a sample job description, sample interview questions, FHWA physical standards for vision and hearing, assessment tools, and information on traffic gap assessment and stopping distances. These resources will also be included in a guidance manual. The draft policy and examples of supporting documents can be found in Appendix E.

Working Group

Thirteen transportation and law enforcement professionals met on November 22, 2011 at the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, New Brunswick, NJ to determine how to proceed with more complete crossing guard training statewide and how to provide additional resources for crossing guards and municipalities. Attendees included representatives of NJDOT, NJ Department of Health and Senior Services (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), NJ Division of Highway Traffic Safety, NJ MEL, AAA Mid-Atlantic, AAA New Jersey, NJ State Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Morris County Police Academy as well as a transportation safety consultant. The group reviewed training materials available in the state and training and guidance manuals used in other states, discussed the results of the crossing guard supervisor interviews and one of the crossing guard focus groups, and outlined what should be included in a comprehensive training program. A summary of this meeting is provided in Appendix D. Next steps discussed at this meeting are described in the Recommendations section.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following program elements are intended to support school crossing guards in the performance of their job, to enhance public awareness of school crossing guards, and to improve

conditions at crossing guard posts. These items will form the basis for a statewide school crossing guard training program that will be accessible, adaptable and affordable; a train-the-

trainer program; and a web-based resource center for crossing guards and their supervisors.

Online Crossing Guard Resource Center

An online Crossing Guard Resource Center should be established as part of the New Jersey Safe Routes to School Resource Center website. The webpage would provide access to resources currently in use in the state (such as AAA, NJMEL, and NJDHSS training information), links to additional training resources and tip sheets created by the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center. The proposed Crossing Guard Guidance Manual and the Model Municipal School Crossing Guard Policy would be available via this webpage.

Guidance Manual

A crossing guard guidance manual should be designed to serve as a training tool and reference resource. The working group supported development of a manual to complement a train-the-trainer program. The working group noted that the manual should be traffic-related and should focus on issues crossing guards face as employees of the local police department. The manual should include information on traffic hazards, laws and control devices; characteristics of children in traffic; crossing techniques; classroom and field training; orientation to the municipal police department; emergency procedures; and public image. This resource may be distributed in paper format to municipalities and made available on the Crossing Guard

Resource Center webpage described in the previously.

Train-the-Trainer Program

In coordination with the guidance manual, a train-the-trainer program would enable school crossing guard supervisors, who are responsible for training and equipping crossing guards, to lead comprehensive training sessions. These officers will be provided with the training manual and other resources to instruct crossing guards effectively.

Tip Sheets and Other Resources

Tip sheets and other resource materials would be designed and presented as templates to provide crossing guards with information on crossing procedures, contact numbers for reporting incidents or hazards, school and municipal calendars, and reminders concerning appropriate post protocols. These resources would be available in paper format and on the Crossing Guard Resource Center webpage described above.

Retraining

Classroom retraining should include fresh elements each year to encourage participant interest, involvement and discussion of relevant issues. Development of a PowerPoint template and a library of images would form the basis of a retraining program that could be renewed annually by each municipality. This image library would be available on the Crossing Guard

Resource Center webpage. References to real world situations with pictures would help prepare crossing guards for situations they may experience at their posts. The process might also encourage discussion of issues at particular posts that the crossing guard supervisor could then address. Retraining should also include a field component.

Model Municipal School Crossing Guard Policy

The draft Model Municipal School Crossing Guard Policy will be revised after review by members of the working group. The final version of the model policy will be made available on the Crossing Guard Resource Center webpage and distributed statewide by the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center and partner organizations.

Outreach

Methods of outreach to support creation and implementation of a comprehensive crossing guard training program and improved work conditions would require coordination between organizations within municipalities and, on a broader scale, with statewide organizations. Members of the working group expressed the need for communication of these efforts to local authorities and state organizations to gain support and facilitate adoption of the guidance manual and implementation of the training program. Outreach to the NJ League of Municipalities, NJ Conference of Mayors, NJ School Boards Association, NJ Principals and Supervisors Association and police

groups statewide, is critical for the dissemination of information and promotion of the program. The Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center would be responsible for communicating with these groups. Outreach to municipal and county governing bodies, local school administration, and parent-teacher groups would be the responsibility of the municipal police department.

Crossing Guard Appreciation

Within municipalities, coordination between the police, the schools, and the governing body to raise awareness of critical role crossing guards play in ensuring the safety of school-age children as well as the issues they face daily might take the form of a crossing guard appreciation day. (There is a national observance annually in January.) Several New Jersey municipalities recognize their dedicated crossing guards through an annual ceremony and present awards for years of service or outstanding job performance. Press coverage for these events emphasizes the importance of the role that crossing guards play in local communities. New Jersey might follow Florida's example by annually recognizing an outstanding Crossing Guard of the Year.

Safe Routes To School Transportation Management Associations (TMAs)

TMAs can provide increased support to address crossing guard issues. TMAs can prioritize projects, direct more attention to conditions at crossing guard

posts, assist with the completion of funding applications, conduct crossing guard training, and educate students and parents about their role in school zones.

School Zone Design Guide

A School Zone Design Guide, to be developed by an engineering firm, will address crossing guard placement. Municipalities facing limited resources would benefit from prioritization of school crossings to facilitate location of crossing guard posts. This prioritization would also serve as a critical tool in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency when some crossings cannot be covered.

The Guide would address a range of available physical improvements to school zones including speed bumps, lower posted speed limits, improved signage to indicate pedestrian crossings, flashing lights, use of cones, and clear delineation of crosswalks. Other improvements would include the prioritization of school zones for municipal snow shoveling and sanding of the roads, leaf collection, storm drain maintenance, and repair of cracks and potholes. Timely attention to these issues is intended to create a safer environment for crossing guards and pedestrians.

V. CONCLUSION

The information gathered from crossing guard supervisor interviews, crossing guard focus groups, and consultations with transportation and law enforcement professionals reveals gaps in the preparation of crossing guards for successful job performance and suggests areas for improvement, not only in training and supervision, but also in the physical conditions surrounding crossing guard posts. A uniform statewide school crossing guard training program, increased awareness within communities of school zone hazards, and the promotion of design

improvements within school zones, will contribute to a safer experience for crossing guards and pedestrians. At the municipal level, adoption of a crossing guard policy and a training manual will provide support for crossing guard supervisors and assist crossing guards with improved job performance. The availability of these resources, other materials such as tip sheets and a formal retraining program presented via a dedicated school crossing guard resource center webpage will enable crossing guards to more effectively and safely perform their duties.

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ⁱⁱ The New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services. (2009). *Educational Outreach to New Jersey Adult School Crossing Guards*. Trenton: New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services.

ⁱⁱⁱ Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2011.

^{iv} New Jersey Municipal Excess Liability Joint Insurance Fund.

^v The New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services. (2009). *Educational Outreach to New Jersey Adult School Crossing Guards*. Trenton: New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Dumbaugh, E., & Frank, L. (2009). Traffic Safety and Safe Routes to Schools. *Transportation Research Record*, 89-97.

^{viii} LaChance-Price, L. (2005). *Child Pedestrian Safety in Hartford, Connecticut : A Survey of Hartford Crossing Guards*. Farmington: University of Connecticut Health Center.

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