

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Crime Stoppers USVI Encourages Local Schools To Adopt Campus-based Program

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In an effort to promote safer school environments, Crime Stoppers USVI is encouraging the territory's schools to implement the anonymous, incentive-based crime reporting program on their campuses.

According to the organization's Public Relations Chair, Etienne Gibbs, Crime Stoppers USVI's goal is to show that "a proactive, not reactive approach to a safer school environment is more cost-effective, financially and emotionally."

The first student Crime Stoppers USA program, known as Scholastic Crime Stoppers, was started in 1983 at Fairview High School in Boulder, Colo. Now, more than 2,000

programs exist in middle and high schools, community colleges, and colleges throughout the nation.

Gibbs listed the benefits of implementing the Scholastic Crime Stoppers program on school campuses.

"Often utilized within the curriculum to teach character development, established campus-based programs have promoted school spirit and pride, and a positive campus image to students," he explained. "Indirectly, schools experienced a reduced risk of lawsuits and put a check on insurance costs."

Gibbs went on to say that in addition to being an avenue by which students could anonymously report school crimes without fear of retaliation, "school-based programs have encouraged the development of responsibility. Students participated in a valuable extracurricular activity, while they benefited from a reduction in incidents on campus and enjoyed an increased sense of security," he said.

A variety of crimes are often committed on school campuses, including vandalism, theft, graffiti, bomb threats, excessive bullying, arson, and presentation of drugs and weapons. Depending on the severity of the crime, Gibbs said, rewards range from \$100-\$200 for drugs or weapons tips that lead to an arrest, as well as passes to school activities or the movies, free school items, and gift certificates for lesser crimes and for younger students.

Gibbs further pointed out that while some critics say rewarding students for providing information about a crime could promote students becoming "snitches" or cause them to invent crimes as revenge against other students, all tips are carefully investigated before rewards are given.

"All things considered, we would rather have an anonymous, good student-citizen to safely report crime-solving or crime-preventing information than have a grieving school and community following a violent tragedy on campus that could have been prevented had there been a Crime Stoppers program in place," Gibbs said.

For more information on starting a school-based Crime Stoppers program, send email to crimestoppersvi@gmail.com.