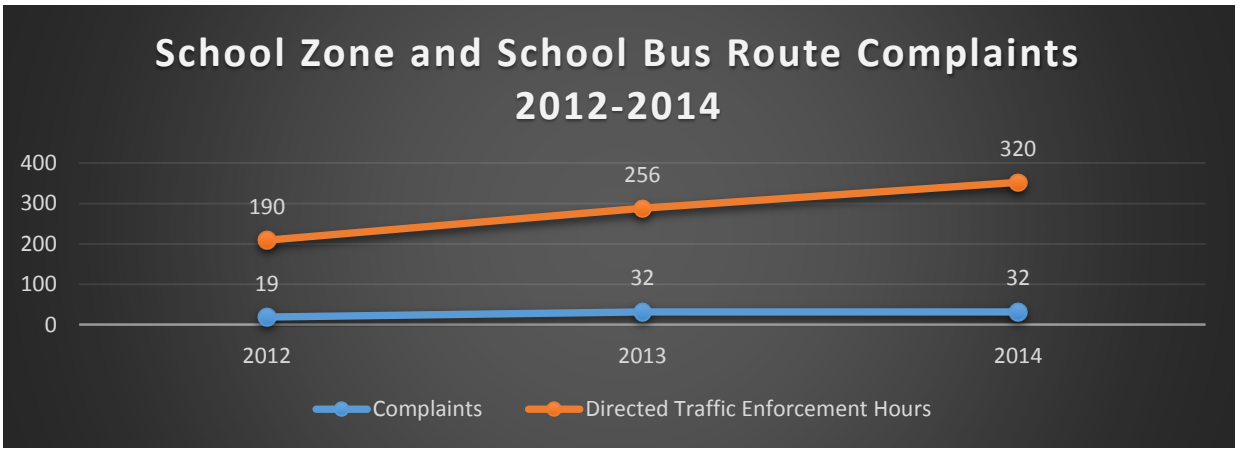
Problem Identification

The Arlington County Police Department (ACPD) is committed to the reduction of property and personal injury vehicle crashes that occur within the County. To accomplish our mission, the Department studies empirical data to best assign and allocate our limited resources. The Police Department has placed a top priority on ensuring our school zones and school bus routes are safe and secure.

Annually, the ACPD Special Operations Section – Traffic Safety Unit (SOS – TSU) Lieutenant reviews data from our Traffic Accident Reduction Program (TARP), the Department's Record Management System and our Traffic Complaint database. This guides our enforcement zones and directs our targeted enforcement locations.

The Department utilizes the Traffic Complaint database, maintained by the SOS – TSU, to effectively track and investigate all traffic complaints. Upon receiving a complaint (via email, internet, Twitter, Facebook, Nextdoor, voicemail or internally generated), a supervisor checks the Traffic Complaint Database to see if there are current details already assigned to address the nature of the complaint or if the issue has been addressed in the past.

During a three (3) year period (2012-2014) officers assigned to SOS addressed 83 complaints directly related to school zones and school bus stop safety. This resulted in a total of 766 hours of directed traffic enforcement in our school zones, school bus routes and bus stop locations.



**Data shown in graph is from the SOS – TSU Complaint Log 2012-2014.*

Over the years the Special Operations Section (SOS) has directed officers to conduct traffic enforcement in our school zones and along our bus routes. Additionally, support from patrol squads, District Policing Teams and School Resource Unit have been requested to supplement the SOS efforts; many times on an ad hoc basis. In 2013 and 2014, SOS handled 32 complaints directed at this problem. In 2014, officers assigned to SOS were directed to spend more detail hours at each location, when assigned a complaint.

Annually, at the start of every school year the SOS would run a Back to School Traffic Safety detail, with support from the School Resource Unit. Officers were directed to enforce every violation observed during the peak school commuting hours (0700-0930 and 1400-1700).

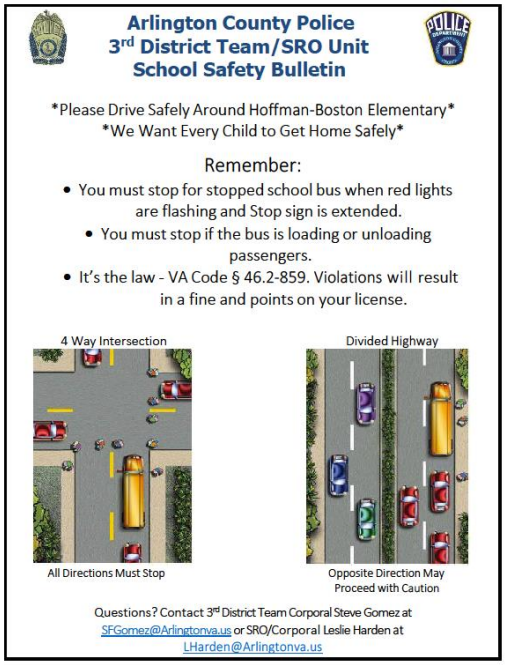
These traffic safety awareness campaigns were developed, implemented and run successfully. But short term gains were not met with long term success.

As a result of the high complaint numbers, the public's observed notion of danger to students and the extremely heavy traffic volume throughout the county, a new approach to mitigating the safety hazards needed to be developed.

In October 2014, the ACPD Third District Policing Team began receiving a high volume of complaints from parents surrounding two (2) school bus stop locations and a crossing guard location in the Arlington View neighborhood. Students in this neighborhood attend the Hoffman-Boston Elementary School. Assistance from SOS was requested and officers were detailed for strict enforcement for a 30-day period. At the conclusion of this detail the problem re-emerged.

In January 2015, The Third District Policing Team developed a collaborative effort with the School Resource Unit and Crossing Guard Unit. They decided to take a different approach and developed a 5-point action plan to address this complaint.

- Utilize the Hoffman-Boston school newsletter reminding parents to use caution when driving or walking their children to school.
- Site visits to evaluate traffic and safety issues.
- Extra checks at the locations
- Increase police visibility at these locations and request assistance from Evening Patrol units working in the Third District.
- Distribute traffic safety fliers to parents picking up children at school.



Arlington County Police
3rd District Team/SRO Unit
School Safety Bulletin

Please Drive Safely Around Hoffman-Boston Elementary
We Want Every Child to Get Home Safely

Remember:

- You must stop for stopped school bus when red lights are flashing and Stop sign is extended.
- You must stop if the bus is loading or unloading passengers.
- It's the law - VA Code § 46.2-859. Violations will result in a fine and points on your license.

4 Way Intersection

All Directions Must Stop

Divided Highway

Opposite Direction May Proceed with Caution

Questions? Contact 3rd District Team Corporal Steve Gomez at SFGomez@Arlingtonva.us or SRO/Corporal Leslie Harden at LHarden@Arlingtonva.us

January 2015 – The flyer pictured above was distributed to parents of students attending the Hoffman-Boston Elementary School serving as a reminder on how proceed when the school bus stop arm and flashing lights are activated.

The Third District Policing Team observed a sustained change in motorist behavior in the Arlington View neighborhood and this trend continued throughout the remaining portion of the school year.

In August 2015, representatives from the SOS meet with personnel from Arlington County Public Schools (APS) and the Department of Environmental Services – Transportation and Engineering (DES) to discuss a collaborative effort in improving safety in school zones and bus routes. Crash data, provided by the ACPD Traffic Analyst, was presented, reviewed and analyzed to identify if enforcement correlations could be made. No discernable pattern could be identified. The success of the Third District Team's collaborative effort with the Hoffman-Boston elementary school was also discussed.

During this meeting, representatives from SOS, APS, and DES agreed to develop a robust plan of action utilizing a combination of the following:

- Strong public awareness campaign
- Have APS and Crossing Guard Unit, in collaboration with ACPD, identify problem/high traffic volume locations
- Create a net of high police visibility in and around school zones and bus stop locations.

At the conclusion of the meeting the framework for the 2015 Back to School Traffic Safety campaign was formed:

1. Public education through the ACPD and APS Public Information Offices
2. Public Education through strategic placement of Variable Message Boards and S.M.A.R.T Sets throughout Arlington County
3. Targeted/Assigned locations, based on times of day at problematic/high traffic volume locations, which provided a high level officer presence/visibility and enforcement.

Policy

The Arlington County Police Department has a specific policy that deals with Traffic Enforcement.

Below are excerpts the Department Policy:

541.02 Traffic Enforcement

"It is the policy and intended purpose of the Department to reduce the frequency and severity of traffic accidents, and to promote a safe, efficient movement of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

In these regards, the Department shall not render enforcement decisions or engineering recommendations based upon revenue generation or the pursuit of artificial statistical goals and quotas. The Department places a priority on the enforcement of speeding, occupancy protection and the detection of impaired drivers, thus every uniformed officer of the Department shall be expected to participate in traffic enforcement activities, when appropriate, and do so without compensation or reward for the number or types of citations issued.

Traffic Enforcement *– enforcement of traffic laws to reduce traffic collisions, their resulting injuries, and to* ***promote the safe flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.****"*

Planning

The Special Operations Section's mission is to safeguard life and property through traffic enforcement to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic through and around Arlington County.

Goals

SOS – Traffic Safety Unit Goals for 2015

- *Reduce the number of property damage and personal injury accidents that occur within the County.*
- ***Regular participation in traffic safety initiatives.***
- ***Collaboration with and fostering relationships with the public, other police sections/units and other agencies*.**
- *Conduct child safety seat educational events.*
    - *Conduct safety seat inspections.*
- ***To conduct training in** DUI, speed enforcement, child safety seat training and **pedestrian/bicycle safety**.*

Our goals serve as our annual guide to ensure we are continually prioritizing our resources in the most efficient and targeted manner. Supervisors are assigned to create, organize and oversee "mini-traffic safety" campaigns in addition to the national campaigns. Our traffic safety campaigns are prioritized in the following manner:

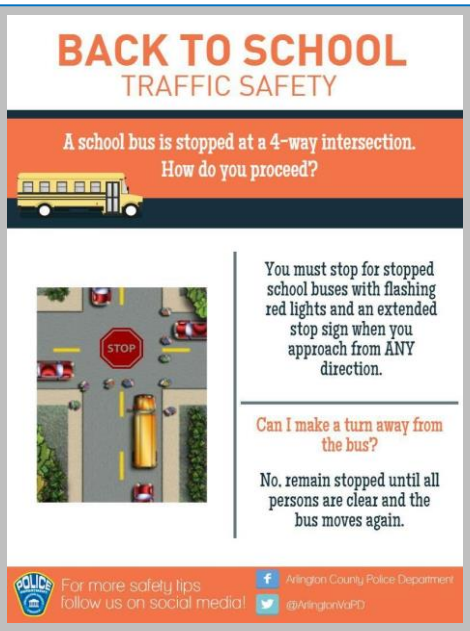
- **School zones and school bus routes**
- High Accident locations and intersections (TARP)
- **Problem areas identified by citizen complaints and other means**
- Problem areas identified by high volume of violations

2015 Back to School Traffic Safety Initiative

The goal specific to this initiative is to ***ensure the safety of pedestrians (students and parents), bicyclists (students, parents and commuters), vehicles (students, parents and commuters) and improved efficient movement through the school zones***. The program plan consisted of three (3) distinct and overlapping methods to reach members of the community. These methods were designed to improve the safe and efficient flow of vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians within and through our school zones. Specific attention was directed at our schools, crossing guard and school bus stop locations.

Public Education – ACPD and APS Public Information Offices

- Developed a Public Service Announcement involving the APS Superintendent, Chief of Police and School Resource Unit Lieutenant.



September 2015 – Tweet pictured above served as a reminder on how proceed when the school bus stop arm and flashing lights are activated.

- Media Release distributed to local media (radio, television and print)
- Education and awareness "flyers" distributed through social media beginning on August 28, 2015; a week and a half prior to the first day of school.

Public Education – Variable Message Boards and S.M.A.R.T Sets

- Variable Message Boards were placed in high traffic locations throughout the county advising motorists, "Back to School, Slow Down, Watch for Children". Locations were chosen to reach a high number of county residents, as opposed to commuters travelling through Arlington County and not necessarily our school zones.
- S.M.A.R.T Sets were placed on secondary routes within our busiest school zones.
- Variable Message Boards and S.M.A.R.T Sets were deployed on August 28, 2015; a week and a half prior to the first day of school.

Targeted/Assigned Locations – Visibility and Enforcement

- School Presence
  - Consisted of staffing officers from the School Resource Unit to these locations. These assignments rotated throughout the morning and afternoon based bell times for each school.
  - Officers were directed to place their assigned/marked vehicle in visible locations.
  - Officers were directed to get out of their vehicles, be visible and to interact with parents, teachers, students and motorists; with emphasis on drop-off and pick-up areas.

- Crossing Guard Locations
  - Consisted of staffing officers from the Patrol Section, District Teams and SOS to these locations. These assignments rotated throughout the morning and afternoon based bell times for each school.
  - Officers were directed to place their assigned/marked vehicle in visible locations.
  - Officers were directed to get out of their vehicles, be visible and to interact with parents, students, crossing guards and motorists.
  - Officers were directed to take enforcement action when violations were observed.

- Bus Stop Locations
  - Consisted of staffing officers from the Patrol Section, District Teams and SOS to these locations. These assignments rotated throughout the morning and afternoon based upon pick up times for each bus stop.
  - Officers were directed to place their assigned/marked vehicle in visible locations.
  - Officers were directed to get out of their vehicles, be visible and to interact with parents, students and motorists.
  - Officers were directed to take enforcement action when violations were observed.

- Staffing Recommendations
  - The ACPD workgroup, along with the Commanders of SOS, District Teams, School Resource Unit and Patrol Section, recommended the campaign be staffed during the morning and afternoon school arrival/dismissal times to be comprised of on-duty personnel.
    - Campaign would begin on the first day of school, September 8, 2015 and run through the first two weeks of school, concluding on September 18, 2015.
  - Off-duty officers working traffic enforcement were encouraged to work school zone, crossing guard or bus stop locations.

Training

A supervisor assigned to the SOS, created a simple training model on proper traffic direction and point control, commonly enforceable traffic offenses and equipment placement. Additionally, enforcement booklets and expectations were created for those Sections and Units who would be working this detail.

At the onset of the 2015 Back to School Traffic Safety Initiative officers assigned to the Special Operations Section provided training to officers working this detail.

Expectations

- School Presence – Officers were directed to be at their assigned location 30 minutes prior to the school bell time.
  - Facilitate smooth pedestrian and vehicular traffic flow.
  - Majority of the issues are with parents dropping off their kids failing to adhere to traffic patterns established by each respective school.
- Crossing Guard Locations – Officers were directed to be at their assigned location 10 minutes prior to the crossing location start time.
  - Facilitate safety through HIGH VISIBILITY and enforcement.
  - Majority of the issues are with motorists failing to adhere to traffic direction and point control being directed by our crossing guards and/or travelling too fast for the prescribed speed (25 mph).
- Bus Stop Locations – Officers were directed to be at their assigned location 10 minutes prior to the scheduled bus stop pick-up/drop-off time.
  - Facilitate safety through HIGH VISIBILITY and enforcement.
  - Majority of the issues are with motorists failing to adhere to the school bus stop arm and speeding to pass a bus to avoid having to stop and wait for children to load/unload.
- Officers were to be in proper uniform and utilize their traffic vest, whistle, ticket book and have appropriate weather gear available.
- Assigned locations were to be worked regardless of weather conditions.

- Maintain HIGH VISIBILITY – No sitting in a police vehicle.
- Always remain professional and interact with parents, students and motorists in a positive manner.

Public Information and Education

On September 8, 2015, the ACPD implemented the 2015 Back to School Traffic Safety Initiative. The goal of this program was to ensure the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles that are arriving at our schools, travelling through our school zones and bus stop locations. This was to be accomplished through public education by having a strong multimodal public safety message (published and visible throughout the county), high officer presence/visibility and enforcement. On Friday, August 28, 2015, traffic management equipment (Variable Message Boards and S.M.A.R.T Sets) were deployed throughout the county a week and a half before the start of school and prior to the long Labor Day weekend.

September 2015 Tweet reminding motorists to STOP on RED.

Public Education through Multiple Modes of Communication

Historically, ensuring the safety of children in our school zones and school bus routes has always been a high priority. This priority was, and will continue to be, a priority during any local, state or national highway safety campaign. Traditionally, the ACPD takes a three-pronged approach to traffic safety: public awareness, education and strict enforcement. In this particular case, we made the overt decision to vastly increase our public awareness and educational efforts through a strong public safety message, heavy use of social media, visible reminders throughout the county, high visibility/officer presence and enforcement. The impact of this adjustment in methodology, for this particular problem, was immediately recognizable.

September 8, 2015 – Back to School Public Service Announcement. Pictured left to right: Lt. Susan Noack, Dr. Patrick Murphy and Chief of Police M. J Farr.

The ACPD and APS, in a collaborative effort, developed, published and broadcast a "Back to School" Public Service Announcement (PSA). The PSA was distributed through the web and social media. Additionally, the ACPD incorporated traditional media and social media (Twitter and Facebook) in support of the 2015 Back to School Traffic Safety Initiative. This reinforced the campaign by keeping the public involved in our efforts, for which the Department received numerous complements, thus validating this program.

One month after this newly redeveloped initiative concluded the second installment of the Street Smart traffic safety campaign was launched. Street Smart is an annual public education, awareness and behavioral change campaign in the Washington, DC, suburban Maryland and Northern Virginia area. This program emphasizes education of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians through mass media. This increased our educational and enforcement efforts by creating additional publicity on major news outlets and local news publications regarding our traffic safety efforts.

This approach has led to an extremely high rate of compliance by motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists who traverse through our school zones daily.

Enforcement

In 2015, prior to redeveloping our Back to School Traffic Safety Initiative, the ACPD dedicated approximately 230 regular duty hours directed at addressing traffic related incidents throughout our many school zones and bus stop locations; primarily complaint driven traffic safety details. Since the 2015 Back to School Traffic Safety Initiative concluded, through the end of 2015, this number has decreased to a mere 10 hours.

2015 Back to School Traffic Safety Initiative

During our targeted enforcement efforts at assigned school zone, crossing guard and bus stop locations officers issued 1215 summons (0700-0930 and 1400-1700).

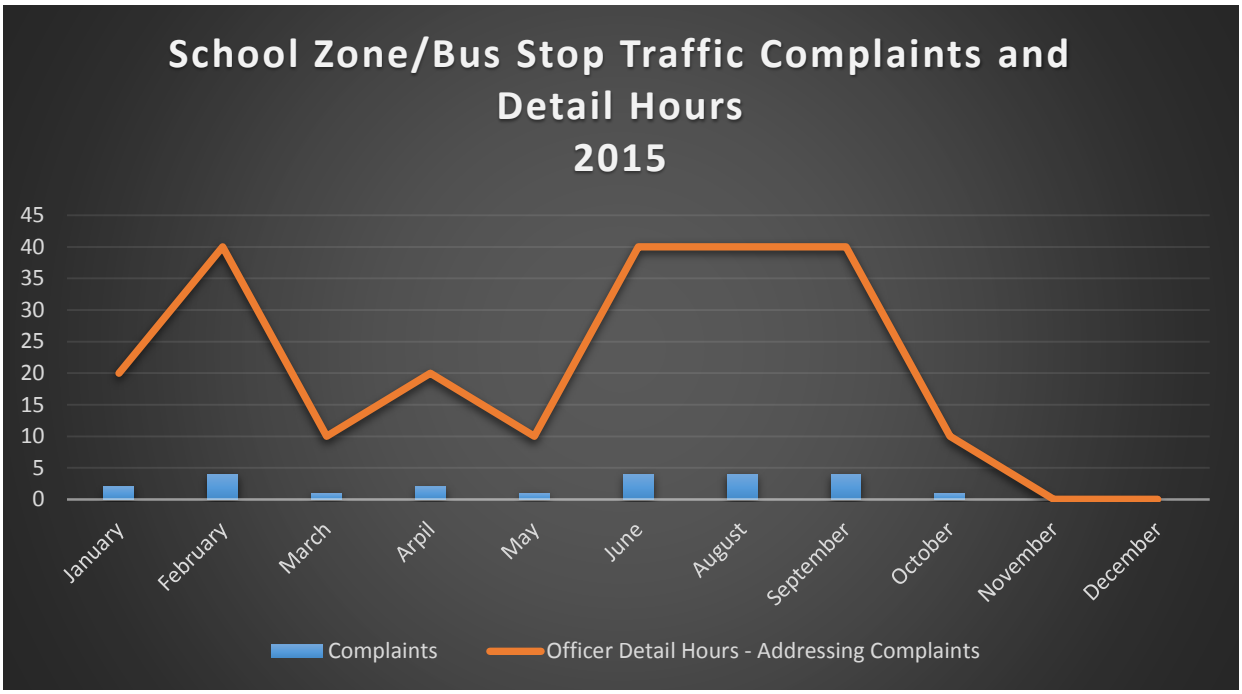
Back to School Traffic Safety Initiative – Enforcement Results

BACK TO SCHOOL - 2015						
VIOLATION	**Patrol**	**District Teams**	**SOS**	**SRO'S**	**Off-Duty**	**TOTALS**
Disregard Traffic Signals	20	1	4	0	45	70
Disregard Traffic Signs	109	89	23	4	0	225
Fail to Yield To Ped./Cycl.	6	2	0	0	0	8
Speeding (School Zone)	8	0	12	0	7	27
Passing Stopped School Bus	31	6	7	0	0	44
DWI /DUI	1	0	0	0	0	1
Reckless Driving	6	3	4	0	3	16
Speeding (General)	22	27	90	0	155	294
Child Restraint	0	1	1	0	0	2
Seatbelt	2	4	11	0	0	17
Driving on Susp./Rev. OL	22	3	3	0	3	31
Equipment Violation	84	0	8	0	0	92
All Other Violations	286	24	76	2	0	388
OVERALL TOTALS	**597**	**160**	**239**	**6**	**213**	**1215**

Outcomes

The Back to School Traffic Safety Initiative actively addressed a long-standing problem that was not being solved through enforcement alone. Our goal in every campaign is to educate the motorist, bicyclist and pedestrian to gain compliance even when police are not present. Although, our dataset is small (October-December 2015), our results appear to be sustained. Officers are reporting less frequent violations in school zone and bus stop locations, and complaints from the community have remained near zero since the initiative concluded.

Prior to the implementation of the initiative, the Chief's Office, SOS, and other County Departments received numerous complaints from citizens. In the months that have followed we have only received one complaint.



The graph shown above illustrates the impact the 2015 Back to School Traffic Safety Initiative had on the reduction of complaints and detail hours. The month of July was omitted due to school not being in session.

The high visibility community interaction reflected positively on the Department. By developing a clear plan of action, Public Education – ACPD and APS Public Information Offices, Public Education – Viable Message Boards and S.M.A.R.T Sets, and Targeted/Assigned Locations – Visibility and Enforcement, we have been extremely successful in creating a safer environment for our community and reducing the number of hours officers spent in our school zone and bus locations addressing complaints. This has led to success in our mission to safeguard life and property.

The collaborative efforts between the ACPD, APS and DES has led to the success of this initiative. Continual support of our mission, from the County, will only lead to more success as we continually adapt our approach to ensuring the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles that are arriving at our schools, travelling through our school zones and bus stop locations.