



FILE PHOTO

Mayor R.T. Rybak in his office at City Hall.

Youth violence prevention plan could go national

BY STEVE PEASE

A broad plan, less than a year old, to reduce youth violence in Minneapolis has Mayor R.T. Rybak convinced the local model could be worked into a national crime bill.

"It absolutely has the potential to be a national program," Rybak said. "If I'm successful getting our four areas [of youth violence prevention] into a national crime bill, work we've done locally would make it dramatically easier."

The Blueprint for Action to Prevent Youth Violence, a document completed in January 2008, is aimed at youth violence prevention in five targeted neighborhoods — four in North and one in South Minneapolis, Rybak said. The Blueprint, drafted in collaboration by the City Council, mayor's office and Minneapolis Youth Congress, includes four main goals and 34 recommendations.

While he did not have hard numbers Sept. 11, Rybak said that the Blueprint's long-term and short-term recommendations are "almost all in some stage of development."

The Mayor said he has plans to present a more detailed progress report in late September.

The plan

The four-point plan to prevent youth violence, outlined in the Blueprint:

- Every young person must be supported by one trusted adult. The city has funded, and is seeking further grants, for a series of parenting-support programs. It also asked 50 city employees to volunteer as mentors for at-risk youth — one of the 34 recommendations — but only 20 have so far.
- Attack the culture of violence. Rybak said this point is most certainly a team effort that will lean heavily on support from Hennepin County. However, he said also the city has applied for a grant to create a position known as a gang prevention coordinator in the Health and Family Support office. It has already hired Youth Coordinator, in July, and the expansion of the Juvenile Unit of the Minneapolis Police Department has helped, officials said.
- Intervene at first sign of at risk behavior. The city's Juvenile Supervision Center, established in January, is a way, Rybak said "to ensure we don't give up on our kids." The JSC, located in City Hall, is a drop-off point where those arrested for "low-level offenses" can receive corrective action without serving jail time. Since January, the JSC has served 1,500 youth, with 950 receiving case management and counseling. Estimates are it will receive up to 4,000 youth by the end of the year.
- Violence is learned, and can be unlearned by reducing the impact of violent messages in media, culture and entertainment. This is where Rybak said local ideas will be used nationally.

Rybak will pitch plans Sept. 25 to the meeting of Big City Mayors at the National League of Cities Conference in Charleston, S.C. Once other mayors' opinions have been incorporated into the work, Rybak said he has plans to put the Blueprint on the desk of Joe Biden, the Delaware senator dedicated to the reduction of youth violence, for inclusion in a 2009 crime bill.

Back in Minneapolis, Rybak, along with other from the city's Youth Violence Prevention Committee, will be publicly releasing a progress report on the Blueprint in early October, according to Rybak's spokesman Jeremy Hanson.

Funding and figures aimed at youth violence

In his August budget address, Rybak said that violent crime committed by offenders under the age of 18 is down 46 percent in Minneapolis when comparing figures from January to June 2006, to the same time period in 2008.

Hanson said this is due to "more cops, better technology, community prosecutors ... and youth violence prevention."

Youth still account for 25 percent of all violent crime in the city.

Rybak proposed infusing \$525,000 in new money for a total of \$8.2 million for the Youth Violence Prevention Initiative — or the Blueprint — in the 2009 city budget.

Council Member Elizabeth Glidden (8th Ward) agreed the Minneapolis Blueprint being touted by Rybak could work nationally, but stressed that a reduction in youth violence is simply one aspect in getting youths more involved in their community, and therefore less likely to commit violence.

"It certainly could work nationally," Glidden said of the Blueprint. "[The question] ends up being how do you put the meat on those bones?"

Glidden chairs the Youth Coordinating Board, consisting of members from the city, county, school and park boards. She believes that the Blueprint is a good start, but hinted more work could be done before it is expanded nationally.

"We're still working ourselves on how do you implement the strategies, and what are all the different pieces," she said. "I think the mayor is right in the sense that we need to broaden how this is seen as a national priority."