



# Keeping gangs out of schools

 By Art McFarland

(Bronx - WABC, April 4, 2007) - Trying to stop violence in schools.

One group is actually using former gang members to convince kids to steer clear of gangs.

Education reporter Art McFarland has details.

"I will work to improve my school," students said, reciting a pledge.

The pledge is for a meeting of the Council For Unity at Bronx Health Sciences High School. The council is active in dozens of schools, there and elsewhere. It uses former gang members to help keep gang activities out of schools.

"I'm looking to prevent students from feeling that there's something out there that we're not providing here," Principal Miriam Rivas said.

It's founder, former school teacher Bob DeSena, says the council is busier than ever.

"Gang activity is one of the single greatest problems that our educational system is facing today," he said.

The December stabbings of teenagers in Union Square Park, which left one 17-year-old dead, were said to be just one example of gang violence involving students.

"At one time, it was within older teenagers," former gang member Sean Johnson said. "Now, they're initiating them at the age of 14 or 15."

It helps that Bronx Health Sciences has fewer than 300 students. But students confirm that they face and witness considerable gang influence when they leave the school building.

"They make themselves popular so other people can join the gang and stuff like that," student Sheron Phillips said. "So that's how they influence the people around my block."

"Where I live, it's dangerous because there may be shootouts, cops, drug seekers, all that," student Carlos Cruz said.

The Council For Unity says this year, it has seen a sharp increase in requests for them to do gang-prevention programs in schools.

"If you don't have safety and the kids don't feel safe, they are not going to learn," DeSena said.