

Forum seeks solutions to school violence

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FONTANA - More parental involvement and conflict resolution programs are needed to curb school violence throughout the county, said school, city and police officials during a panel discussion Thursday night at City Hall.

Only a handful of people attended the meeting, which was organized by the Rialto-Fontana branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The discussion forum is the first in a series of five aimed at finding solutions to the school-violence crisis, said Ellen Turner, president of the Rialto-Fontana branch of the NAACP.

Outbreaks of violence at high schools in Rialto, Redlands, Fontana and San Bernardino in the past year have prompted the organization to find a way to curb the violence at schools.

"Parents are our first teachers," said Herb Fischer, San Bernardino County superintendent of schools.

Fischer was one of several panelists, which also included state Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell, Deputy San Bernardino City Unified School District Superintendent Judy White, NAACP representative Lynne Beckford, Fontana Unified School board trustee Kathy Binks, Fontana police Capt. Rodney Jones, interim Fontana Unified School District Police Chief Joe McCann and interim Rialto Police Chief Frank Scialdone, a Fontana councilman.

Turner said she would like to see schools from all over the county participate in the forums from school officials to students and parents because "everyone can be part of the solution."

White called for more conflict-resolution programs like Peacebuilders at the schools and more sports and job opportunities for high school students.

O'Connell lauded the group for its efforts to curb school violence and urged members to use all resources at their disposal, including statistical data. He recommended the group select programs, set goals and monitor the outcomes and results.

"There is no magic solution, no universal solution to school violence," he said, "but you've taken that first step."

Some urged that parental involvement is more crucial than specific programs.

"Until we get back into the home, we're treading water," Binks said. "No matter how many programs we have available."

The group will craft a plan based on recommendations from all five forums. The next one is planned for March in Rialto.