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Crossing guards block traffic to protest cuts

Parents join in action and warn of threat to children's safety

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Worried parents and angry Staten Island school crossing guards blocked traffic for 20 minutes yesterday morning in front of PS 11 in Dongan Hills to protest the elimination of three out of the four guards at the school.

In September, the cash-strapped city plans to lay off 52 of the 103 crossing guards on Staten Island. Citywide, 950 of 2,000 may be let go due to budget cuts.

Nearly 50 protesters walked among four intersections near the Dongan Hills school: Buel Avenue and Jefferson Street, Garretson Avenue and Jefferson Street, Cromwell Avenue and Jefferson Street, and Richmond Road and Cromwell Avenue.

Some motorists sped by the protesters. Others stopped and read the signs carried by chanting

protesters: "Mayor Dinkins, will you have any children dying to get to school in September?," "Blood or \$," "You can't put a price tag on my child's life" and "Safe Streets, Save Lives."

Parents say a cut in crossing guards will result in dead children. When all city guards were fired between 1976 and 1978, eight children were struck and killed by cars at unguarded school crossings. Hundreds more were injured.

If budget cuts are realized, only the corner at Cromwell Avenue and Jefferson Street will be manned in September.

But the most hazardous corner is Garretson Avenue and Jefferson Street, according to parents and guards. Yesterday protesters hung a petition with 78 signatures from a stop sign at that intersection.

"Cars come so fast that when they realize there's a

stop sign, they can't even stop. They skid across the street," said Amy Magierski, president of the school's PTA and organizer of the rally.

"Ambulances speed through there, and we get all the people going to work at Staten Island University Hospital. The doctors are always in a hurry," said Maureen Crocco, a crossing guard at the corner. Mrs. Crocco is also 122nd Precinct shop steward of District 37, the guard's union.

Parents and educators complained that the borough's three police precincts, which oversee the guards, eliminated corners without input from the community.

School board member Jerry Cammarata, who heads the board's transportation advisory committee, charges that police broke an oral agreement to consult with parents before cuts were finalized. The agreement was made during a February committee meeting with liaisons from the police precincts, he said.

In a letter to Borough Commander Robert E. Burke, Cammarata stated: "It seems the educational community is being shunned from this vital decision-

making process."

But Police Inspector William Wallace said he was not aware of the agreement.

"There may have been a misunderstanding. We don't shut out the community as far as making the determination, because people involved in the process are officers involved in the community.

"Since the school crossing guards work for the Police Department, it's in the realm of the Police Department to make the decision," he said.

In designating corners as high and low priority, police evaluated the rate of summonses and accidents at the corner, traffic signs and the volume of students.

"If traffic patterns or patterns of children leaving the schools indicate we should adjust the priorities, we will respond to that," Wallace said.

The Police Department has notified schools which corners will be cut. Crossing guards, however, have not been told of layoffs.

Crossing guards with the most seniority on Staten Island will be redeployed to high priority areas, Wallace said.