



## NFL players, ATF officials team up to talk to high school students in Sunnyside

By **Keri Blakinger** Published 6:06 pm, Tuesday, January 31, 2017



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Mayor Sylvester Turner, Councilwoman Amanda Edwards and a slew of ATF officials and former NFL players turned Tuesday into a teachable day at one high school in Sunnyside.

Hundreds of students offered raucous cheering as city officials posed for a large-group selfie Tuesday in the Worthing High School auditorium.

The wildly popular impromptu photo session came in the middle of an interactive learning event featuring retired NFL players, Mayor Sylvester Turner, representatives from Crime Stoppers and officials from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

For eager students, it was a teachable day filled with optimism and life lessons.

"This is giving us hope that things will change - that Worthing will get better, that Houston will get better, that the world will get better," said 18-year-old senior Douglas Evans, who saw it as a rare spot of positive attention for the Sunnyside school.

After Turner addressed the students in the auditorium, the teens divided into three break-out groups for learning events led by the event sponsors.

In the auditorium, ATF officials taught kids about what the federal agency does and what tools it uses to enforce the law. Meanwhile, another session featured Crime Stoppers leaders sharing information about the Safe School Program that's been used to solve nearly 2,000 cases in schools.

And finally, in the cafeteria, retired athletes with the NFL Players Association Former Players of Houston shared their life experiences and offered advice on positive decision-making.

"I don't accept excuses from youngsters about why they make bad decisions," said former Falcons player Matthew Teague.

"Deny yourself that privilege of acting out. And just try to do the right thing."

For ATF and CrimeStoppers officials, the event was an important outreach effort.

"We realize that it takes more than just the investigation of fire-related crime to have a positive impact on our communities," ATF's Houston Field Division Assistant Special Agent in Charge Art Peralta said at a pre-event press conference.

"We need to go into our communities, talk to our residents, talk to the community leaders and, most importantly, we need to talk to our young people."

The mayor also took the mic, speaking briefly about the importance of safety and community investment.

"You can't have complete communities without having excellent schools and without creating an environment where kids can achieve their full potential," he said.

For students, Turner's appearance was one of the event highlights.

"Honestly I never thought I would be so close to someone who has so much power in the community of Houston," Evans said. "It really made my heart jump."

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