The following story is reprinted from The Newport News Daily Press. It appeared in that newspaper last January shortly after Virginia Tech's appearance in the Independence Bowl game.

By Mike Holtclaw

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — On Tuesday afternoon, Antonio Banks returned to the scene of the crimes of his youth.

Banks, a freshman free safety for the Virginia Tech Hokies and the defensive MVP in Friday’s 45-20 Independence Bowl victory against Indiana, visited several classrooms at Carver Elementary School. He talked to the students about what he was like as a student when Carver was a middle school.

"I was a bad knucklehead kid," Banks told one class. "I didn't get good grades and I was always in trouble, getting in fights, always in the principal's office. But when I got to high school, I figured out that I had to straighten myself out and be a better person."

He told the students that they should learn to avoid the problems that he himself used to find.

Banks' visit was arranged by Deon Ruffin, a security officer at Carver who was an assistant football coach at Warwick high School when Banks played for the Raiders.

"I used to think it was cool to get in trouble and hang out on the street corner and beat up on people," Banks said. "But if you hang out on the corner instead of getting an education, you're just going to end up in jail or dead — and you can't help your community that way."

Banks visited about eight classrooms, bringing his defensive MVP trophy and autographed photos for every student.

Talking to the students — who clamored about him and shouted his name when he entered the classrooms — Banks stressed the importance of getting an education. He told the students about the serious knee injury he suffered as a senior at Warwick and how it almost ended his football career.

"That injury made me realize that I had to do more than just play football," Banks said. "It can all be over in a second, so you have to get a good education."

In each classroom he visited, Banks was asked if he wanted to play in the NFL. Each time, he said he would like to have that opportunity but that his first goal is to complete his college education.

Banks said he wanted to talk to the children in an attempt to give them a positive role model. He said kids will always choose athletes as role models, but he stressed that the athletes must try to present a positive image for the youngsters.

"I think it's especially important to tell them to get an education," Banks said. "And I wanted to tell them to work toward their dreams, because it's important to have dreams."

He also suggested to the students that they should have role models other than athletes, such as parents and teachers.

"I know a lot of you might dream of playing football or baseball or basketball," Banks said. "But if you get good grades, you can do more than just play sports. We need more lawyers and doctors and teachers, and you can do those things, too."

In the last classroom Banks visited, a fourth-grader raised his hand and told Banks that he wanted to be a professional football player when he grows up. Banks smiled and nodded.

"It's nice to play football," he said, "but if you want to keep playing, you have to work hard in the classroom and keep your grades up. That's the most important thing to remember."