

Superintendent's Report

October 20, 2009

Violence and Vandalism Report

In 2008-2009, the district had a slight decrease (from 104 to 97) in the number of incidents reported to the State of New Jersey. The decrease of 7 incidents can be broken down as follows: violent acts decreased from 81 to 80, vandalism decreased from 17 to 11, possession of a weapon decreased from 8 to 5, and substance abuse increased from 0 to 3. The reduction of incidents since the initiation of this report remains significant. For example, in 2000-2001, there were 223 violent acts recorded in the district. In 2003-2004, the number was 142 and two years ago we reached an all time low of 84 incidents.

The number of graffiti related incidents dropped from last year and the estimated indirect cost for man hours and for the solution needed to remove the graffiti was \$1,950. Unfortunately, there were four other incidents involving our buses that resulted in direct and indirect costs of \$1,076 resulting in a total cost of \$3,026 for vandalism.

Five students were suspended for being in possession of a weapon in school. Each time the weapon was a knife. Having any type of weapon in one's possession on school property will never be tolerated and the district will continue to take advantage of the Interim Alternative Educational Placement (IAEP) program sponsored by the county when appropriate. Although the district did have a slight increase in substance abuse incidents (from 0 to 3), the number is still minimal. The work of our SAC's, the Physical Education teachers, and our DARE Program at both the middle school and high school are major factors for our continued success in this area. I am especially happy with this number since alcohol use among high school students is on the rise and is a concern in many districts.

The district notified the police 16 times because of incidents in the school. The police responded immediately to all calls and on 11 occasions a complaint was filed and additional action was required. Although, the police were notified 16 times, they patrol the high school on a regular basis during the end of the school day. This is part of the outstanding relationship our high school administration has with our police department. Their presence around the school has had a positive impact on students congregating around the building or in the general neighborhood.

There were 124 unduplicated suspensions because of violent acts. Overall there were 148 suspensions because of violent acts, meaning that 24 individuals were suspended more than once because of fighting in school. In each case, that individual was suspended to my office on the second offense. Since 2000-2001, the reduction in violent acts continues to be significant and is a credit to the hard work of all our administrators and teachers. In 2000-2001 306 unduplicated suspensions and 366 suspensions were recorded. This year the numbers are 124 and 148. This represents a decrease of 59% in both categories over the seven year period. I maintain that the number one reason for the decrease remains the 10-day suspension for fighting at Union High School and the five day mandatory suspension at the middle schools.

Acts of violence can occur at any level. Although the most common act involves a physical altercation, other violent acts are more subtle. They include harassing, bullying, intimidating and teasing other students. Last year, seven of our buildings reported at least one violent act that resulted in a suspension. Most of those incidents were the result of two students fighting. Other reasons include biting a student (elementary level), threatening a student, or harassing/teasing another student. The breakdown for each school is as follows:

Battle Hill	1	Hannah Caldwell	0	Central-5	5
Connecticut Farms	0	Livingston	0	Kawameeh	23
Franklin	1	Washington	1	Burnet	44
				High School	59

School districts have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for all of the students. Although this can be accomplished in many ways, preventing violent acts is probably the most important way to insure the safety of our students. Several years ago, this Board of Education adopted a new anti-bullying policy. Each year, I review this policy with all of his administrators prior to the start of school and each administrator reviewed it with his/her staff prior to the first day of school.

In addition to revising our anti bullying policies and procedures, the district continues to focus on safety in general. Several years ago, our safety designs for each building met with approval from the Department of Education. It has now been almost five years since the district installed safety devices in each of our buildings. These devices include cameras, sensors, motion detectors, and alert buttons. At present, we are working with our IT department to update, assess, repair, and replace this equipment as deemed necessary. We have also been the recipient of two grants, one initiated by our Board Secretary and one initiate by our local police department, to upgrade our camera equipment at the high school. We have also, in a shared service agreement with our municipality, employed a resource officer at the high school. The main responsibility of this individual is to serve as another support person for our students and to assist our administration whenever the need arises.

I believe this violence/vandalism report has provided you with the information to conclude that the district is committed to insure the safety of our students. However, the Board and this administration realize that you can never be safe enough, and we will continue to investigate strategies and programs to increase the safety of our students and staff. We will also continue to work in cooperation with our police and fire departments. As a result of all our efforts, I remain confident that all of our children are receiving an education, designed to meet their individual needs, in an environment that is safe and conducive to learning. At this time, Mrs. McNeil, I ask you to open the discussion to the public for questions, comments, and concerns.