

LINCOLN-SUDBURY SAFETY REVIEW COMMITTEE  
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 2007  
Sudbury Town Hall

Present: Dennis Picker, Chair; Ron Nix, Vice-Chair; Sheila Calkins, Sarah Cannon Holden, Scott Carpenter, Hal Chapel, Eric Harris,, John Ollquist, Barbara Pedulla, Karen Thomsen, and Alternates:  
Tom DeNormandie, Tim Garvin, and Bill Ray.

Absent: Mark Collins, Bill Keller, Tucker Krone, Alexandra Sliwkowski, Gary Taylor and Alternate  
Clara Daly

Six members of the public were present

Mr. Picker called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m. He asked all in attendance to pause for a moment of silence to reflect upon the tragic events in Virginia earlier this week.

**Presentation and discussion: Current policies and practices at L-S as they relate to safety**

Two Lincoln-Sudbury Housemasters, Iain Ryrie and Eleanor Burke joined fellow Housemaster Scott Carpenter and teacher Karen Thomsen to present this information. Superintendent Ritchie was present to help answer questions. Also attending tonight's meeting were Lt. Nix representing the Sudbury Police Department, Lt. Kennedy from the Lincoln Police Department,

Iain Ryrie began the presentation, and explained the responsibilities of the four L-SRHS Housemasters and two Campus Aides. He stated that each of the School's four houses accommodates approximately 400 students. Mr. Ryrie also discussed how infractions are reported, dealt with, and the possible consequences. He also described various meetings that are held to discuss issues and concerns related to specific students.

Eleanor Burke continued the presentation, and described the School's Discipline Code, which is reviewed and updated each summer by administrators and approved by the School Council. She reviewed the relevant sections of the Code pertaining to safety and explained how and when the Discipline Code is communicated to students and parents. Ms. Burke noted that the School's statistics show a downward trend in fights over the past 10 years, but an increased incidence of cyber-harassment. She also briefly described the School's Mediation Program and process.

Scott Carpenter next presented information about the collaboration between the School and the Police Departments, including the Community Based Justice (CBJ) program, where representatives from L-S, the Police Departments of Sudbury and Lincoln, the District Attorney's Office and the Department of Social Services meet monthly to discuss student needs and issues. He explained the Memorandum of Understanding that L-SRHS has with the Police of both Towns, which covers reporting of incidents by the School to the police. Mr. Carpenter briefly explained the School's search process. He also discussed the expulsion criteria, adding that appeals are referred to the Superintendent.

Karen Thomsen reviewed several L-SRHS safety-oriented programs and initiatives. She emphasized that safety topics are woven through a broad range of classes and activities, and she showed a list of safety curriculum topics. Ms. Thomsen also discussed the range of programs and mechanisms at the School aimed at conflict resolution, She reported that the Mediation program handles approximately 60 mediation sessions a year.

Mr. Ryrie further explained briefly other safety concerns managed by the Housemasters including: vandalism, alcohol and substance abuse, depression and suicide. He stated that L-SRHS employs four clinical counselors to also support student needs.

Ms. Burke reviewed how and when student concerns are communicated amongst personnel and with parents.

Mr. Carpenter concluded the presentation with a brief explanation of general trends tracked by the Youth Risk Behavior Surveys which the School has participated in since 1997. He also referenced the L-SRHS Safety and Crisis Response Plan and noted that it is continually reviewed and updated.

Mr. Picker noted that the Committee will discuss how it will follow-up on tonight's discuss at next week's meeting, and there may be a need for a follow-up session with the L-S staff to address additional questions from the Committee about policies and procedures. Then, the Committee members posed questions.

Hal Chapel noted he is impressed with the level of attention to safety provided by the School as evidenced by the breadth and depth of the programs described. He asked what percentage of time is spent by the Housemasters on safety vs. academics. Responses from the Housemasters varied from 20% of work time being devoted to discipline, to the majority of their responsibilities revolving around helping struggling students. Mr. Chapel questioned what the biggest challenges are for safety. Mr. Carpenter responded that he feels the largest challenges are depressed and suicidal students and the prevalence of drugs and alcohol. Mr. Ryrie said that he feels the challenge is to reach the students who are out of control.

John Ollquist wondered if two Campus Aides can adequately handle 1600 students spread out amongst four buildings, parking lots and fields. Housemasters agreed that if money were no issue, additional personnel would be ideal. However, it was noted that the Campus Aides are helped by Buildings and Grounds Staff who also communicate regularly with administrators. Mr. Carpenter described the radio communications that links the Housemasters, the Aides, and the Buildings and Grounds Staff. Mr. Picker suggested that the Committee can explore further the matter of additional Aides when establishing recommendations.

Barbara Pedulla asked about the education and formal training of the Housemasters and about the credentials required of the professional staff who provide counseling services. The Housemasters addressed her questions. A discussion ensued regarding how various decisions requiring judgment are made and when are specific protocols followed. Mr. Picker suggested that the subject of judgments and specific protocols would be fruitful to explore in detail as part of a follow-up discussion.

Eric Harris asked how Housemasters decide when to be what he termed aggressive in their interactions with students, so as to avoid a potentially dangerous occurrence, and when to utilize what he termed more supportive techniques. Ms. Burke indicated that when they perceive that a student poses a danger to themselves or others that the Housemasters get very direct and take actions.

Sarah Cannon Holden asked how the school evaluates the effectiveness of its policies and procedures. Housemasters responded that statistics on these matters are maintained and monitored. Ms. Holden stated that she believes that some members of the community feel that policies and procedures are not implemented consistently from case to case. Dr. Ritchie responded that the school is extremely consistent and fair regarding policy adherence, discipline matters, and safety issues. He noted that since individual members of the community may not see all the actions taken by the School, they may get a partial picture. He also noted that a community member may observe an infraction that is not visible and is not reported to the School Administration, and that in such cases the School does not act because it has no knowledge of the incident. He said that if there is a perception of inconsistency, it does not reflect the reality.

Ms. Pedulla asked each Housemaster what they think is needed to improve interpersonal safety, both physically and psychologically. She also encouraged the Housemasters to email suggestions to the Committee at a later date if unable to respond this evening. Ms. Burke believes additional resources devoted to conflict resolution and anti-bias education would be helpful. Ms. Thomsen agreed, however, she noted that more staff and more training time would be needed as well. Ms. Thomsen also noted that due to budget constraints and loss of certain grant funding some initiatives in this area have been eliminated or reduced in recent years. She felt that restoring those reductions would contribute significantly to improving safety. Mr. Ryrie said he

would like to be able to apply more time to identifying discrete profile groups within the School who would benefit from extra assistance. Mr. Carpenter concurred that reaching the struggling students is the challenge and perhaps an extra clinical counselor in each House would help. He also believes the Mediation Program should be enhanced and expanded.

Sheila Calkins asked if the School is part of Project Alliance. The answer was affirmative. She also asked what procedures are followed if Police Departments become aware of a potentially challenging student or situation before the School does. Lt. Nix provided a brief summary of processes followed, indicating that the Police notify the School in such cases, and that the information about students and situations flows two ways.

At 8:55 p.m., Mr. Picker opened the floor for questions from the public, asking that they remain focused on topic of tonight's discussion. He reminded everyone that the April 25, 2007 meeting will provide a forum for broad-base public input regarding issues relevant to the Committee's work. There were additional questions that Committee members wanted to ask that were deferred to a future meeting.

Sudbury resident Rick Johnson asked how many suspensions there are a year. The answer was 70 this year, to date. Mr. Carpenter indicated this extrapolates to about the same level as last year. Mr. Johnson also asked how discipline is handled for out-of-district students and whether they are treated differently, and whether statistics about out-of-district students should be segregated from the all inclusive statistics. The Housemasters replied that the same discipline code and procedures apply to any student who is attending the School.

Sudbury resident Pam Hilton also expressed the preference to have data for out-of-district students segregated from other statistics. She suggested that the School be very clear about who is in charge in each building at any given moment of the School day.

Alternate Tom DeNormandie asked about the formal training the Housemasters possess to help them to identify and intervene appropriately in situations that might affect safety. Dr. Ritchie emphasized that the Housemasters do not assess these situations on their own. They rely on regular meetings and consultations with their staff, includes other professionals from a variety of disciplines.

As there were no more questions from the public, Mr. Picker concluded this portion of the meeting at 9:12 p.m., and thanked the School representatives and the Police Lieutenants for their contributions. He expressed appreciation to the School staff who gave up vacation time to prepare for and present at this meeting.

### **Planning**

Update from the subcommittee charged with planning for the future meeting on the Causes of and the Prevention of School Violence:

Eric Harris provided a brief update of the subcommittee's work to date on planning for this meeting. He said the subcommittee decided to select a small number of key documents for the Committee members to read prior to the meeting on this topic. He distributed copies of one such recommended document: "Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates" issued by the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education in May 2002. The Subcommittee is contacting a nationally renowned expert on school violence, who may be willing to help educate the Committee and the community at a public forum and then attend a Committee meeting to answer questions. Mr. Harris also confirmed that the subcommittee will also address what other schools do to prevent school violence as part of its planning efforts. Mr. Picker noted that another update from this subcommittee is on the agenda for the next meeting, and he hoped to get an idea from the subcommittee as to when they felt the Committee meeting focused on Causes and Prevention of School Violence could be scheduled.

Mr. Picker said that the Lincoln and Sudbury Police Chiefs would like to address the Committee on a range of subject relevant to the Committee's charge. He is working with them to schedule a date for their presentation.

The Committee delegated the task of planning for a meeting focused on various approaches to physical security to Ron Nix. He will report back at a future meeting.

The scheduled discussion regarding planning a meeting to provide information about and to discuss Special Education was postponed to the next meeting in the interest of time.

Mr. Picker noted that the focus of the May 2, 2007 meeting and beyond has not yet been agreed upon. This is already on the planning agenda for the next meeting..

### **Process**

The Committee discussed the subject of anonymous communications to the Committee. Three anonymous inputs have been received to date via email. After brief discussion, the Committee decided that it would not create any special mechanism to obtain or encourage anonymous input. However, the Committee agreed that a different approach may be needed regarding obtaining input from students. The subcommittee planning for obtaining student input is considering that issue and will report back. The Committee also agreed that if an anonymous communication is received, then it will be distributed to all Committee members for them to factor into their thinking as they see fit. If there is a way to send a reply to the source of the anonymous input, then they will get an acknowledgement that their information has been passed to all members.

There was a brief discussion regarding answering questions posed to the Committee via email.

Some members raised a concern as to whether the Committee can produce a report by the end of the school year, the schedule established by the Committee at a previous meeting. A brief discussion was held, with some sharing the schedule concern and some stating that they thought that a useful report could be produced by the end of the school year. No conclusion was reached, and the matter will be discussed further at a future meeting.

The Committee discussed how to deal with allegations involving individuals that are brought to its attention via email messages. Tom DeNormandie urged the Committee to avoid what he termed "mission creep" and focus on making recommendations that would improve school safety. The sense of the Committee was that it is not the role of this Committee to research, assess, or resolve such matters or to act as an ombudsman to help resolve disagreements between a parent and the school. The Committee asked the Chair to make it clear at the beginning of the public discussion on April 25, 2007 the areas that the Committee is studying as part of its work to recommend improvements. Comments about those topics or about topics that a member of the public feels needs to be added the list are appropriate. Comments that refer to personal situations, that identify individuals, or that represent second-hand accounts of events will be ruled out of order.

Ms. Pedulla and Ms. Calkins asked the Committee to consider the balance between time spent at our public meetings on listening and responding to public input versus time spent on questions and discussion by the Committee members, in light of the large amount of work to be accomplished. After a brief discussion, Mr. Picker suggested, and the Committee agreed, that the sense of the Committee is that we need to continue offering multiple avenues for public input, including time at each public meeting, but that after the major public input session on 4/25 we need to shift the balance so that significantly more time is allotted to discussion among the Committee members and with presenters.

Ms. Cannon Holden reported that she had not found a recording secretary for the April 25th meeting.

Mr. Picker announced that the May 23, 2007 meeting will be held in the Hartwell Conference Room at the Lincoln Schools, in Lincoln. At this point, except for that meeting, it appears that all the other meetings will be recorded for rebroadcast on both towns' community access television channels. Volunteers are being sought to record the May 23 meeting.

### **Minutes**

The April 11, 2007 meeting draft minutes were reviewed. Ms. Calkins moves that the minutes be approved and accepted. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ollquist. The motion passed.

### **New Business**

There was no new business raised.

### **Adjournment**

Mr. Picker moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Nix. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 p.m.