

Lincoln-Sudbury Safety Review Committee
Meeting Minutes of May 9, 2007
Meeting held in Conference Room B, L-S

Members present: Sheila Calkins, Sarah Cannon Holden, Scott Carpenter, Hal Chapel, Mark Collins, Eric Harris, Tucker Krone, Ron Nix – Vice Chair, John Ollquist, Barbara Pedulla, Dennis Picker – Chair, Alexandra Sliwowski, Gary Taylor, Karen Thomsen.

Alternates present: Tom DeNormandie, Tim Garvin, Bill Ray.

Absent: Bill Keller, Claire Daly

8 members of the public were present.

Dennis Picker called the meeting to order at 7:20 pm. He briefly mentioned having attended a meeting, along with several other members of the committee, to hear and discuss the results of the annual L-S Youth at Risk Survey conducted in the fall of 2006. He encouraged everyone to review the data in the Youth at Risk Survey report which has been provided to the committee.

Public Comment:

Dennis Picker opened the meeting for public comment and questions. A comment was made that IPass appears to be a good system for capturing and reporting on safety-related incidents and suggested that the committee recommend that all teachers be required to use the IPass system and use it consistently. It cannot be reliable if used at the teacher's discretion. It was noted that year to date, 80% of faculty have used IPass to report an incident.

Committee Discussion: Weapons Policy

Dennis Picker asked the group how they would like to proceed with the evening's discussion, and the Committee decided to start by discussing the subject of the weapons policy. Ron Nix has provided a draft potential recommendation regarding weapons policy and Eric Harris has provided a revision to that draft.

Ron Nix stated that the basis of his recommendations is that the school strictly enforce the current weapons policy as written in the school code and crisis response manual. Eric said that his revisions did not represent any substantive change to Ron's draft, but rather edits to some language. Gary Taylor encouraged the group to consider when or where any discretion might be allowed on "zero tolerance." He suggested that there must be zero tolerance on reporting all issues relating to weapons, in order for the policy to be effective. Sarah Cannon Holden suggested that the emphasis on zero-tolerance might be better placed on a requirement of teachers to report incidents and violations of school policy while allowing for discretion once the facts are determined.

The group discussed whether weapons reporting should be mandatory, and whether consequences should be the same for all weapons incidents. The group discussed the value of maximizing the amount of safety-related incident reports logged into the IPass system and how this would track recommendations made in the paper “Threat Assessment in Schools” which members have read. The group discussed the degree of case-by-case discretion that is allowed at expulsion hearings, which are required under the current policy for all weapons infractions. The group discussed a model in which weapons incident reporting and a hearing would be mandatory, but judgment would be applied at the hearing in determining consequences. The group discussed the potential negative effects on obtaining incident reports if the mandatory consequences were deemed too harsh. In this light, some suggested that perhaps a mandatory discipline hearing would occur in all cases of weapons infractions, and that discipline hearing could determine, among other things, whether an expulsion hearing was called for. The group also discussed different types of weapons and whether some are more innocent than others. It was noted that the Massachusetts General Laws provide a legal description of the term “weapon.”

Scott Carpenter elaborated on the school’s policy, giving examples of different situations where an item intended for another use could be used improperly. For example, a baseball bat, could be considered a “club”, if it was used to deliberately hurt someone. An Eagle Scout could inadvertently carry a pocket knife onto the school grounds. Housemasters have complete discretion at the expulsion hearing to determine the intent of the person charged, whether the item in question was used as a weapon, and what consequences should be imposed. He agreed that the reporting of incidents should be required of all teachers, and the expulsion hearing should (and does) allow for discretion by the housemasters.

Barbara Pedulla made a **Motion** that John Ollquist and Eric Harris provide revised draft recommendations regarding weapons policy, Eric in terms of weapons and John in terms of types of hearings, so that the Committee can read and discuss them further. The motion was seconded by Hal Chapel. The motion **Passed**, with a majority in favor and some opposed.

Eric noted that the L-S culture allows parents and students to feel safe within the school. Any policies that this committee recommends must not be so rigid as to take away the feeling of security and safety valued by the community.

Recognizing potential acts of physical or psychological violence, preventing violence, and providing support to students:

The Committee proceeded to discuss topics related to the report “Threat Assessment in Schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and to creating safe school climates.”

Hal Chapel noted that the school currently has many policies and practices in place that are suggested in the report. He suggested the group consider: 1) what processes found in

this report can be recommended to the school Committee? 2) To promote the culture of a safe school, we need to have adults in the school that students feel comfortable talking to. The latest Youth at Risk survey data states that at the time of the survey, 68% of students felt they had an adult in the school with whom they would share concerns. What can we do to foster more students feeling comfortable enough to approach an adult with a problem or concern? 3) Address issues around bullying. The group should consider looking at schools that serve as models for their “no bullying” practices.

Another suggestion was to provide training to teachers in how to reach out to students who may need help. The report mentioned that students who have indicated in any way that they have contemplated suicide should be a focus for concern. Dennis Picker noted that the Youth at Risk survey data indicated that there were 22 incidents of attempted suicide in the past year by L-S students that required medical attention. He said that even if this number is over-reported, it is still a high number.

Scott Carpenter stated that when the school is aware of a student who has attempted suicide, they make every effort to provide special support. Some families, however, don't want the school to know about such incidents. Karen Thomsen mentioned two specific programs the school provides that try to address issues before a student goes so far as to consider or attempt suicide. The Peer Helper Program offers training for students in listening skills and provides a place where kids can go to talk about their problems. In the Depression Workshop kids are taught how to recognize signs of depression and suicide. This program also teaches kids how to be a better friend and where to go to find support and adult help.

John Ollquist noted a key statement from page 24 of the Threat Assessment Report. In most cases other students knew about the attacker's plan before the attack on the school took place, yet this information was never conveyed to an adult. The Committee discussed how it might encourage a student to confide in a teacher if another student is contemplating suicide or any act of violence. While there is no perfect system for feeling out threats of violence, the group agreed they need to pro-actively work towards building positive relationships with students and encourage open communication.

The group went on to consider how bullying affects nearly every student in the school to some extent. Alexandra Slikowski said that special attention needs to be paid to online bullying, which is becoming more prevalent and carries over into the school. Hal Chapel suggested that the school form a committee or focus group to work on ways to reduce bullying and find ways to connect with kids. Rumors, gossip, name calling, ethnic comments all fall under the category of bullying. Scott Carpenter said that bullying issues usually come to the attention of a Housemaster as a result of a report by the victim.

Barbara Pedulla asked the Committee to consider: 1) comments from staff on what they believe would help support students, 2) reviewing the existing threat assessment process and how L-S might integrate new ideas, and 3) whether it appears obvious in Dr. Ritchie's letter to parents and students that bullying incidents should be included in the electronic reporting system.

The group discussed how the Wellness Dept. fits into the school's curriculum and aids in teaching students how to handle bullying. Alexandra Slikowski explained how wellness courses emphasize development of the whole person, and teach effective communication skills.

Eric Harris noted that any programs the school decides to incorporate will require additional funding. The schools are spending less money per student in real dollars than they have in the last 6 years. He said that unfortunately, there is presently no money in the budget for new programs.

Members were asked to send specific questions they have about the Threat Assessment Report out to the Committee. Eric Harris will collect the questions and bring them to Dr. Pollack's attention when he briefs him prior to Dr. Pollack meeting with the Committee. Dr. Pollack is one of the co-authors of the report.

Planning:

Status update from subcommittee regarding student/staff input focus groups

At its 5/8 meeting, the School Committee approved a mechanism for funding the expenses of the Safety Review Committee, including the cost of note takers for the focus groups. Eric Harris needs to obtain a go-ahead from the Chairs of the Lincoln and Sudbury Finance Committees, which he anticipates receiving by 5/11. He will then notify John Ollquist, who will work with the subcommittee to get the focus groups going.

There was brief discussion about adding certain questions to the list posed at the focus groups, and it was agreed that those questions would be used as potential follow-up questions if discussion at the group warranted that.

Discuss plans for future meetings:

The Committee discussed topics for future meetings. The subject of whether to discuss the how drugs and alcohol affect safety was discussed. The Committee decided that although this area is a clear threat to student safety, it would go beyond the scope that the Committee has set for itself at this time, and would also require a significant ramp up time for members to study and learn about this area. Therefore, the Committee decided not to schedule discussion or work on topics related to drugs and alcohol between now and the end of the school year. It was acknowledged that during the meeting with the Police Chiefs, the subject of drugs and alcohol is likely to come up for discussion.

At this time, the plans for the remainder of the school year are:

May 16 – continue discussion on policies and practices, recognizing potential violence, preventing violence.

May 23 - Police Chief's of Lincoln and Sudbury will make a presentation. Gary Taylor expressed interest in discussing the possibility of a community resource officer for the school. The committee will also discuss the topics of emergency response and physical security at this meeting.

May 30 – Discussion of information available to the school when admitting a student from out of district to a special program at L-S. Sheila Calkins is working to arrange this meeting and to confirm that Joanne Delaney and Judy Belliveau will be available for that date. Also, the committee will discuss the results of student and faculty input at this meeting if those results are available.

June 6 – Discuss student/faculty focus group reports if that did not happen on 5/30. Discuss possible recommendations and content of preliminary report.

June 13 – presentation from Dr. Pollock and discussion with him about recommendations being considered

June 20 – work on recommendations for the report

June 26 – provide a status report to School Committee at its last meeting of the school year

June 27 – Plans for meetings and work over the summer

Eric expressed interest in continuing work with the Safety Review subcommittee over the summer. Approximately 6 members indicated they would be willing and/or available to attend meetings during the summer.

Process:

Discussion on Ron Nix's proposal for handling FAQ's:

Ron offered a proposal on how the Committee might handle FAQ's. The Committee agreed to adopt his proposal, which involves compiling a list of questions regarding school safety that would be of interest to community members. A list of questions will be assembled by Bill Ray who will then submit them to the School Committee. Members may send any additional questions over the next week to add to the draft that Bill Ray has already circulated.

Minutes:

The Committee discussed and made edits to the meeting minutes of May 2. Ron Nix made a **Motion** to accept the minutes as amended, and John Ollquist seconded the motion. The Motion **passed**; the minutes were approved .

New Business: None.

Next meeting: May 16, 2007, 7:15 PM, L-S Conference Room B

Adjourn: Ron Nix made a **Motion** to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Sheila Calkins. The Motion **passed** and the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 PM.