

Lincoln-Sudbury Safety Review Committee
Meeting Minutes of June 13, 2007
Meeting held in L-S Library

Members present: Scott Carpenter, Hal Chapel, Tom DeNormandie, Sarah Cannon Holden, Tucker Krone, Ron Nix – Vice Chair, John Ollquist, Barbara Pedulla, Dennis Picker – Chair, Gary Taylor, Karen Thomsen.

Alternates present: Claire Daly, Tim Garvin, Bill Ray.

Absent: Sheila Calkins, Mark Collins, Eric Harris, Bill Keller, Alexandra Sliwkowski.

15 members of the public were present.

Dennis Picker called the meeting to order at 7:15 pm. and reviewed the agenda. Barbara Pedulla introduced Dr. William Pollack, an internationally recognized authority on the psychological development of boys and men. Among his many affiliations, he has served on the National Campaign Against Youth Violence, and as a consultant to the US Secret Service, on the Safe Schools Initiative. He is also co-author of the report “Threat Assessment in Schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and to creating safe school climates”. Dr. Pollack has donated his time this evening to support the school.

Presentation by Dr. Pollack: Dr. Pollack explained how the Safe Schools Initiative was established by the Dept. of Education (DOE) in collaboration with the Secret Service in response to the tragedy at Columbine, to investigate the cause of this and similar incidents. One of the outcomes of this initiative was to develop methods of creating and sustaining safe school climates. They wrote a report on school violence that included 37 different incidents of school violence from the 1970’s up to Columbine, and 41 actual perpetrators of violence. Findings from this study lead to the “Threat Assessment in Schools” report, which can be found at http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf.

Dr. Pollack made a presentation in which he summarized and elaborated on this report.

The floor was opened to questions from the committee.

Ron Nix asked about the results of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey given last November that showed that 74% of students felt there was at least one adult in the building that they felt comfortable talking to. Dr. Pollack noted that this percentage is above average, but that he would advise that the school continue to look for ways to improve this statistic.

Karen Thomsen asked how best to reach out to students and parents. Dr. Pollack suggested having a number of parent meetings offered at different times of the day to accommodate everyone’s schedule. Ask teachers who have established a good rapport with most students to do outreach. Encourage students who have spoken up in the past, to talk about how difficult it was to do so, but also how valuable it was. Then ask students who kept information to themselves, how they felt when someone was hurt in some way later. Teachers and staff should continually ask for feedback from students on

their assessment of the current climate. They need to create opportunities for kids to come forward, anonymously if needed. This lets students know that the culture of safety and trust is always important. In return, students need feedback that changes are taking place, without singling out any individuals. Ideally the school climate should be a “shame free safety zone”.

Tom DeNormandie asked about how L-S might use the Ipass database system to assess behavior. Dr. Pollack recommended utilizing a central group of people to review information in Ipass on a regular basis. He also noted that it would be beneficial if students could use the system to anonymously provide information. This would be a way to seek out students who may be feeling left out, isolated or troubled.

All staff members should reach out to students by checking in with them and asking how things are going. It is important to hire faculty who are able to build a rapport with the students and who students feel comfortable approaching with concerns. Students need to feel empowered by staff to act on information that may lead to a violent act.

John Ollquist asked about the faculty/student ratio. Clearly a lower ratio is preferred, but regardless of their caseload, all staff members can and should find time to be available to students. No one staff member should ever feel shame that they didn't do something to immediately respond to a situation they observed, but they should feel that they can inform another staff member of the situation without being judged and that the other staff member will take timely action.

Dr. Pollack noted that to be effective, a School Resource Officer needs to be a person who respects kid's views, but also challenges them.

Tim Garvin asked how L-S could use Ipass to quantify the positive relationships as well. Keep data on teachers who each kid feels comfortable with. Also look at which teachers have not established a rapport and why.

Sarah Canon Holden asked for names of schools that are considered model schools for safety. The DOE has listed them on their website. These schools were picked by a blue ribbon committee, using objective criteria.

Karen Thomsen asked about the use of mentoring. Dr. Pollack felt strongly that connecting older kids with younger kids is a very powerful anti-bullying activity and helps to diminishing level of violence, and breaking the code of silence. Students are often very willing to do that. He cautioned students passing judgment on others in such situations, as students tend to be more draconian in their responses than adults.

A question was asked on the need for School Resource Officers (SRO) to carry weapons. There is no data to show that weapons are necessary. SRO's are divided on this; some carry weapons, others do not. It may depend on the overall climate of the school. The purpose of hiring an SRO is prevention, not intervention. Dr. Pollack noted that these are his personal views and he emphasized that he is not an expert in this area.

Ron Nix asked how to balance the threat assessment team concept with the privacy of the individuals. Dr. Pollack responded that the team must respect confidentiality, and get legal advice about what information can be shared and with whom.

Dr. Pollack mentioned that programs that start in elementary school help kids learn how to communicate and feel safe in elementary school, but there is no data to prove that it carries over into middle school and high school. There is a blue ribbon committee that has evaluated various elementary and middle school programs for their effectiveness. It does not seem to have a positive effect in the long term.

The floor was opened to questions from the audience for Dr. Pollack:

An audience member stated that she has heard from kids that they think that if an adult witnesses something that they should not have to say anything, because the adult will take care of it. They are fearful of being wrong and causing problems for someone else. Dr. Pollack stated that the adults should be taking care of problems as they occur. Any student who brings a potential problem to the attention of an adult needs feedback, thanking him for doing so, whether the incident is determined to be of serious consequence or not. If the student is thoughtfully dealt with they should not feel embarrassed to have spoken up. No names need to be mentioned and there is no harm done as a result.

A question was asked as to conducting audits for self-evaluation? Any threat assessment and violence prevention system put in place must have an ongoing evaluation that considers positive and negative behavioral anchors. Any behavior that has caused a shift in a positive direction should be continued, and behaviors that have not, need to be discontinued.

Dennis Picker thanked Dr. Pollack on behalf of the committee for the donation of his time and expertise.

Discussion of drafts for the preliminary report: The committee briefly discussed the drafts of sections of the preliminary report that had been submitted to date. It was noted that it would be useful to merge into a single document the drafts submitted by Barbara Pedulla, Gary Taylor and Scott Carpenter as they overlapped. Members were encouraged to read all the drafts and send comments to the full committee for the authors of the drafts to consider. The focus of the next two meetings is to discuss the drafts in detail and make some committee decisions about content and recommendations for the preliminary report.

Presentation to the School Committee: At the last meeting, and via an email, some members of the School Committee had expressed a desire to get an update regarding the Safety Review Committee's work. The Committee discussed this. A preference was expressed by Patty Mostue of the School Committee that update take the form of a

presentation at a School Committee meeting attended by as many Safety Review Committee members as possible. The SC would like an update from this committee on what it has done and is considering, and where it's headed. It is not necessary to have recommendations ready. The SC would like to hear about the complexities of the issues, and find out to what extent the committee agrees with various recommendations it may put forth. It was acknowledged that the preliminary report is not expected to be available prior to 6/26.

Ron Nix made a **motion** that the Safety Review Committee attend the School Committee meeting of June 26 to present a status of affairs. Sarah Canon Holden seconded the motion. The motion was **approved**. The safety committee will plan to make a presentation to the SC at 7:30 pm on June 26. Dennis Picker will send a reminder to all members via email and confirm the time and location with the SC. Most members indicated that they would be able to attend the SC meeting. It was agreed that the Committee would determine the content of its presentation at its 6/20 meeting after it had spent more time discussing drafts of sections of the preliminary report. It was also agreed that in addition to a formal Safety Review Committee presentation to the School Committee, individual members should feel free to express their individual thoughts to the members of the School Committee during the 6/26 meeting.

Minutes: The meeting minutes of May 30 and June 6 were considered for approval. Ron Nix made a **motion** to approve the minutes of May 30. Sarah Canon Holden seconded the motion. The motion was **approved**.

Ron Nix made a **motion** to consider the minutes of June 6 for approval. A member wanted revise sections of the minutes. The committee agreed that due to the late hour, the review and approval of the 6/6 minutes would be postponed until the next meeting.

New business: The Committee discussed an editorial in the most recent issue of The Sudbury Town Crier that discussed the Safety Review Committee. The group discussed whether and how to respond to the editorial. John Ollquist presented a draft of a letter to the editor that could be the basis for a response.

Dennis Picker made a **motion** that the committee draft and send a letter to the editor focusing on its presentation at the June 26 School Committee meeting, inviting the public to attend. Hal Chapel seconded the motion. After further discussion, the motion was **denied**.

John Ollquist made a **motion** that he letter he drafted in response to this editorial be sent as written. Ron Nix seconded the motion. After further discussion, the motion was **withdrawn**.

Ron Nix made **motion** to reconsider the previous motion. The motion was **not seconded**.

The Committee ended up concluding that it would not make any response to the editorial.

Sarah Canon Holden made a **motion** to adjourn. Ron Nix seconded the motion. The motion **passed**, the meeting adjourned at 10:15 pm.