

SECURITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Summary Report

Committee Charge

In June, 2018, the Board of Education requested the formation of a Security Advisory Committee to provide an opportunity for interested citizens to have input into the Board of Education's decision-making process in the following security-related areas:

- School Security and Safety
- Mental Health
- Parent and Public Communications

Attendees at Committee meetings have included:

- Members of the Community
- Board of Education Trustees
- Central Administration
- Building Administration
- Director of Security
- Executive Director of Operations
- Director of Pupil Personnel Services
- District Social workers
- School psychologist
- Public Information Officer

There was also representation at Committee meetings from the Syosset Fire Department, Covert Investigations (the District's security consultant) and H2M Architects + Engineers.

Summary of Work

TOPIC: SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

Mr. Flynn of Covert Investigations reported to the Committee on the security assessments commissioned by the District in 2015 and 2018, and the current status of what has been planned and implemented since the assessment. Mr. Flynn and Mr. Farrell, Director of Security,

reviewed the District's multi-dimensional approach incorporating the essential security disciplines of highly trained staff; updated, fluid and practiced plans; and technology.

Committee members engaged in discussion and provided input to Board members on the following topics:

- **Personnel-related issues** such as employing retired police officers and armed guards, and volunteer opportunities for community members with a law enforcement background. The following points were discussed:
 - Highly qualified and trained security personnel are the most effective resource the District can have. A background in law enforcement is desirable, but the skill set and training for the school environment is highly specialized. Training and supervision need to be ongoing and tailored to the school setting. Thus, use of volunteers is not advisable, and a great deal of attention needs to be paid to the hiring and onboarding process for security staff.
 - Differing perspectives were aired on the subject of armed guards. Covert Investigations advises all its clients that armed security is very difficult to implement properly and introduces a new and different set of risks. Training for armed active shooter response requires a significant level of investment and time and must be done continually. In New York State, being a retired police officer alone does not qualify someone to carry an armed guard license.
 - There is a significant difference in training between guards with a carry permit and active duty police officers. In other parts of the state, police agencies have been hiring police officers to be stationed at the school buildings as school resource officers. At this time, the NCPD has not indicated this is something they intend to move forward with.

RECOMMENDATION: The District should increase the number of personnel with law enforcement experience, and move to hire a balance between contracted security guards who are hired and on-boarded by the contractor and guards who are hired/trained directly by the District.

STATUS: The District is in the process of directly hiring several guards with current and previous law enforcement experience.

- **Security technology** such as metal detectors and surveillance cameras. The following points were discussed:
 - The District has made a significant investment in infrastructure and technology in the past several years. The District security consultant indicated that he knows of “no other district that is doing more” in the area of school security infrastructure. The District's presentation on security initiatives given at the June Board of

Education meeting was referenced, which can be found by clicking the link below:

<https://www.syossetschools.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=703&dataid=3449&FileName=June%202018%20Security%20Update.pdf>.

The initiatives both completed and in progress include:

- Additional surveillance cameras and infrastructure;
 - Security vestibules in all buildings;
 - Reinforced classroom doors with wireless locking mechanisms;
 - Visitor management system with real-time identification checks;
 - Staff badges and ID card reader access;
 - New alarm panels and detectors;
 - Raised perimeter fencing at all campuses;
 - Building “wayfinding” signage for first responders;
 - Enclosing open air walkways at South Grove Elementary and Syosset High School;
 - Creating outdoor bathrooms for athletic contests at Syosset High School;
 - Removing window air conditioning units; and
 - Eliminate interior corridor glass partitions and windows.
- When evaluating all the technology-related tools available, it is important to consider how they will operate on a day-to-day basis with hundreds of students, and in situations such as when students leave the building multiple times a day.
 - Research was done on both the physical logistics of adding metal detectors to the school buildings as well as logistics of students entering the building through the detectors. The District’s architects were unable to design floor plans to fit the number of metal detectors needed, increasing the amount of time that large numbers of students would be congregated in front of the high school.
 - The limitations on the effectiveness of metal detectors in school settings were discussed, since windows must be operable for fire escape and students leave and reenter the building frequently for recess and/or physical education classes.

RECOMMENDATION: Enthusiasm was expressed for student ID badges at the high school, and for outdoor strobe lights to signal an emergency condition inside a building.

STATUS: The District implemented these initiatives and made several adjustments to the projects underway as part of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 capital construction projects.

- The District has redesigned the security vestibule at the High School that was included in the Phase 2 capital project in order to enclose the front of the campus and accommodate a larger footprint to allow

for streamlined building entry for students as they scan their badges.

- Bathrooms with outdoor access were also added to the Phase 2 construction project in order to reduce access to the High School building after school hours and on weekends for outdoor athletics.
 - **IMPORTANT NOTE:** In March 2019, the Board of Education added a proposition to the May 2019 ballot to upgrade the specification for the classroom doors that offer added security features including firearm resistance and a “one-button lockdown” remotely-controlled locking mechanism. If approved, the additional cost would be paid for by a combination of an existing fund balance, reserves and state grant funds.
- **Security protocols** such as drills, random bag checks, protocols for visitors to the facilities during non-school hours, and security for students outside the building for recess or physical education. The following points were discussed:
 - Under the supervision of the new Director of Security, the District is conducting more drills during inconvenient times of day and when students are not in their regular classrooms. This requires teachers and students to exhibit situational awareness and be able to follow protocols in a variety of settings.
 - As it is not realistic to have everyone go through the visitor management system for events such as a concert at the high school that hundreds of people will attend, after-school activities are treated differently regarding visitor management than during-school hours. The District segregates the event area from the remainder of the building, which provides an alternate measure of security.
 - Each school building now has a mobile guard. When students are at recess or outside for any other reason such as P.E., it is the job of the mobile guard to focus on the students who are outside.

RECOMMENDATION: Interest was expressed in having additional security for evening and weekend events and for community facilities use. There was interest in having better segregation of athletics and performance spaces from the rest of the high school during after-school activities.

STATUS: The District is extending regular hours for after-school and weekend security staff. The security door project will include redesigned hallway doors to segregate building sections that host after-school activities.

TOPIC: MENTAL HEALTH

Dr. Joseph LaMelza, Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services, and a team of administrators and District mental health professionals provided an overview to the Committee of the mental wellness programs in place at the elementary, middle and high school levels, the staffing enhancements made by the District, and new processes and protocols put into place to identify students who may need support. Areas of focus included the importance of school climate, use of evidence-based social-emotional learning programs, positive behavioral supports for all students, professional development for faculty and staff, the increase in mental health staff and the new threat assessment protocol that has been implemented in every building.

Committee members engaged in discussion and provided input to Board members on the following topics:

- A restorative practice approach to discipline, which the Committee expressed support for.
- A focus on building mental health literacy among the student body and de-stigmatizing the need for support.
 - The Committee commended the student-led programs at the high school aimed at reducing the stigma around mental illness.
- The importance of students developing the ability to recognize mental health issues in themselves and others and how to address it.
- Addressing how to educate parents and guardians about the services offered, and how the District can support parents and guardians in knowing how to address mental wellness with their children.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee expressed a desire for the District to increase staffing for the support of student social-emotional health.

STATUS: In the 2018-19 school year, the District added an additional school psychologist and an additional social worker to support student mental health. The proposed 2019-20 budget maintains these two positions and supports the addition of two new positions to support student social-emotional health, including a Board Certified Behavior Analysis (BCBA) for the elementary schools and a social worker or psychologist for the social-emotional programming at the high school.

RECOMMENDATION: Support was expressed for a process to identify at-risk students and to educate the study body on warning signs of concerning behavior.

STATUS:

- Each of the building's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) teams have a threat assessment rubric in place and utilize it to address any significant mental health concerns for students.
- The District has rolled out an anonymous reporting system for secondary students. As part of the program, students were provided with training from the Sandy Hook Promise organization, facilitated by the District's DASA coordinators, on recognizing concerning behavior and speaking to a trusted adult when faced with that situation. If students do not feel comfortable speaking to an adult, they now have a way to anonymously report the behavior so that the situation can be addressed.

TOPIC: PARENT AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Tricia Williams, Public Information Officer, reviewed the current methods used to communicate with parents and guardians during emergency situations which include email, phone calls, District website alerts, Facebook posts, and text messaging (which has just been added this school year). It was announced to the Committee that the District will make an anonymous tip line available to students to report any concerning behavior. In addition, newly-created guides that outline the District's inclement weather procedures and security terms and procedures were presented to the Committee for feedback.

Committee members engaged in discussion and provided input to Board members on the following topics:

- The messaging used to communicate information about various situations, which were developed with input from the PTA School and Community Committee.
- The communication methods that are most effective for various situations.
- Drafts of the *Inclement Weather Procedures* and *District Safety Terms and Procedures* guides created by the District to better inform parents of District protocols during irregular and emergency situations.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee recommended edits to the messages used to communicate with the community. The Committee also expressed interest in the District amending its protocol to communicate about significant unusual events with the entire

community, not just the affected school, in order to reduce the potential for rumor and misinformation to spread through social media.

STATUS: Scripts have been updated accordingly and the District iterated its communications protocol during unusual circumstances in response to committee feedback.

RECOMMENDATION: The District was asked to use texting more frequently to contact parents during irregular and emergency situations.

STATUS: After some initial difficulties with the District's mass communication software, the texting feature is now working properly and being utilized in conjunction with robocalls and emails. Crisis communications now appear to be operating well.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee provided feedback on the content, design and format of the *Incident Weather Procedures* and *District Emergency Information* guides, as well as methods for distributing the guides to the community.

STATUS: The guides have been updated based on the feedback provided. The edited guides can be found here:

- ***Incident Weather Procedures:***
<https://www.syossetschools.org/domain/153>
- ***District Emergency Information:***
<https://www.syossetschools.org/Page/487>

Summary

The Committee commended the District on its work to enhance school security and mental health support. The Committee expressed an interest for the District to continue to exploring new security-related technologies and to continue to advance the mental health curriculum, with a focus on providing supports to students, identifying at-risk students and reducing the stigma around mental-health issues. The Committee also stressed the importance of District communications during times of emergencies, and provided input into the methods of communication used as well as the content of the messages.

The District has refined and enhanced security-related strategies based on input from the Committee, including the following initiatives:

- Hiring security guards with current and previous law enforcement experience.
- Adjusting projects underway as part of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 capital construction to better address security needs identified.

- Extending regular hours for after-school and weekend security staff.
- Segregation of building sections that host after-school activities.
- Implementation of an anonymous reporting system for secondary students.
- Communication protocols and content of messaging.
- The addition of two new positions to support student social-emotional health included in the proposed 2019-20 budget, including a Board Certified Behavior Analysis (BCBA) for the elementary schools and a social worker or psychologist for the social-emotional programming at the high school.