

Harford County Board of Education
Citizen Advisory Committee on Safety and Security

ANNUAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Submitted October 2009
For Presentation and Discussion
October 19, 2009
Board of Education Working Session

Background:

Each year, the Superintendent of Harford County Public Schools recommends to the Harford County Board of Education the areas of study to be pursued by each of the five Citizen Advisory Committees appointed by the Board of Education.

In consistency with the Board approved timeline for operation of the Board sponsored Citizen Advisory Committees (CAC), a charge or area of study is provided to each Board sponsored CAC during a December Board meeting, with completion during the following calendar year. The CAC reports their findings in October of each year.

The current area of study for the 2008 - 2009 school year assigned to the Safety and Security Committee is stated as follows:

Citizen Advisory Committee on Safety and Security

- 1) The continued evaluation of the School Resource Officer Program.
- 2) Review the effectiveness of the Alert Now system as it is currently being used in the Harford County Public Schools.
- 3) Evaluate the use of cameras in the schools and the expansion of them into newly built schools and elementary schools.

Report on Activities and Discussion:

During the past school year, the Citizen Advisory Committee on Safety and Security (herein referred to as “the Committee”) pursued the assigned charges and the following was accomplished:

Charge I.

The continued evaluation of the School Resource Officer Program

The Committee continued reviewing the School Resource Officer (SRO) program. An SRO from one of the Harford County Public High Schools attends every committee meeting and reports on activities at their respective middle and high schools. The Sergeant from the Harford County Sheriff’s Office who supervises the SRO program attends every committee meeting and also reports on current activities concerning Harford County Public Schools.

From the reporting, it was found that information from school administrators, teachers, and students has helped to both prevent and solve incidents. The SRO is seen as an intelligence base for their particular school and is the equivalent of community policing in the school. Feedback received from the schools show that the SRO program is greatly supported by teachers, students, and parents.

The committee found that the majority of the SRO’s job is mentoring, teaching, and counseling. SROs are considered part of the administrative team at the school and work with faculty and staff on how to identify and defuse volatile situations and prevent criminal activity.

Charge II.

Review the effectiveness of the Alert Now system as it is currently being used in the Harford County Public Schools

The committee reviewed the manner in which Alert Now is currently being used by Harford County Public Schools. It is currently being used for crisis communication, attendance, parental involvement, substitutes for school nurses, and inclement weather. In addition to these functions, the Alert Now system also has the capability of emailing, texting, and conducting polls, all of which provide expanded communication possibilities for the future. Though there are other systems on the market (Connect Ed is currently used in Cecil County), at a cost of approximately two dollars per student, the committee finds that the Alert Now system provides a valuable service at a modest cost to the county. The only problems that have arisen are occasional dropped calls due to answering machines and cell phone pauses. It is the recommendation of this committee that the county continue to use Alert Now in its current capacity and to look for ways to make it more effective. Those recommendations are as follows:

1. Crisis communication protocols (guidelines/manual for safety and security issues).
2. Templates for what to say and/or write for recurring issues.

Charge III.

Evaluate the use of cameras in the schools and the expansion of them into newly built schools and elementary schools

The committee reviewed the use of cameras in the schools and greatly supports their continued use in the middle and high schools, as well as their expansion into newly built schools and elementary schools. At the time of the review, there were 653 cameras operating in Harford County Schools that run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Administrators, central office personnel, and law enforcement have access to viewing these cameras from many locations. This is an important aspect because information can be gathered real time as an incident is occurring. When investigating incidents that have already occurred, the cameras supply factual information that can help establish a timeline and identify perpetrators. In addition to helping solve incidents, in many situations cameras are used as a training tool to learn what to do and what not to do. The mere presence of cameras in the schools has helped to lessen the overall number of incidents that have occurred since their inception.

Recommendations and suggestions.

- 1) The Safety and Security Committee recommends the continuance and expansion of the School Resource Officer Program. Over the next year, the committee would like to continue to support the program and its successes within Harford County Public Schools. We believe this is an invaluable program and fully support its use in all schools within the County. The cost associated with adding to this program involves providing an office, phone line, and data port connections. The cost of the officer rests with the participating police agency.

- 2) It is the recommendation of the committee that the county continues use of the Alert Now system in its current capacity, and expands the manner in which it is used in the future. With growing numbers of residents in Harford County using cell phones, sometimes as an alternative to a land line phone, emails and texts can be an effective way of communicating information. In no way does the committee recommend taking decision-making away from individual administrators, but by creating guidelines and templates for individual schools to follow. It will decrease the time needed to prepare and disseminate important information.
- 3) The committee recommends the continued use of cameras and their expansion within Harford County Public Schools. When it comes to cameras there is no one size fits all approach. The committee believes that each site should be evaluated individually and a site survey should determine the location and number of cameras. We believe that cameras should only be placed in non-academic settings where there is no expectation of privacy. Examples are hallways, stairwells, entrances, exits, loading docks, etc. With the help of Mr. Matt Bedsaul, the committee reviewed the possibility of expanding the use of cameras on school buses. It was a very interesting and enlightening review, one we would like to carry over into the 2009 – 2010 school year.
- 4) The committee recommends that a fulltime Safety and Security Investigator be added to the Department of Safety and Security. The committee has observed that the responsibilities and duties of this department have expanded and

In the late 1970's, one person was hired to assume the position of assistant supervisor for safety and security. Over the years, as the need for safety and security changed, so have the duties and responsibilities of the position. Two events caused significant change to how we viewed the safety and security of our schools. The April 20, 1999, shooting at Columbine High School and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on our country demonstrated a need to change past practices of having campuses open.

In 2002, the coordinator's responsibility expanded after convening a committee to develop the original flip chart. Since that time, it has evolved into an ongoing process of assisting schools with developing and implementing their individual plans. Within that year, two other significant changes occurred; the scheduling, coordination, and onsite presence for drug dog scans was transferred from the Director of Secondary Education to the Coordinator of Safety and Security. The coordinator is also the liaison for the Citizen Advisory Committee for Safety and Security, and this position was reassigned from the Assistant Superintendent for Education Services to the Coordinator for Safety and Security.

In 2004, the Board approved the installation of school security and surveillance cameras. The responsibility for facilitating design, scheduling installation, and ongoing services related to the cameras was assigned to the

coordinator. In 2005, it was recognized that the coordinator became more involved in the construction planning phase of all new school projects.

Future 2009-2010 - Areas of Study

The Committee respectfully requests to pursue the following areas of study during the 2009-2010 school year:

- 1) The continued evaluation of the School Resource Officer Program.
- 2) A more extensive review of the effectiveness of cameras on school buses as it relates to safety and security.
- 3) Evaluate the alarm systems currently being used in Harford County Public Schools.

The Citizen Advisory Committee on Safety and Security would like to thank the Harford County Board of Education for allowing us the opportunity to present our views. These views are from professionals and parents of students in many of our public schools throughout Harford County. We would like to thank Dr. Robert M. Tomback, Mr. Robert A. Benedetto, Mr. Robert Hess, Sgt. Scott Virden, Mr. Matt Bedsaul, Mrs. Teri Kranefeld, and all of the current committee members. We look forward to serving the Board of Education and the citizens of our county by providing the citizen's perspective and advice relating to the safety and security of all public schools in Harford County.

David A. Hobson
Citizens' Advisory Committee
for Safety and Security
Chairperson