

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HARFORD COUNTY

INFORMATIONAL REPORT

PRESENTATION ON THE CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON

SAFETY AND SECURITY

OCTOBER 27, 2014

Background:

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

A charge or area of study is provided to each Board sponsored Citizens Advisory Committee during a December Board meeting, with completion during the following calendar year. The Citizens Advisory Committee reports their findings in October of each year.

The area of study for the 2012-2013 school year assigned to the Safety and Security Citizen Advisory Committee included:

- Continue to review individual school critical incident plans;
- Review access to school facilities;
- Investigate the benefits and the effectiveness of the AAA Safety Patrol Programs in elementary schools; and
- Investigate the installation of “white phones” – committee initiated.

Discussion:

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

1) Review individual school critical incident plans and review access to school facilities.

The committee elected to combine charges one and two in their study to provide a better insight to the implementation of the schools critical incident and safety plans.

The Committee developed a checklist of specific areas addressed by the school critical incident plans for inspection during the school year. With close coordination with school leadership, the HCPS Safety and Security Office, and local law enforcement, Committee members working in teams began to visit schools and conduct assessments of the access

protocols and physical security procedures school outlined in their plans. The intent of the assessments is to validate adherence to the school's established procedures.

The Committee's assessments were not intended to be:

- An inspection or effort to grade or rate the efforts of an individual school's leadership;
- An evaluation or report that scores a school and compares it against schools; or
- A substitute for other inspection authorities or regulatory or inspection surveys that are part of the HCPS safety and security reporting requirements.

Committee personnel perform the following activities in preparing for an assessment. The tasks are divided into three phases: (1) activities necessary prior to arrival at the school; (2) the assessment activities at the school; and (3) the follow-up actions after the school visit. The team coordinates the date, time, and location with the HCPS Safety and Security Office, who then notifies local law enforcement and the respective school. Then the team reviews the individual school's incident plan for specific areas to look-for, and conducts the assessment with the HCPS Security Officer present. To perform the assessment in a reasonable period, the team assumes it is viewing the school in its day-to-day operating mode and makes its recommendations accordingly. Prior to departure, the team provides a review for the school principal, if needed. All reports are submitted to the HCPS Safety and Security Office for follow-up.

Ten schools were assessed during the 2013-2014 school year. The following are some of the findings:

- Cafeteria doors being propped open was a common issue (cool air, deliveries, convenience, etc.).
- Main entrance access control was very good across assessed schools, including the visitor management system (badges).
- Employees consistently wore badges as required (visible).
- Unoccupied classrooms were left unsecured. **Note: The Superintendent addressed this issue at the February 2014 principal's meeting.*

2) Investigate the benefits/effectiveness of the AAA Safety Patrol Program in Elementary Schools.

The AAA Safety Patrol Program has been in existence since the 1920s. The AAA Safety Program in Harford County focuses on school-sponsored student volunteers primarily in the fifth grade. Typically, teachers and principals appoint students who have an interest in participating in the program and who have demonstrated maturity, reliability, and respect for their classmates. School Safety Patrol members:

- Complete training in traffic safety;
- Protect students from the hazards of crossing roads on their way to and from school;
- Assist bus drivers in safely transporting students to and from school;
- Teach fellow students about traffic safety; and
- Serve other leadership functions under the direction of school officials.

Students gain safety awareness, leadership/citizenship, pride, and respect for law enforcement. They are also trained to report problems with strangers (“Stranger Danger”) to the school’s patrol supervisor. Schools benefit from opportunities to promote traffic safety awareness, character-building opportunities, and a positive relationship with parents, law enforcement, and the overall community.

Currently, 22 Harford County elementary schools (65%) are actively participating in the AAA Safety Patrol Program with 12 schools not participating. The Committee, with help from the Superintendent, elementary school principals, and law enforcement, would like to see that percentage increase to 75% by SY15-16 and to 90% by SY16-17. The only requirement to institute the AAA Safety Program is for elementary school principals to obtain authorization from their executive director; participation in the program is free. The HCPS Safety and Security Office distributed patrol belts, badges, wet weather ponchos, and caps to all participating schools this past year.

The Committee recommends that schools participating in the program take the time to recognize student patrol members at their school assemblies and to include School Policing Unit personnel when making these recognitions.

3) Installation of “white phones” in each classroom.

In the Committee’s review of emergency plans and procedures, it discovered that most classrooms did not have a direct, unobstructed line to the main office in case of an emergency. The procedure is for a teacher to call the main office and relay the known facts at the time. An administrator would then initiate the school’s lock-down procedures. The Committee found that teachers were unable to reach the main office for various reasons, which may have included phone lines being busy, public announcements being made on the PA system, or personnel communicating with someone at the main entrance.

The Committee recommended that a dedicated emergency phone be installed in each main office. The Committee recommends that the “white phone” be manned at all times by office personnel. The HCPS Safety and Security Office followed-up on the recommendation and installation is expected to be completed in November 2014.

Findings and Recommendations:

1. The Committee requests the continuance of reviewing individual school critical incident plans and conducting team assessments.
2. The Committee requests the School Board’s endorsement of the AAA Safety Patrol Program and will continue to work with the remaining schools that have not adopted the program.
3. The Committee recommends use of the “white phone” be included in annual training requirements to include part-time and substitute teachers.

Future 2014-2015 - Recommended Areas of Study:

The Committee respectfully requests to pursue the following areas of study during the 2014-2015 school year:

- Continue to review individual school critical incident plans and to conduct on-site assessments; and
- Review the effectiveness of school bus cameras.

The Committee 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 Superintendent Mrs. Barbara Canavan; Coordinator of Safety and Security, Mr. Robert Benedetto; Lt. Scott Virden; Sgt. Robert Royster; 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 citizens perspective and advice related to the safety and security of all public schools in Harford County.