

SPECIAL TASK FORCE ON SCHOOL SAFETY MEETING MINUTES

CITY OF DANBURY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2013 AT 7:00 PM

King Street Primary School, 151 S. King Street, Danbury, CT 06811

The mission of the Special Task Force is to consult with local officials, community members, and School Safety industry experts to assess the District's existing Safety Plans, and to develop deliverable recommendations that may enhance those Safety Plans, with a deliberate focus on protection, prompt intervention, and prevention.

Present: Atty. K. Thompson, Co-Chairperson; K. Molinaro, Co-Chairperson; E. Alberts, A. Fluskey-Lattin, G. Bocaccio, M. Schork, R. SanSeverino, C. Garnett, B. Keefe, E. Daly, D. Moore, D. Wiedl, R. Pietrafesa, Members;

Mayor Mark Boughton (7:25 p.m.)

Dr. S. Pascarella, J. Martino, R. Jalbert

P. Estefan, Director of Civil Preparedness (7:31 p.m.); Lt. J. Browne, Danbury Police Department

Absent: J. Knapp, J. Carmen

CALL TO ORDER

The Co-Chairperson, K. Molinaro, called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m., and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairperson K. Molinaro turned the meeting over to Atty. Thompson. She called to the attention of the members Minutes from the prior meeting on February 7. She said the Minutes are also posted in an effort for this Committee to be very transparent to the general public.

Atty. Thompson attended the Gun Violence Forum that took place today at Western CT State University. It was organized by Senator Murphy, Senator Blumenthal and U. S. Rep Esty. She said there were several panels that took place and remarks were made by A. Duncan, Secretary of Education, and the Vice-President of the United States, Joe Biden. She thought it was an excellent presentation.

The first panel dealt with gun control issues, the second was on mental health issues, and then the concluding remarks from Vice-President Biden. Vice-President Biden talked about his panel and task force and what kind of recommendations they are making to the President. She feels what we can take away from that is there is now movement on the national level and we will see that unfold.

Atty. Thompson said that the task for this Committee is to continually be aware of those developments and what is happening and to be looking at how they apply to what happens in our district. For that reason, at the last meeting, we took a close look at the status of facilities and the status of infrastructure, and today we are turning that discussion to the other piece, which is the social services piece.

PRESENTATION ON STATUS OF SCHOOL BASED SPECIAL SERVICES

- Sandra Atanasoff, Coordinator of Pupil Services

Atty. Thompson introduced S. Atanasoff. She distributed handouts to the members of the Committee to give some insight with regard to mental health services that are presently in place in Danbury Public Schools and also those services that are available within our community that students are accessing. She wanted to echo what Atty. Thompson said with regard to the mental health services. She said the plethora of information that is out there with regards to a real comprehensive approach to the tragedy in Newtown is clearly what this Committee is looking at. A balanced approach that includes some excellent mental health services is certainly necessary and exists in Danbury Public Schools already and also in the City of Danbury.

The handouts contain data from the 2011/2012 school year. During last year, there were 85 referrals made to the Department of Children and Families as of May 1, 2012. Family With Service Needs referrals are those referrals that are made to the Juvenile Court, and they are made based on truancy and defiance issues in schools, and last year there were 32 referrals made.

The mental health services that were accessed in the City of Danbury last year are as follows:

- Danbury Youth Services, 37 students and families have sought mental health services through DYS;
- Community Health Center, 117 students have sought mental health services;
- Family and Children's Aid, 425 students have sought mental health services, 28 attend the Extend Program and 40 families are involved with the IICAPS in-home service program;
- Danbury Hospital, Center for Child and Adolescent Treatment Services, 15 students have sought mental health services through their intensive outpatient programs.

In addition, we have school-based health centers in both middle schools and the high school. Last year 224 students have accessed mental health services through these school-based health centers: Broadview, 73; Rogers Park, 64; and DHS, 87.

Also, we have a grant-funded Primary Mental Health Project that utilizes therapeutic play to engage first and second graders with role model adults. There were 115 student serviced through the PMHP project.

We have the DSABC Mentoring Program. Danbury students in Grades K-12 are receiving mentoring services through the Danbury Schools and Business Collaborative. Weekly meetings are held between mentors and mentees to develop healthy relationships, provide support, and have mentors act as positive role models for these students at risk.

The Even Start Program is a program to address the needs of teen moms, which focuses on the attainment of a high school diploma along with instruction on positive parenting skills. There were 8 students enrolled in this program last year.

In addition, in collaboration with DYS, there is the TARGET Program, an after-school prevention program for 24 youth (Ages 5 – 10) residing at Laurel Gardens. The program is offered on Tuesdays through Fridays from 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. The program helps to keep youth safe and provide a healthy lifestyle curriculum, homework assistance, and literacy instruction.

We also have a Danbury Grassroots Tennis and Enrichment Program, which is a needs-based, community-based program that provides educational support, homework assistance, nutrition and health education to students in Grades 2 through 12. Last year, DGTE serviced 64 students.

S. Atanasoff also reported that Danbury Public Schools continues to have collaborations with Danbury Children First, Danbury Promise for Children Partnership, along with our additional collaborations with Housatonic Valley Coalition Against Substance Abuse.

The Committee members asked clarifying questions for S. Atanasoff and a discussion ensued.

The second piece that S. Atanasoff presented to the Committee is a breakdown of staff in Danbury Public Schools that provide these mental health services, which includes social workers, psychologists, counselors, speech and language pathologist, and nurses, and a copy of that handout is attached hereto. Clarifying questions were asked by the Committee members and a discussion ensued.

The last piece that was presented by S. Atanasoff to the Committee is a position paper that was written on December 19, 2012 and it has been endorsed by 183 different organizations nationwide, including the National Education Association. She asked the Committee to take a look at this paper with regard to the balanced approach that they are saying needs to be presented in dealing with the mental health needs and safety in our schools. She feels it is short and concise and it provides good direction. One of the key pieces that this article highlights is that students must feel connected with an adult, a mentor, a counselor, or another peer. We have to make sure we are addressing these kids. If that means increasing services in schools and forging additional collaborations within our community, then we need to do this because it is crucial to the mental health kids.

Atty. Thompson asked S. Atanasoff to speak about indicators of kids that may need some other additional support. She asked about what training is available for people such as school lunch workers, school bus drivers, and custodians and what we do for PPS staff. S. Atanasoff said that she feels that

the PPS staff in the schools often become the heart and soul of the school. They are the ones, together with the school principals, who help to create the climate to make sure that everyone in the school is connected. There is much professional development that our staff engages in, and the department gathers monthly to talk about our issues together. Committee members spoke and asked questions and S. Atanasoff responded and a discussion ensued.

Atty. Thompson said that S. Atanasoff touched on not only what we have but where we are going and how we are developing some new programs.

PRESENTATION ON SERVICES PROVIDED BY SCHOOL BASED HEALTH CENTERS

- Melanie Bonjour, Program Coordinator

This presentation will be tabled because the presenter could not be here tonight.

Atty. Thompson turned the meeting over to J. Martino who introduced Robert Rossman of United Alarm. It is a company that both the City of Danbury and the Board of Education has utilized for a number of years. He is here to talk about some of the things we are looking to do here in Danbury and some of the things we have done.

R. Rossman said that Danbury is and has been way ahead of many of the other school systems that we currently already do work for. He said that Danbury has stayed on top of their security systems and updated them, and there are some things that we can do simply and economically that would enable the staff to have the police arrive on a little faster basis. He felt the implementation of panic buttons is a very cost effective way to enhance the product that is already in place. He continued to say that Danbury is way ahead of other schools with the front door entry systems. Many of them already have the camera and the entry system for the receptionist to make a decision to let someone into the building. Danbury has had key access and it should be easy to jump forward and complete it a little further. He said the parents can feel good about the position Danbury is in with regard to security in their buildings. R. Rossman said the company basically assesses the risk against the cost of implementing it and they try to use common sense to go forward in a manner that is not overreacting, but certainly in a manner that will be safe and protective for the children. J. Martino said we have made moves to address the panic buttons in the schools. We are also formulating pricing with regard to larger items. The card access is a big issue on the outside of the doors. That is definitely something we want to see.

Atty. Thompson said she received some information today about the committee at the State that is now just coming out to make its recommendations to the legislature, and she said it looks like it is two pronged. One is new construction and all the baseline things they recommend and the other is how to allocate funding to tune up a district like ours who already has something in place, but needs to escalate. Some of the things they have been talking about are what we have been talking about in terms of ballistic entryway glass, double door access, penetration-resistant vestibules, room locks, exits with buzzer systems, etc. She asked if CCM has looked into any of it. CCM is the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. Mayor Boughton said they are not qualified to assess the buildings. They want to hire a consultant to go into the buildings to make an assessment. We want the State to pay a fair share

of that. The Governor, in his budget, has no money allocated for school safety and security. He said you can take some of the grant money and use that. In Danbury, that money is \$900,000, but we also have to use that money to build sidewalks, repair roads, etc. The consultant cost alone would be \$100,000. We want the

State to set aside \$100 million dollars in a fund. Our recommendation is that Danbury would spend 25% as a community and the State would spend 75%. Mayor Boughton said he has brought this to the legislature and they like the idea. He said the second piece is that they are recommending a Statewide clearinghouse so that when you want to know how to keep a building secure, the standards for evacuation procedures, and what the standards for lockdown procedures, etc. are, the school districts will have a school safety center in the State of Connecticut that they can go to and be able to obtain a manual. It will put everyone on the same page. Thirdly, we asked that more money go into the mental health services both in the system and out. We are recommending an academy where licensed certified safety advocates will go who will understand all the procedures necessary to provide security.

Atty. Thompson said that part of the reason the meeting was scheduled at King Street Primary tonight is to have United Alarm show us places where we have put in effective devices and how they work so that we could see how that happens. She cautioned and asked for everyone to use care as they tour the school as there will obviously be some things that are not appropriately disclosed to the general public.

The next meeting for the Special Task Force on School Safety is scheduled for Tuesday, March 26, at 7 p.m. at the Beaver Brook Administration Center.

Discussion ensued about hiring a consultant and prices we are still working with, and Chairperson Molinaro feels it will probably be May before we make a recommendation to the full Board. Questions were asked by the public and a discussion ensued.

ADJOURNMENT;

The Task Force Committee adjourned its February 21, 2013 at 8:21 p.m.

Kathleen M. Molinaro, Co-Chairperson