



<http://www.nj.com/news/expresstimes/pa/index.ssf?/base/news-10/1175659621308050.xml&coll=2&thispage=2>

Parents call for safer school More Hall monitors, better enforcement, harsher penalties needed at Freedom, many say.

Wednesday, April 04, 2007

By MICHELLE PITTMAN - The Express-Times

BETHLEHEM, PA - Parents of Freedom High School students have more questions than answers when it comes to violence at the school.

More than 100 people at an open forum Tuesday night quizzed Principal Roger Washburn about the school's safety. They called for more hall monitors, better rule enforcement and harsher penalties for violations.

The recent arrest of a senior student, who was subdued with a Taser by the school resource officer when he refused to end a brawl with five other students, was addressed at length, but administrators said the incident was not the only fight to break out this year.

"I hear people say there's a fight in the cafeteria everyday, but you look at the report numbers and there have been zero," Washburn said. "You can have a fight any time of the day. I just don't understand why kids with all the counseling that's available to them, the trained professionals we have on staff, why they would turn to violence."

Thomas Washington, Bethlehem Area School District's director of student services, said the number of physical assaults in the district, and at Freedom in particular, hasn't increased drastically over the past three years.

"You have to look at the whole district of 15,000-plus students," he said. "The numbers look pretty steady. Anytime there's a fight, we have a problem. People tend to congregate. It takes time to sort out what happened. We get so many stories."

But parents said some pressing concerns at Freedom need to be addressed. For one, no new monitors have been added to the school, even though an expansion that increased the school's size by nearly one-third opened in January. The school has seven monitors.

"What do we need to do to make sure we get the monitors you need?" parent Kathie Davis asked. "If you need parents, I will be there."

Others argued that while the school needs more eyes, volunteers and full-time employees need to know what to look for.

"They have all these rules in the handbook, and they're not enforced," parent Isabelle Lastres said. "You're sending the message that kids can do whatever they want. They're testing the waters. There are juniors and sophomores going out to lunch with seniors. Next thing you know, there will be kids in the school who don't belong there."

Washburn said that with the size of the school, the number of students and as many as six possible entrances, it's impossible to monitor the comings and goings of every student.

"Any person who is not visibly known is stopped," he said. "But if we stop everyone, we'd never get everyone in and out of the building."

Parents said a zero-tolerance policy for fighting has to be enforced, something the school board is considering implementing for the next school year.

Washburn said a student can get into as many as three or four fights under the current code of conduct before being expelled for the school year.

"The code of conduct served us well 10 years ago," Freedom teacher Jodi Evans said. "But what I've seen in the past two years, students just don't care about the consequences."

Washburn said he didn't expect any easy answers from the meeting, but parents and administrators need to come together before there's a dire situation.

"The flow of information needs to be constant," he said.

Reporter Michelle Pittman can be reached at 610-258-7171 or by e-mail at mpittman@express-times.com.

Police use Taser to subdue Freedom High student

Posted by Alyssa Young

March 23, 2007 10:08AM

Categories: Breaking News

Bethlehem Township police used a Taser on an 18-year-old Freedom High School student who was involved in a fight at the school Wednesday, Capt. George Boksan said this morning.

Angelino Aponte, of the 1200 block of East Fourth Street in Bethlehem, punched another student and then refused to obey police orders to end the brawl, Boksan said. He was among about six students fighting in a hallway while other teenagers en route to class gathered to watch.

Boksan said the teens began a shouting match stemming from an earlier incident that had occurred in the community. The school resource officer and other staff tried to separate those involved, but it got physical after Aponte threw a punch, Boksan said.

Aponte resisted attempts to subdue him until the officer used a Taser. The device projects two probes that deliver an electronic signal once they make contact with a person's body or clothing. The shock causes the person to lose neuromuscular control.

Boksan said this use of a Taser conforms to the police department's use of force policy. In accordance with the policy, Aponte was taken to St. Luke's Hospital in Fountain Hill for a medical evaluation, and no adverse effects were found, according to police.

Four other students will be cited with disorderly conduct in connection with the fight, Boksan said.