

BOE Address 04.01.08

Good evening and thank you for this opportunity to speak.

We need to talk about school safety.

We've had significant events in the past few weeks at both Olympia and Athena that put staff and students in danger. To the District's credit the students were dealt with quickly and appropriately. The Association wants to thank the Superintendent for going to Olympia to meet with the staff and the board members who responded so quickly to our staff.

Fights are unavoidable and a review of The Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows that 2007 statistics are not substantially different from 2001. But these recent incidents highlight some critical issues.

Surrounding Districts need to honor long term suspensions so that students don't leave our district and jeopardize those in another class room, in a new district a week later. We need to communicate with our colleagues in surrounding districts to support one another on this.

The internet shrinks our county so that an incident that occurs at 1:00 can be on myspace by 1:10. The ability to text and send pictures expands the audience exponentially.

It is incumbent upon us to communicate with our sister schools – first for awareness and second for follow through. Students involved in violent acts can't be on campus the next day in another building.

The potential for violence always exists but we are not proposing building fortresses. We don't believe knee jerk responses are wise but we do propose working together to ensure the safety of our students and staff in all our buildings. We have the fundamental components of a plan in place but we need to do the following consistently:

1. Follow the code of conduct
2. Central Administration must support building level decisions
3. Building level administrators must support teachers, security and support staff
4. Expand the school resource officer's presence
5. Enlist parent support limiting the use of cell phones in school
6. Effective communication between and among schools

We have some excellent examples of buildings working together to create a safe learning environment and the hallmark of each effective situation has been administrative support, following the existing Code of Conduct, effective security personnel, school resource officer presence, teacher presence and parent support.

This is truly a situation where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We have to support one another on this or all we end up with is the illusion of safety.

Thank you and good night.

- George Cantabene