

Committee Report, February 2007

Safety Committee: Pam Moommau, Chair, Pammoomau@comcast.net

The safety committee met January 18, 2007 with MCPS Acting Director of School Safety and Security, Robert Hellmuth. Mr. Hellmuth discussed issues related to school building security, emergency communications between MCPS and parents and between MCPS and the police department, and student violence. He noted that in general, while MCPS provides broad guidelines and procedures, with respect to building security the principal of a school is like the captain of a ship. It is up to the principal to determine the appropriate balance between limiting building access and impeding the smooth operation of a building. He also noted that statistically, both nationally and within Montgomery County, troubled students pose a bigger threat to student and staff security than random intruders. We discussed the confusion caused at the beginning of the year by the simultaneous declaration of "Code Blues" at numerous schools in response to a reported threat at a bus stop. It was apparent that communications both between MCPD and MCPS, and between MCPS and the parent community were less than ideal, and lessons were learned.

After the discussion with Bob Hellmuth, Safety Committee members and liaisons and chairs from local PTAs talked about issues of concern in various local communities. High priority issues include, in addition to building security, bus stop and pedestrian safety, recess supervision, bullying prevention, gang recruiting, and building environmental safety.

Building security

A resolution calling for a security inventory of each school, and for allocation of resources for security improvements to buildings and portables, was passed by the Delegates' Assembly January 23, 2007. MCCPTA President Jane de Winter conveyed this resolution to MCPS, noting that the security inventories that are currently conducted do not adequately address concerns noted in this resolution, including limiting access to buildings and improving portable security. The resolution may be found on the MCCPTA website. Please feel free to refer to this resolution in any security advocacy efforts, including future budget testimony to the County Council.

MCPS safety and emergency communications policy

We received a response (from Brian Edwards, MCPS Director of Public Information, and Bob Hellmuth) to our letter to Dr. Weast requesting information "about any regulations or other guidelines Montgomery County Public Schools uses to guide both central office and local school staff on providing information to parents and the community about potential emergency situations and other security concerns affecting students." The response referred us to MCPS Regulation COB-RA, which provides guidelines for reporting of serious incidents both within the school system, and to the parent community. In composing the letter requesting information, the Safety Committee was aware of Regulation COB-RA, but felt that it is very general with respect to reporting to the parent community; specifically, COB-RA does not provide enough detail to enable parents to know what type of communications they can expect from their principals.

Local School Involvement Critical to Safety

The MCCPTA Safety Committee urges each local PT(S)A to form its own Safety Committee to monitor and advocate for safety within your own school.