

# READINGTON TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

Holland Brook School Gymnasium

## SCHOOL SECURITY MINUTES

February 28, 2018

### **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Dr. William DeFabiis welcomed everyone and thanked the audience for taking time to attend a public board meeting to have a productive dialogue on school security. Dr. DeFabiis introduced Chief Joseph Greco and the newly hired resource office dedicated to the school district, Mr. Brian Gilmurray. Mr. Brian Gilmurray is a retired police officer who has obtained over twenty years of experience in Franklin Township Police Department in addition to working at the Middlesex County Prosecutors Office. He is currently a Special Law Enforcement Officer – Class III under regulation by the State of New Jersey, allowing him to serve at the Township of Readington (Township) and Readington Township Public Schools (District) through a shared services agreement. The Township and District have a wonderful working relationship and collaborate to provide services to meet the needs of the community.

Following introductions, Dr. DeFabiis requested special dispensation from the Board President, Laura Simon, to allow open dialogue outside standard board meeting procedures as well as to enter into an open public session during the Superintendent's Report. Ms. Simon granted approval.

Dr. DeFabiis provided an overview of the evening's planned discussion, which in his views encompassed three primary tasks:

1. Assure everyone the safety and security of the students, staff and community members is the utmost priority of the district personnel and Board
  - Although there is dialogue this evening, everyone should be aware the district safety and security processes are continuous and have been ongoing since the day he started and beforehand
  - The Township and District discuss strategies and methods of improvement frequently and hold regular meetings
  - Policies, regulations and procedures have been already in place and have been amendment over time to strengthen the safety and security of our premises. Some are made public but other procedures are kept private to maintain the highest degree of safety
  - There is a need to have open dialogue given recent events across the country
2. Desire to hear from the community, parents and community stakeholders through an open forum with dialogue and sharing of ideas
  - Administrators, teachers, and staff have all come this evening to listen and participate as security is a joint effort requiring everyone's efforts to be successful
  - The Board shall listen and take notes to reflect on current procedures and enhance moving forward
  - Encourage parents to engage and listen to children as they participate in school drills, have a unique view of the world and are on the forefront of identifying circumstances through daily lives
3. Reflect and taken actions moving forward to improve school security
  - Some actions can be immediate and some actions will require a longer process so be patient
  - The process is continuous and Dr. DeFabiis welcomed anyone at any time to reach out to him or make an appointment to discuss further
  - Summarize points this evening, work collaboratively on suggestions and communicate with public future steps

Board President, Laura Simon, supplemented the thoughts of Dr. DeFabiis by reiterating the recent events in Florida and nationwide have not caused action to be taken. The District is continually reviewing and improving processes with Board members active in the process through committee meetings and other activities. Ms. Simon asked for patience while the district continues to review current measures and make adjustments moving forward. Ms. Simon then opened the meeting to public comment and requested persons to come to the podium to share their thoughts.

Over twenty-five community members, parents, staff members and stakeholders came to the podium expressing their concerns, suggestions and points of consideration. Ideas and comments shared include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Persons monitoring access to buildings have to multitask and challenging to require them to be sole source of point of entry
- Exposure at parent pickup and drop-off, and desire to enhance process to provide better protections
- Ability of staff during larger events, entry and exit to identify and spot an intruder
- Better main entrance access procedures and measures
- Real-time access to school cameras to police vehicles and police officers in the Township
- Desire to hear from law enforcement and Township regarding subject
- Stronger communication and sharing of processes with parents and community
- Understand how parents can help and actions community should undertake to assist
- Active involvement of parents in decision-making and processes through all aspects beforehand through implementation
- Concern of safety of students when fire drills and other activities outside building are being conducted, and request an officer be present during these and other critical times
- Review and enhancement of usage of cameras including for entry
- Evaluation of buzz-in procedures as major vulnerability and inability to know everyone who enters the building
- Capacity to identify disguised persons trying to enter building who might have ill-intent
- Appreciation of hard work of staff, administration and Board on safety and security, and new tone and focus on matter
- Expansion of budget to allow inclusion of more steps and measures for school security through tax levy or separate vote
- Review of history of keeping tax levy at zero for extended period of time and detriment to District of doing so
- Reduction of direct school budget and amount of staff in main offices who are first line of defense
- Security vestibules such as at HBS, holding areas and other physical upgrades or building redesigns
- Request to continually seek new methods and procedures to better the district in terms of safety
- Expand current security systems and technology
- Bullet-proof glass and film
- Cell tower or cell reception boosting methods
- Understanding of current police patrols and resource officers within the building, and expansion of armed officers possibly to include one at each school for sole purpose of security not other tasks
- Metal detectors and ability to screen for weapons
- Identification systems and possible check versus active database of high-risk individuals
- Copy of license or identification required to entry
- Signage and other deterrents such as visible cameras, so forth
- Update security plans and communicate said plans to parents
- Security and safety committees involving parents, as well as involvement in setting processes before adoption
- Review of limitations of analog vs. digital technologies, and real-time vs. delay aspect of tools
- Openness of buildings during afterschool hours, special events and weekends
- Lack of personnel and thorough review of persons entering building when students not present/outside contractual hours with suggestion to add person through overtime or alternative method

- Propping of doorways and ability of a person to open door from inside not at main entrance
- Request volunteers who are trained or willing to be trained as Class III officers such as stay-at-home parents, retired community members or other individuals following appropriate hiring practices
- Modification of hallway procedures to include “buddy system” or other measure so individual student not alone
- Ask community, corporations or other invested persons for donations or assistance in raising funding for more security measures to be implemented
- Potential removal of recreation from school district, and Township building or leasing own facilities
- Review of speaker systems in all buildings to ensure all staff can accurately hear important notices to take action
- Hiring of security compliance manager to review buildings, laws, policies and set best practices
- Numbering system for windows, access points and within the building to share with police
- Code, thumbprint or swipe system to gain access to building, instead of simply stating name through buzzer system. System could include students too
- Intercom for secretaries direct to police department
- Single entry system with alarm or other notification if any other door in building is opened
- Actions to fortify schools and classrooms
- Measures to allow quick response and neutralization of threat if a situation does arise
- Covering of windows during lock-down
- Hotline, email, google form and other ways for persons to easily communicate potential threats with required follow-up by appropriate persons with option to be anonymous
- Increased police patrol by Township
- Share911 or other app to allow communication and accountability between first responders, staff and others in emergency situation
- Double clear for lock-down drills so no miscommunication and reduced risk if one person under duress
- Active participation by all staff and students during drills
- Student support service and positive feedback surrounding practice of important drills, with clear understanding if solely a drill to reduce anxiety and stress
- Identification of persons exhibiting characteristics that are “red flags” or potentially in-need to avoid long-term risks and to obtain help for said individuals
- Desire to keep particular processes private when necessary to keep staff and students safer
- Meeting with each staff member individually to identify tools and procedures for each classroom or office, working to communicate priorities and steps if real-life incident occurs
- Caution of arming untrained personnel as other actions mentioned compensate risks without need
- Train resource officers, administrators and select staff members to approach varying situation with degree needed in an appropriate manner
- Need to dedicate more time for guidance counselors, behaviorists, social emotional staff and other members of district to address current and former students who are struggling and need assistance
- Panic buttons
- Exposure of parking lot and accessibility of vehicles during critical times of the day when mass persons outside such as bus arrival or dismissal or recess
- Adding cost of resource office to facility use form or cost of door monitor as expense needing to be paid in advance
- Appointment access to schools and visual verification with access only to main offices, not rest of school
- Request for follow-up, next steps, notifications to parents and continual communication moving forward

During various parts of the discussion, Dr. DeFabiis, Ms. Simon and Chief Greco provided clarification and understanding of current procedures in place. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Active shooter drills and other important drills have been in place and practiced for over a decade

- Training by police in area is not limited to schools and practiced elsewhere on an on-going basis for critical situations such as mentioned during the meeting this evening
- Officer Gilmurray is directly assigned to the schools through a shared services arrangement
- Other police officers come to the school during each shift
- Officers are armed
- Township has access to security cameras in the District, and working to enhance said access as deemed necessary by all parties
- Additional training will be occurring for key persons in main offices by Township Police Department to ensure better screening techniques among other priorities relating to security
- All aspects of security from personnel to physical structures to processes is reviewed on an ongoing basis, with actions undertaken when deemed necessary to improve structures
- Parents are an integral part of the process and should listen to children, be alert and notify police and district at first signs so investigation can occur
- Parents might be inconvenienced as modifications to existing procedures are implemented, and ask to be patient
- This is a team-effort by everyone and everyone needs to be on-board to be successful

After asking if anyone else wanted to speak and finding no persons wanting further time, Ms. Simon closed public comment. Mr. Zwerling, Board member, stressed the importance of observing children and neighbors to report any unusual fascination with firearms, animal cruelty or suspicious behavior.

Dr. DeFabiis thanked everyone for their participation and ideas. It was stated that meetings have already been held and processes are actively being modified. Principal are being incorporated to help fortify the entrances to the school buildings and other ideas such as the above among others have been discussed and will be discussed moving forward. Certain steps can be implemented immediately, while others may take more time such as in the summer. Although the contract of Dr. DeFabiis ends in June, transition and synchronization with incoming person will be a priority particularly on school security. Chief Greco expressed that everyone must be vigilant and actively communicate. Dr. DeFabiis furthered the point indicating all parties including children, parents, police, staff, administrators, board and others must work collaboratively for the district to succeed. Dr. DeFabiis expressed his thoughts on recent investigations performed by Chief Greco and the police department involving the District. The key is for everyone to work collectively and thoroughly. Dr. DeFabiis hopes to share draft minutes of this discussion shortly after February 27. Please anticipate a Superintendent's Report later this school year as a follow-up to this discussion. Dr. DeFabiis concluded by saying his door is always open.