

Clinton Schools: A safe environment

Last spring, in an attempt to learn more about the reasons that families chose to open enroll their children out of our district, the Clinton Community School Board surveyed parents about their reasons for choosing the open enrollment option.

Among things that were learned, we found that some families expressed concern about the Clinton schools not being a safe environment for their children. These concerns troubled me greatly and as a result, I decided to try to learn if our schools are safe and about what the CCSD does to provide a safe environment.

Here is what I learned.

With the renovation of existing buildings as well as our new schools there have been a number of safety upgrades. Each building now has a system where all doors except for one are locked during the school day. Where necessary, a safety camera monitors that door and a defined check-in procedure is in place to ensure that no one gets into the schools that should not be there.

Each building contains surveillance cameras located strategically throughout the inside and outside of the buildings. Regular safety checks are conducted in order to ensure that doors are locked, cameras are working, hazardous materials are properly stored etc. Our district has been fortunate to be able to work with an agent from the Department of Homeland Security who has helped review and establish safety procedures as well as make recommendations on how our physical environment can be made safer.

In fact, our district has been cited by this agent as an example to be copied

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by other districts.

As many know, bullying and harassment has been a widespread issue for schools and families across the nation. The improper and unsupervised use of social media among students has contributed greatly to this growing concern.

The CCSD has a specific district policy used by all building administrators to address issues of bullying and harassment. The policy ensures that a thorough investigation is conducted and that a continuum of consequences is in place for those found guilty of such actions. In addition, guidance counselors provide proactive support by working closely with students and staff in order to educate and prevent issues of bullying.

Guidance counselors, teaching staff and building administrators are also central components of Positive Behavioral Instruction and Supports, a program utilized by all buildings in our district that emphasizes the recognition of students who are modeling appropriate behavior and following school rules as well as establishing positive relationships with students and their families.

By emphasizing these positives, negative behaviors such as fights and shows of disrespect have decreased in all buildings. In fact, data for behavior referrals shows that all schools have seen a decrease in their student referrals for behavior problems.

In 1995, the Clinton district began using School Resource Officers (SROs) in their buildings. This program, in my opinion, has led to major advances in school safety over the past two decades. While many may believe that the main role of the SRO is to break up fights and to charge students who have committed criminal acts, this is actually a very small part of their job.

According to the SROs, their primary goal is to develop relationships with students so that they can help to create a safe and socially motivating atmosphere in which they can learn. By being visible and developing relationships, our SROs are able to prevent situations from becoming more serious.

During my meeting with the SROs, they were able to tell me about a number of different situations that could have become dangerous without their early intervention. When students see these officers during lunch, passing time, on the playgrounds during recess and before and after school, they develop a sense of trust that enables them to feel comfortable to report a situation that may become harmful or dangerous. The SROs have also been instrumental in providing ALICE training for all staff and students throughout the district.

ALICE is a nationally recognized and supported program that deals with how schools should respond in the event that an armed intruder should enter the building. Of course, this scenario is everybody's worst nightmare, but as we have sadly learned, it is

something that can happen in any community.

I feel fortunate that should the unthinkable occur, our children and staff could respond in a way that may prevent or minimize the consequences. I cannot emphasize enough how fortunate I think our district is to have the SRO program available. We are the only district in the immediate area to have SRO's in our building, and I firmly believe that our schools and community are much safer because of their presence.

So, in conclusion, I believe that the Clinton Schools are a very safe place for our children to attend. Larger schools always have more students doing things, both good and bad when compared to smaller schools. More truancy, more students on the honor role. More student conflict, more students taking AP courses. More behavior referrals, more participation in the fine arts programs.

I hope that when people are considering where to send their children to school, they take these things into account. The efforts made throughout the school district to provide our students with a safe environment is exemplary. District administration as well as our school board will continue to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to providing our students and staff with the safest possible environment in which to attend school.

I'd like to thank all district administrators as well as Corporal Pat Cullen and Officers Matt Lorenzen and Shane Haskell for their contributions to this article.

Eric Gettes is a Clinton School Board member.

