

Littleton Public Schools
Safety and Mental Health Advisory Committee
Final Report to Board of Education
June 25, 2015

Background:

Littleton Public Schools convened a Safety and Mental Health Advisory Committee (Committee) on December 2, 2014, according to the following charge from the Board of Education:

The Littleton Public Schools Safety and Mental Health Advisory Committee will operate as a short-term advisory group to the superintendent and Board of Education under the following charge:

The committee's scope of work is in the following three areas.*

- *Safety and Security*
- *Mental Health*
- *Communication Systems*

What are the recommendations and best practices for the future based on current practices, protocols, procedures, training, staffing and crisis management?

What changes have been made or are planned as a result of lessons learned? In what areas are there opportunities for improvement?

A report for the Board of Education will be completed citing committee recommendations for the future based on discussion and information reviewed. An interim report will be presented in March 2015 with a final report in June 2015.

**the areas within each broad category will be further defined.*

Committee Process:

The Committee is comprised of 26 members from a cross section of the greater Littleton community, selected by LPS administration, with one Board member as a liaison, two District liaisons who are members of the Superintendent's staff, and facilitated by an outside consultant. The full Committee met over the course of seven months, on ten different dates, between December 2, 2014 and June 10, 2015, including two Saturday morning meetings and a community input session on April 22, 2015.

The Committee agreed to working norms which included norms for collaborating, conducting meetings, confidentiality, communication, and reaching consensus. The Committee was divided into three working subgroups, each facilitated by an identified Committee member, working in smaller groups to identify strengths and commendations in each of the three identified focus areas, (Safety and Security, Mental Health, Communication) as well as to develop recommendations for improvement in each of these areas. Ultimately the work of the three subgroups was brought to the full Committee where consensus was reached around the contents of this final report.

To facilitate common knowledge and understandings by the full Committee, presentations were provided as follows:

- **School Safety and Security**, presented by Guy Grace, LPS Director of Security
January 14, 2015

- **Mental Health Services in LPS**, presented by Melissa Cooper, LPS Director of Special Education/Student Support and Nate Thompson, LPS Director of Social, Emotional and Behavioral Services February 11 and March 11, 2015
- **Evidence-Based Approaches to School Safety, Security and Emergency Preparedness**, presented by Michael Dorn, Safe Havens International
Considerations for Psychological Safety and Resource Mapping, Suicide and Threat Management presented by Dr. Linda Kanan, Adjunct Faculty, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver February 28, 2015
- **Communications Briefing**, presented by Diane Leiker, LPS Director of Communications and Mark Lindstone, LPS Chief Information Officer March 11, 2015

In addition to the April 22 community input meeting, the community had the opportunity to give input via online, between April 14 and May 15. In total, the Committee received input from 53 individuals, a combination of parents of currently enrolled students, staff, parents of former students, former staff, neighbors and grandparents. An overview of the themes of that input is in the next section of this report.

In addition to the speakers, Committee members were given extensive reading material such as best practices for school security, building design features to enhance school safety and security, strategies for safer schools, LPS security timelines, history and overview, documents related to suicide intervention and threat assessment, improving mental health in schools, student perspective on mental health, an LPS mental health position paper related to history, best practices, current practices and recommendations, a framework for safe schools, measuring school climate, resource mapping, among other documents.

It soon became apparent that the charge to the Committee represents very in-depth, complex and critical issues which require greater study and analysis than the timeframe set for this committee's work. Given that understanding, the Committee determined that the outcome for this report would represent our collective best thinking so far, recognizing that there is more extensive work to be done. A recommendation in that regard is included in this report.

Overview of Community Input:

The Committee developed the following general observations of the community input:

- The comments reflect a range of opinions.
- Many of the comments represent elements of discussions that the Committee had in our work.
- There were a range of beliefs expressed about communication from the District, representing support as well as beliefs that it could be done better.
- There were also a range of beliefs shared about mental health supports, from mental health supports done well in the schools to perceptions of limited support provided.
- There were a range of beliefs provided related to safety and security, representing support as well as ideas for changes that could be made.
- Based on this limited feedback, it appears that the community is not generally aware of the District threat assessment protocol, including what information can or cannot be shared. A general observation is that there needs to be more information shared with parents regarding LPS practices.
- There appears to be some pressure to assure the community that we are being systematic, and that the District is creating transparency through this Committee.
- Another observation is that based on the range of beliefs of those responding, it is difficult to know how to please everyone; and that if this feedback represents a microcosm of the community, it is a challenge to know where to go next with the work, but that it's obvious that the work is important.

- It is clear that different people receive communication and information in a range of different ways, also resulting in different interpretations of the same information.
- Some of the input reflected empathy with the responsibilities of public schools today.
- Comments also reflected concerns about the importance of mental health in students – for students (and staff) to have healthy habits for dealing with pressure and stress. Also emerging were themes around cultural issues of over-emphasis on achievement at all cost, lack of resiliency in students if the “plan” doesn’t work, and not having a back-up plan.
- Some providing input were clear that the District couldn’t (and shouldn’t) handle the issues of student stress and resiliency on its own but that parents and students themselves needed to increase their mindfulness and skills in this area, striving for balance of goals and healthy living tools and habits.
- Another observation is that many of those providing input were solution oriented, providing critical feedback but with solutions included.
- It seems clear to Committee members that, based on this feedback and other observations, that there are still questions in the community regarding the Arapahoe tragedy, in areas such as what existed before and what has changed as a result, what were the lessons learned and on a District wide scale, what changes have been made.
- Another clear message included the value of allowing students to make mistakes, get help and redeem themselves.
- Based on comments from students, there is clearly a value in obtaining and listening to student perspectives and feedback related to these important topics.
- There clearly is value in asking the community for input and feedback to this important work.
- The Committee felt that many of the comments were reinforcing that the Committee work is on the right path and needs to continue.

Identifying Values:

As the Committee had continuing discussions around the critical issues related to school safety and security, mental health and communication, the importance of identifying underlying community values became evident. While not included in the charge from the Board of Education, it is our belief that identifying these values is a critical way to inform priority recommendations, LPS action planning, and ultimately next steps for LPS related to this critical work. This represents our current thinking to date and is not necessarily all inclusive. The Committee has identified the following values that we recommend to the Board of Education:

Overarching: The Committee believes it is critical to provide recommendations to the Board of Education regarding priority needs, regardless of potential cost.

Safety:

1. Schools should not be a fortress. Finding a balance of safety and welcoming school climate is critical.
2. Safety considerations need to be inclusive of student priorities and school culture.
3. Regardless of precautions, not all acts of school violence can be prevented. We will continue to have high standards around school safety and security and implement recommended practices based on our own learning, lessons learned, research and guidance from recognized state and national experts.
4. An integrated security system across the District is critically important and cost effective.
5. Continuing strong and ongoing collaborative relationships with law enforcement and other first responders, as well as community mental health providers is of high value.

Mental Health:

1. Families are primarily responsible for the mental health and well-being of their children. Schools and the community at large have an important and supporting role in this.
2. Any mental health interventions need to be evidence/research based.
3. Students need opportunities for second chances, for recoverability, and opportunities to learn from their mistakes.
4. A working environment that values and enhances the mental health and well-being of all District staff is of critical importance.

Communication:

The greater LPS community values consistent, transparent, timely, positive, and relevant communication about the District as a whole. Opportunities for dialogue and two way communication, as well as sharing LPS strengths, achievements and stories need to be our continuing focus. Littleton has always had a rich tradition of working within the organization and with the community to acknowledge challenges and shortcomings as well as to collectively take actions to address them. We encourage that this continue.

System Strengths:

Identifying current strengths was an important part of our work. Following the various presentations and review of documents, the Committee identified the following strengths and assets of the District. While we believe there are additional strengths, this represents our work to date.

Safety and Security:

- District level security systems are strong, relevant and consistent across District buildings
- There is strong and consistent collaboration between District security and law enforcement jurisdictions as well as other first responders
- Law enforcement agencies (both jurisdictions serving LPS) think highly of District security staff, practices, its collaboration, and consistent communication with law enforcement
- District security responds 24/7 related to any issues regarding students and/or District property
- The Safe-2-Tell system is integrated into District practices
- There are increased School Resource Officers (SROs) at District middle and high schools. Littleton Police Department and Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office have increased the number of SROs in District schools from five to eight SROs. An increase of one SRO from Littleton Police and a "floating" elementary SRO from Arapahoe County (shared between LPS and Cherry Creek Schools) is planned for 2015-16. The District and cities of Littleton and Centennial have increased their ongoing financial commitment to increase SRO staffing.
- The SROs have constructive and valuable working relationships with District staff, with students and among themselves
- District safety drills and table top exercises result in staff and students responding appropriately in emergencies
- SROs have presented age appropriate safety information to various elementary schools
- District security has radio interoperability with local law enforcement
- The community appreciates the increase in safety features that were already good, but have been improved even more.

Mental Health:

- There is strong and constructive collaboration between District security and mental health personnel
- Significant collaboration exists between the District and community mental health agencies
- The District has a strong history of addressing social, emotional and behavioral challenges in students through various programs and strong community partnerships
- There are many programs in District schools addressing different aspects of student emotional and mental health
- The District has recently added significant school site mental health staffing to existing staff, a notable financial commitment. Between 2013-2015, 8 additional mental health staff were added to middle and high schools, 2.5 mental health staff added for district wide supports, all elementary schools now have at least a .5 mental health professional beyond the staffing for special education, and the Village preschool program received an increase of .6 mental health staffing.
- Consistent District practices are in place for threat assessments and suicide risk intervention
- A multi-disciplinary team is in place at the District level for oversight and review of all threat assessments and to respond to individual cases as needed
- A well trained mental health crisis response team is in place to respond and support during and after crises
- The District is maintaining statistics on threat assessments to maintain quality assurance and find any gaps in the process
- The District is maintaining suicide intervention statistics to determine if staff are intervening with success

Communication:

- District communications are provided through a variety of resources
- The District's use of Infinite Campus, a student information system, provides for timely and accurate communication to students' parents and guardians. Of course this is dependent upon the accuracy of information provided to the District. (Infinite Campus is used as a student data repository and collection tool for student enrollment, grades, attendance, discipline, schedules, course master list, athletic/activity information, transcripts, transportation, student fees, etc.)
- The District's identification of "key communicators" facilitates accurate and timely communication to a segment of the greater LPS community, primarily for those who do not have students enrolled in LPS schools
- The District has a decision making process that they use when determining who gets what type of communication related to any particular issue or incident
- Challenges are recognized around legal protections of student information and implications for various communication content

Priority Recommendations to the Board of Education:

Following extensive small and large group discussions, and after reaching consensus, the Committee respectfully makes the following recommendations for Board of Education consideration. They reflect what we as a group consider the highest priorities based on our work to date, and are listed in no particular priority order.

A recurring theme in many of our discussions relates to an overarching issue that we believe needs to be stated clearly. While we don't have immediate solutions or action steps identified, we believe that the District has an opportunity through this Committee and other avenues to be a leader and talk about a difficult and complex issue:

We believe that LPS and the greater community recognize an emphasis on high achievement and high performance with the unintended consequences of creating a climate for mental health issues and pressures on students. Given that, there need to be supports for students (and by extension parents) around coping skills, resiliency and recovery.

Safety and Security Recommendations:

1. That there be uniform, consistent, ongoing and specific safety and security training across the District
This includes appropriate and relevant training for all LPS staff and students, providing tiered trainings (differentiated for specific age and level), relevant to their particular District role/responsibilities. Also included should be substitutes, parents, volunteers and guests, with relevant and modified information and instructions according to their role. We encourage use of various methods and communication tools for the trainings.
2. That there be a consistent numbering/designation system for all District buildings, including classrooms, meeting rooms, other rooms and building areas, including outside doors; with the designation marked on both the inside and outside of the room, maintained for internal reference as well as for first responders
Utilizing law enforcement guidelines, or collaboration with law enforcement is encouraged.
3. That the District continue to determine and support consistent and regularly scheduled drills for all schools and district buildings (and adjust for lessons learned)
Differentiation for school and student level, as well as purpose of the building (i.e. district office vs. school) is recommended to continue.
4. That annually, the District conduct a review of data and processes in place (or missing) related to school security, with resulting adjustments made as appropriate
5. That there be a safety and security audit every three to five years by an external, recognized expert
We recommend that the audit come from a completely neutral source and not one that advocates a particular, for profit program or structure, possibly utilizing existing resources for the audit such as local law enforcement or security teams from other districts (added benefit of sharing ideas and resources between districts).

Mental Health Recommendations:

1. That a District wide priority be greater emphasis on mental health supports for students at the preschool and elementary levels, resulting in increased mental health staffing and services
This includes systems in place to ensure consistent access for any child to receive District mental health supports, across preschool programs and elementary schools
2. That the District needs to designate research/evidence based interventions, in identified priority areas, that schools can choose from, with the understanding that every school must have research/evidence based interventions in the identified priority areas
Examples might include bullying, suicide prevention/intervention, school wide behavior interventions, etc. The Committee recognizes that adequacy of staffing and oversight for alignment and fidelity are critical elements of this recommendation.
3. That the District increase efforts to enhance development of community mental health partnerships through a “mental health resource liaison” for clusters of schools, to help schools and families identify what the mental health needs are and improve ease of access to mental health resources and supports
This includes identifying and strengthening existing resources.
4. That there be a district wide, minimum level of mental health staffing identified for all school sites (perhaps differentiated by level and need)
The Committee recommends that this District priority be funded from a source other than school site FTE allocation

Communication Recommendations:

1. That the District review and regularly revisit the communication process, purpose, strategies and team structure to ensure that they provide timely, transparent, equitable, accessible, and balanced information to foster community knowledge and understanding, confidence and trust.
The Committee recommends a priority for balance of legally required information, program information, schedules etc., District and school achievements and human connections. We urge proactive efforts, telling more stories behind the events and the people involved, not solely the events, etc.

Continuing the Work of the Committee:

The Committee is recommending that the Board of Education consider renewing the charge of the Safety and Mental Health Advisory Committee as a community voice to advise the Board related to best practices and further recommendations for improvement in the areas of safety and security, mental health and communication systems.

As stated earlier in this report, it quickly became apparent that this work is complex and requires deeper study and analysis than the initial timeframe could allow. The Committee envisions that, among other priorities:

- continuing the Committee would build off of existing knowledge and momentum to avoid delay in furthering the work
- work would include assessing, refining, addressing and prioritizing the remaining items identified by the Committee but not included in this initial report, as well as more in-depth review of best practices in the three focus areas and advising the Board and District administration regarding areas of strength and opportunities for continuous improvement
- Committee work would include review of outcomes of internal audits in the three areas of focus and advise the Board and District administration regarding next steps
- engaging with the broader LPS community, in a way determined by the Board, LPS administration and the Committee, would foster an ongoing dialogue regarding community values and priorities in the areas of safety and security, mental health and communication systems
- work of the Committee could include monitoring the progress of the statewide committee established by SB 214 and establishing relevance to the District

We envision similar composition to the current Committee, with many Committee members interested in continuing to serve the District in this work, with of course, the possibility of additional members. We believe that the student voice is critical to this work and encourage more student representatives.

As with other District advisory committees, we envision monthly meetings on a set schedule, a District administrative liaison and accountability to the Board of Education through regular reports and presentations related to the work.

Pending a Board of Education decision related to whether the Committee will continue, we encourage anyone reading this report to direct any questions or need for clarification to Assistant Superintendents Diane Doney or Mike Jones.

Lastly, the Committee would like to commend the Board of Education and District administration for convening this Committee and being open to the outcome of this work. Throughout this process, staff have been responsive and timely in providing information that we have requested, presenting important data and information related to the areas of study, and brought in recognized experts to provide a state and nationwide context to the work. We want to thank Mary Nichols for serving the Committee as Board liaison, Diane Doney, Assistant Superintendent, Business Services/Chief Financial Officer and Mike Jones, Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources who have served as Administrative liaisons, Annette Fante, who served as the group's facilitator, and Janella Ferrie, Administrative Assistant, Human Resources who capably took care of the many logistics and took minutes of all meetings.

As in many things, Littleton Public Schools is again a leader in inviting study of the critical areas of safety and security, mental health, and communication systems, with the collective intended goal to improve outcomes in these areas for students, staff, families and the greater LPS community.

We appreciate the opportunity to serve Littleton Public Schools.

Respectfully submitted,

The Safety and Mental Health Advisory Committee

Signatures of individual Committee members follow on the next page

Mauri Capps, Voyager Counselor

Cathy Noon, Mayor, City of Centennial

Joseph Elias, Student, Littleton High School

Sean O'Shea, Parent, Binning Foundation, GLYI Chair

Henry Fischer, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist

Alissa Rausch, Parent, Faculty, CU Denver

Summer Guerrina, Assistant Principal, Falcon Bluffs Middle School

Robert Reichardt, Parent, Financial Advisory Committee, District Advisory Committee

Molly Haag, Student, Heritage High School
former Arapahoe High School Student

Stacey Riendeau, Principal, Heritage High School

Mary Haney, Littleton Educators Association President

Tiffany Ritchie, School Psychologist, Powell MS

Tammy Harimon, Parent, District Advisory Committee Chair

Tonette Salazar, Education Commission of the States State Liaison

Gary Hein, Principal, Euclid Middle School

Nancy Seavall, Parent, PPC President

Meredith Henry, LPS Social Worker

Nancy Sharpe, Arapahoe County Commissioner

Lucinda Hundley, Special Education Legislative Consortium

Jenny Shoen, Special Education Teacher, Moody Elementary School

Angie Johnson, Parent, Systems Accountant
US Fish and Wildlife Service

Bruce Stahlman, Littleton City Council

Mary McGlone, LPS Foundation President

Doug Stephens, Chief, Littleton Police Department

John Melkonian, Principal, Franklin Elementary School

Jim Stephens, Parent, Citizens Bond Oversight Committee, Littleton Council of Educator Effectiveness