

Superintendent Forum
Wednesday, December 12, 2018
TMS 4:00 – 5:30 PM

Superintendent Jermain thanked everyone for attending. She began by sharing background and outlined what she was/was not able to share due to student and teacher confidentiality.

She spoke of the incident that took place last week with a bat involved. At this point in time all disciplinary actions have been taken. The district has a zero tolerance policy for weapons and any behaviors of this nature.

For any infractions a Principal is able to suspend for five days and may appeal to the Superintendent to add 5 additional days. A mental health evaluation is required and a 45 day placement can be made after the initial 10 day suspension. A follow up report is given back to administration for determination as to whether the student can be brought back to school in the district. A child may also be provided tutoring or be placed in an out of district placement. If the parent does not agree with determination, the Newport School Committee has the ability to suspend for the remainder of the year. Tutoring must be provided for the child. The school committee may increase the suspension up to the remainder of the school year if the superintendent requests this.

Actions and behaviors of this nature are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. There are internal discussions taking place about hall monitoring, being alert, watching what all are saying and doing. Yesterday (Tuesday) an assembly was held with 7th and 8th graders, and another age appropriate assembly will take place tomorrow (Thursday) for grades 5 and 6. The Newport School Committee met yesterday to review policies, practices and procedures. Information will be shared with community within a week.

Counseling is available for students and staff. EAP – Employee Assistance Program is provided for staff. Newport County Mental Health is available for students and staff. There is a school psychologist, mental health, and guidance counselors on site, as well as a schools social worker. This is not the TMS we are nor is it the TMS we want to be. We need to take action to make improvements and we are taking this very seriously, to be on alert, and students need to know that we are here for them. Communications practices within and outside the school with families needs to improve. Protocols and practices are being revised so that everyone is on the same page.

Forums are being held to provide facts and also serve as a “listening tour”. The notes will be shared so that the community will hear what people are saying and what actions we need to take as next steps. The Superintendent cannot speak about specific children. Disciplinary actions to their fullest have been implemented.

Parent asked about policy of notification to parents – Superintendent responded that communication was not acceptable. Communication was sent out at 10:30 to staff that morning. Information had not

been sent out to parents – the district is changing the procedure. Going forward, information will be sent out as timely as possible to staff and parents; the TMS incident was an important learning experience.

Parent stated that there is an issue with Zero Tolerance because there are children that do not feel safe in school and there is a lack of responsibility from staff and parents. The school has never abided by the zero tolerance policy and stated that this incident should have never happened. Staff needs to follow zero tolerance policy. If parents have to stay out of work for student suspension – they must make arrangements to do so. It starts at home; nothing will change until the policy is followed.

A parent stated that incidences must be reported and we have to prevent weapons from getting into school. The police station is across the street. We need metal detectors in the school. We need to prevent this from happening.

Superintendent followed up on metal detector comment and asked for community input on metal detectors at the front door. Many parents were not opposed and were focused on protecting students and preventing incidents from happening; security cameras only show what has already occurred. Others stated that a bat would not have been detected. All agree that children must feel safe and bullying should not be tolerated. When a child(ren) make threats to the school or others, educators and police need to listen. Everyone needs to work together and listen to one another. Parents want action.

Question arose about how budget cuts are impacting staff. Statement was made that more and more kids are being brought back into schools. Superintendent responded that the budget is being worked on but we also need to focus on what can be done now and asked for everyone's perspective. Zero Tolerance topic came up again and wonders regarding whether student behaviors are being addressed by teachers.

Parent comment regarding bullying: Bullying needs to be addressed. This is a huge problem and the entire community needs to come together to solve the problem. After the school assembly, many students felt as though the incident was their fault and felt guilty. A bullying program should be in place in the school. Parents must be notified of incidents in school. The parent shared information of an app that is available for incidents to be reported anonymously. Children do not want to be known as a "snitch" and many are afraid to report OR feel as though adults are not listening. Others agreed that children need to be protected and wonder about procedures that are in place to protect those that report "see something/say something". Another parent commented that their child did not want to attend school because of ongoing bullying. Adults need to be awareness and listen to what students are reporting.

Parents also commented on the importance of dealing with the issue of dealing with bullying now. Many students do not tell their parents or teachers. They need to be able to talk to police, teachers, and parents. The parent is also concerned about the procedures in place on the day of the incident. Students were ushered into classrooms and there was a delay in bringing all students together for an

assembly. Opinion is that the assembly should have taken place sooner. It was also asked if the Superintendent was aware of the situation. Superintendent responded that she went to the building after learning of the incident and spoke with students and teachers and also returned to the building at dismissal time.

Parent commented that she sees a huge disconnect between teachers and administration. They are not on the same page. All need to be on the same page before anything is said to the parents. Budget cuts should not be an issue; give teachers what they need. In her opinion, teachers should have been required to be at the forum to ask and answer questions.

A community member stated that there must be accountability. Their child survived bullying at the school and has since enrolled in a private school. Does the TMS principal or administration have comments? The Superintendent responded that she scheduled the series of forums to hear from community. She hears loudly and clearly the concerns on bullying, adults listening, and security for our schools. Ultimately, the Superintendent is responsible.

Discussion followed on discipline. Parents commented on suspensions and stated that the school is quick to suspend, but should focus on getting to the root of the problem. Students must be educated and suspension is not always the answer. Teachers need incentives and resources. There are outside factors at home that effect student behaviors. Students should be encouraged to be leaders, get into programs that make them successful; they need resources. Perhaps there students should come to school on Saturdays? Superintendent stated that teachers have ongoing training in Kingian non-violence, restorative practices and racial equity. We want our students in school; all facts must be considered and educational plans must be in place for all students.

Parent wondered if this situation could have been prevented. Parents need tools to help their child decide what to do if they are being bullied. Parents also state that they need to know and be called to school when there is an incident involving their child. Teachers need to take seriously anything that is reported to them; kids do not feel listened to. Bullies sometimes are portrayed as the victim. Parents need to be held accountable too for following up with the school. If a parent does not return a call to the school and cannot be reached, something needs to be done.

Superintendent responded that communication should be made from the school for every incident in which a student has been removed from the classroom by phone call and a written notification. A parent or guardian needs to know about a problem in school. Secondly, if a search of locker and/or backpack is in order, a parent must be notified. The Superintendent stated that the SRO or truancy officer will do a home visit for non-responsive families.

A community member questioned non-reporting of the incident during an unrelated meeting on the day the incident occurred. Superintendent reported that the incident was not related to the purpose of the community meeting and specific agenda items were being discussed.

A parent asked if there is an expectation that the grade 7 and 8 students will be brought together again for discussion with the administration. Those students need to feel supported and every single child deserves another meeting. There is also concern about allowing the three involved students back in school which would send a horrible message to students. The superintendent responded a follow up will occur within the next 48 hours.

The superintendent repeated that when serious actions are taken there is a wonder about why students are allowed back. Alternatively, we need to find out by listening why an incident occurred. We need to understand what drove the child to do what he/she did. It is a delicate balance and there are arguments to both sides. Most importantly, the children on both sides need support and we as a school district are responsible for their education. This takes cooperation and face to face meetings with parents and the children.

A staff member recalled that teachers stood up and talked about student behaviors in school. The union put themselves in a position of reporting behaviors and received a lot of backlash from parents and administration. Many families do not support teachers. Police officer in the building should be getting to know the students and interacting with them. Teachers were hurt in this incident. TMS needs to have a replacement for Mr. Campion since he is leaving and more police presence in the building. The solution needs to be found working together. Superintendent responded that teacher training is happening and assured that administration is listening.

Parent stated that we need to have diverse staff. Teachers need resources; fix the budget and put more salaries toward the teachers. Parents want immediate action.

Results of all group discussions will be shared and next steps will be determined.

December 13, 2018

Superintendent Community Forum

Park Holm Senior Center – 8:30 – 10:00 AM

1. Welcome - Superintendent Jermain thanked everyone for attending. The incident last week at TMS where 2 brothers attacked another student has led to disturbing fears and concerns. A “listening tour” is to get input from community members.
2. School Safety
Superintendent Jermain explained the policies in place and what happens when events like this occur and will give an update on communication system and how we failed in communication. Information went out very late and we have immediately changed the process of communications to inform parents and staff. She will not/cannot speak directly about students or names because of confidentiality but will explain practices in place.
3. Policies – there is a zero tolerance policy. A principal is allowed to suspend for up to 5 days. If principal feels offense is more serious in nature, they may apply to the Superintendent for an additional 5 days. The Superintendent cannot suspend for more than 10 days. All children must have supports and services available to improve and get better. A mental health status update is completed by internal staff and an outside consultant. Based on results, a 45 day placement for a therapeutic setting may be required. After 45, days data is sent back to the Superintendent and the team and then placement is determined. Based upon information after the 45 day placement, the administration makes a recommendation Parents may disagree with the decision and can appeal to the School Committee, who has the ability to suspend for the remainder of the school year. The district is responsible for providing education for the student – in district or out of district. Zero tolerance policy, practices and have been implemented and used.
4. Communication – as soon as an incident occurs the communication is crated right away and is reviewed by Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent for immediate release. The chain of command is followed. Newport School Committee had a meeting on Tuesday to discuss student safety and gave certain directives to the Superintendent for a report back next week. Immediate action is being taken to monitor behaviors and interact with students; Grade 5/6 assembly is being held today (Thursday); Grade 7/8 assembly was held Tuesday.

Feedback from the forum last night (Wednesday) was shared:

1. Communication – parents want to know right away and should be able to support students when they arrive home
2. Bullying – students having trouble with other students may not speak up because they are afraid and do not trust adults, OR students that are saying something feel they are not being listened to.

The Superintendent has asked that Grade 7/8 students be re-gathered for another assembly today to reassure students the incident is not their fault. Directives have been sent to building leaders.

It was determined that messages need to go home to parents by phone and in writing if their child is being bullied or if a child is bullying another. Return to school must always be accompanied by a parent. The current practice is to notify the family of the child doing the bullying; not the child that is being bullied. That practice is going to change. Trainings are ongoing with restorative justice because suspension is not a resolution; the root cause needs to be known.

Parents feel that assistance and support is needed for the family and if parents are aware, they can help and that there needs to be a procedure to stop events before they occur. Elementary school has Open Circle where almost every teacher has been trained. Parents would like the entire school community to be trained - paras, lunch aides, playground aides. Clarification is also needed on who is responsible for parent notification when a child is dismissed from the bus for inappropriate behavior.

A parent asked about restorative justice training and what is done for children that are bullies and cause disruption in schools. The Superintendent reported that there are mental health coordinators, social workers, and outside services that watch interactions between teachers and students. We need to have safety plans in place for all students to address whatever is bothering them.

Discussion followed on the importance for staff to know the "triggers" of behavioral issues, and to identify the difference between children with social emotional deficits and a child that is self-regulating. Concerns were raised about self-regulation, children with IEPs, the disparity among staffing, and fears of being recognized in school by a police presence translating into the community (inheritance of reputation).

Parent/community member comments were discussed on the responsibilities of some children at home. There is a wonder about whether police should be part of community meetings so that there are more positive interactions and celebrations with our students. Bullying is a problem; parents and schools must work together. Children are losing respect for adults; students need to know how to behave and have respect for adults. Children need to have respect for themselves so that they can respect others.

A parent noted that adults need to model behavior that we want to see our kids display. Every student is greeted at Pell. It should happen at all schools. Politeness is important and if adults display that for our students they will feel safe.

A concern was raised about whether cameras are available. Superintendent responded that RHS and Pell have cameras and a buzz in is required for all schools. RHS has a challenge with the

number of doors in the building. She also reported that metal detectors were discussed last night and she was unsure parents would feel about them. It is the standard practice for airports so it would not be completely out of the question. The TMS was an isolated incident; a horrible event, but isolated. The community needs to decide how to move forward.

Discussion followed about the sign in process and escorting guest in our schools. An ID and sign in is required in all buildings and community police officers are present in all schools. A parent noted that there is a different feeling at TMS. Students are not greeted; it is not a welcoming atmosphere.

Community members stated that they would like to gather information and work with directly with schools to help in communication and behavior. Schools need more resources; parents need to be held accountable and the community and Housing Authority must be involved. It was also suggested that time is taken from within the school day to focus on bullying with the students. It was agreed that more communication is needed and it will take involvement of the entire community to make change. Superintendent Jermain stated that as a start, guidance counselors will be at Florence Gray Center once a week to connect with students/families.

Parent comment - There is a lack of communication within the school and would like to have a dedicated communication person in each building to follow up with parents, draft messages. Secondly, after school programs are needed to get to the root problem; more avenues need to be provided for our students and they need ways to learn more about how to solve their own problems. (Yoga, meditation, and some other new way to learn about themselves – learning, writing, creating)

Superintendent thanked everyone for taking part in this important discussion.

December 13, 2018

Superintendent Public Forum

Newport Public Library – 2:00 – 3:30 PM

1. Welcome - Superintendent Jermain thanked everyone for attending. It is important to have community discussions surrounding last week's incident at Thompson Middle School.

2. School Safety

Superintendent Jermain reported that there was a hands-on fight today between two 6th grade girls; disciplinary action was taken and parents were notified.

Regarding the incident last week at Thompson Middle School, the Superintendent indicated that she cannot speak about specific students but will review policies, practices and procedures that are in place.

Polices – Principals are able to suspend for up to 5 days. Depending on seriousness of the infraction, a Principal can then appeal to the Superintendent for an additional 5 day suspension. Once 10 days passes, the School Committee has the ability to suspend for the remainder of the school year. Education is still the responsibility of the school department – in school or out of school.

When something of a high incident happens, a mental health evaluation status is provided by an outside service and district staff. The Office of Student Services reviews the report with the Superintendent for further action. Most of the time, a child is put on a 45 day therapeutic review. After 45 days, a report comes back and the next best steps are determined - out of district placement, home tutoring or return to school. Parents have the right to appeal the decision which is then brought to the Newport School Committee. The School Committee can add suspension days and educational services must always be provided. We have a zero tolerance policy.

3. The communication process has been changed. Communication *must* be sent to staff and families in a timely way.

In the two forums which have been held, bullying and communication have been discussed and the Superintendent has heard the message loudly and clearly.

There is a wonder if adults are listening to our children when they report something. Also, although some students may not verbalize a concern, there may be behaviors that adults should be aware of. There are social workers, mental health staff, and guidance counselors that are in place. Newport County Mental Health has helped to support staff and students on-site and the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has also helped staff on-site. An assembly was held with grade 7 and 8 students about see something/say something and to reassure students that they

are safe. Some parents reported that students left that meeting feeling as though they are to blame and many students were upset. Principal Sullivan will meet again with grade 7 and 8 before the weekend to let them know that this incident is not their fault, make them feel safe, and to be sure that all students know that adults are here to support them. Grades 5 and 6 are having an assembly today (Thursday) to reassure them of their safety and encourage them to report.

A question arose about what happens to the child that does report something --- who will protect them? The district has to be careful and confidential about the students that are reporting. The Superintendent reported that parents which attended the forum earlier today want to set up a community group and get information to share with the schools and help in communication.

Superintendent Jermain also reported that at last night's forum she asked for parent feedback about metal detectors in the building. The reaction was interesting; many parents are receptive to the idea others stated that weapons, such as a bat, would not be detected.

A parent stated her disappointment in the school response to parents and children. Her daughter came home from school last week with rumors about the incident that took place. The parent did not know what to say. The kids went from an academic learning environment to a gossip rumor mill and she reported that nobody in school shared any information and students were upset. Her child, and friends, have shared that they do not feel safe. Students are not reassured when they come from Pell to TMS. Information is reinforced at Pell and students are disciplined. She is for metal detectors.

Parent asked if there was bullying going on that wasn't handled. What is happening on the supportive end? Is anything explained to the children on how things will happen? Superintendent explained that training has been underway. Pell has Open Circle. TMS has seen Kingian non-violence and equity training. Family of the child that is the bully is contacted; the child that was being bullied was not necessarily contacted. That practice has immediately changed. Outside agencies are also available in our buildings. See something/say something – the kids know how to report, but they need to know that they will be watched out for after they do report. The other importance is to notify parents by phone call and a written report. Another good point is at the re-entry process – there is a safety plan put in place. If there has been conflict within families, there has to be a mediator and meeting with parents and students.

Parent stated that the building leader has to go back and admit that the message was not relayed appropriately, they take responsibility, and they need to be sincere. The Superintendent assured that this will take place.

A relative of one of the children involved said that the situation has not been reported accurately by the media.

The nurse's office is also a safe place for students.

It was reported that parents do not always know when their children are suspended. Is the parent brought into a conversation immediately if a child is saying that they are being bullied? A student was being bullied and the mom is supporting her but is not getting feedback from the school. Superintendent Jermain stated that she has discussed this with the staff and aligns with what she has heard from parents. It is important to make the family aware of it as soon as possible. There is a need to have an interpreter available in the school for communication home to parents. Often times, when the Superintendent is speaking with a parent, it is reported to her by the parent that their child has never been in trouble; to the contrary she has disciplinary actions listed in front of her and knows that more communication is needed.

Parent stated that there needs to be a closing the loop if no response is received back from the parent. If a student gets suspended and there is no acknowledgement from the parent then the follow up needs to happen.

A parent stated that there was an incident the day before and she was not notified; she stated that it should have been addressed and that "everyone knew this was going to happen". Superintendent Jermain replied that the wrong name was given to the school. When this situation was unfolding the Asst. Principal was with the wrong student beginning the investigation.

Question arose about whether the schools have avenues for students to feel safe and articulate the process of what happens when you report something. The Superintendent reported that the district works closely with Boys and Girls Club; a guidance counselor will now spend time at the Florence Gray Center to give students access. Newport County Mental Health has been a huge support to students and staff. Merrie Scott, Community Police Officer is at TMS, Officer Brett is at RHS and Pell has an officer as well. Health Equity Zone and Women's Resource Center also help families.

A question arose about lockdown procedures and if the school went into lockdown last week? Superintendent responded that the incident occurred as children were entering school. When the bat was seen, it was grabbed. The School Resource Officer was there immediately. The rest of the staff knew to put children into classrooms and close the doors. Children were put in safe places and stayed in safe places while the situation was being handled. First floor children were unaware until later in the day as students were brought to the dean, main office, etc. The school did not go into lockdown. The walkie-talkie and a runner are important as means of communication to the main office.

How about the police officers? Are they NPD or school staff? The police officers are not school department staff.

Community Forum # 4
Friday, December 14th

Communication, mentors, adults that will listen to children and work with them to be successful were common themes to this meeting.

TMS needs to build community – and get the teachers and leadership together to work with and for the students. They need to remember that these are little human beings that need attention and they are learning.

Children know when an adult is being authentic or not. Adults need to get to know the child before he/she can teach the child.

Children come from very different backgrounds. Children fight, brothers stick up for their brothers.

Staff needs a clear plan on what to do when a child gets involved in a fight; parents need to know the process and what they should do if a child gets in trouble and understand what the school does, what they should do as parents; what the expectations are of families and the school to work with each other;

The school needs to communicate more with the families and students.

There is a disconnect; trusted adults are needed; we are an urban school district in a suburban setting; our teachers do not look like our students; we need more diversity; more diversity training;

Some were for metal detectors – some not; they do not want the school to be a pipeline to prison; others want the backpacks checked before entering the building and wondered how we do that.

How are we measuring our young's success and if we are reaching them? Some wondered do we have good measuring methods.

Schools almost need a glossary and definitions of practices and procedures; have it posted on the website and shared with parents often; children need to be clear; staff needs to be clear and consistent and parents/community need to be clear on how the school operates and who to contact when there are questions.

We need to educate our community.

How do we support efforts to get the community more involved? People at the meeting wanted to work with the schools and community to support the students and teachers. We need to encourage and urge parents to be involved. This forum is a great opportunity.

There is a group called the Kings Men that is organized 15-19 men to help young male students learn they can have a better life and do better; to help support and mentor; the

Superintendent asked an article be written about them be done and create a plan to see how they can help TMS.

Find the influencers with the students; who are the student influencers and leaders that can help the school and teachers.

We need to look for proactive/preventive programs. We need to provide a platform and place for students to be able to share their concerns and feel safe while doing this.

School services: social workers, nurses, mental health counselors, community volunteers.

Newport Public Schools-Communication Process

As soon as something happens on campus and/or off-campus that puts students in danger or perceived danger, **emails will be drafted**. Emails will be sent to the faculty, staff and students and another to the parents. These emails go out as soon as possible. If it's an incident on campus, notification will happen **within 60 minutes**.

- If it is a building situation- principals will handle and can work with Communications Coordinator and/ or Administrative Assistant . Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent must approve before message is distributed.
- If it is a districtwide event- i.e. weather, messaging will come out of the Superintendent's Office.

Include the following components: (if applicable)

- a) What happened (in as much detail as legally allowable)?
- b) How did it affect the victim/perpetrators?
- c) What did school/district do to or for the victim and perpetrators?
- d) What did school/district do to protect other students?
- e) What tools are available to the school/ community with respect to counseling services, grief counseling, etc?
- f) What is the plan to avoid (if possible) the incident from happening again?
- g) Always, always an offer to TALK/Communicate to community members if they have follow-up questions.

A rapid-response process is needed so that parents, guardians and teachers hear from the district and or school **first** that something has happened.

This process allows building/district members to have factual details when they hear something outside of school and can prevent misinformation from circulating.