



NEWS RELEASE

Superintendent of Schools and President, Perth Amboy Board of Education

February 28, 2023

For Immediate Release

Dear Perth Amboy School Community:

This last week has been an extremely difficult time for our community, in particular, for the two families directly impacted. Our school community is thankful that the student is stable. We will continue to provide support, wherever we can, on his road to recovery.

Our school community has been continuously under attack, even though the incident did not occur on school grounds or under school supervision. Unfounded and irresponsible accusations were made to the media and traveled through countless social media accounts. Our students were mischaracterized, mislabeled, and manipulated. The Perth Amboy Federation of Teachers (PA-AFT), on their social media accounts, encouraged our students to walk out of school in violation of school rules into a situation that potentially compromised their safety. The freedom of speech of our young citizens is undeniably tantamount to our American values, but it is the motive of those inciting our students that is to be questioned. Through all of it, our dedicated and hardworking educators continued to maintain order, professionalism and tended to the needs of our students and fellow colleagues who were in crisis. For that, we will be forever grateful.

As the Perth Amboy School Community continues to heal, we want to share some of the actions that we had already taken to promote safety along with the following steps:

1. **Armed School Security Personnel**. On the agenda for Board of Education approval, there will be a recommendation for the appointment of several armed security guards, with a corresponding stipend. These guards will be confidentially and strategically assigned to various school buildings as soon as possible. It is the goal of the District to increase the armed security guards to every building in the next few months.

The administration has been researching and recommending the addition of armed security guards prior to June 2022. The Board previously approved the job description for Armed School Security Personnel at its November 17, 2022, board meeting.

Security guards are members of the Perth Amboy Federation of Teachers, requiring the Board to negotiate the stipend for those armed guards. The District has been attempting to negotiate the stipend of the armed security guards with the PA-AFT since mid-October 2022. In addition to several conversations, the Board Attorney corresponded with the PA-AFT Attorney regarding the negotiations of a sidebar agreement on October 17, 2022; October 20, 2022; November 23, 2022; and January 4, 2023.

Despite the allegations of the PA-AFT leadership, that they raised concerns regarding the safety of our students, **THE PA-AFT NEVER RESPONDED TO THE DISTRICT'S REQUEST TO NEGOTIATE A STIPEND FOR ARMING SEVERAL SECURITY GUARDS.**

2. **Metal Detectors.** On the agenda for Board of Education approval, there will be the recommendation for the Board to adopt a policy and authorize the purchase of walk-through and / or hand-held metal detectors at any school activity, within school buildings, District buildings, and on school grounds.

The administration has been researching the use of metal detectors prior to June 2022. The research included visits to other school districts in Middlesex County that were actively using metal detectors, a live demonstration of a weapons detection system, and the draft of a policy on metal detectors for approval. As some of you recall, it was publicly discussed at the November 17, 2022, Board meeting. However, it was determined that the community was not prepared for metal detectors in our schools, and the matter was not placed on the agenda for approval.

3. **“Backpack” Searches.** Pending receipt of the metal detectors, the administration is revising a policy for board approval for “backpack” searches. Parents and students should be put on notice that all backpacks are subject to search in accordance with applicable law and will be instituted, once the policy is Board approved.
4. **Emergency Operations Center.** In July 2022, as delineated in our newsletter, we developed an Emergency Operations Center to enhance our District safety operations. The District is taking extra measures to continue to monitor surveillance cameras by assigning an individual whose sole responsibility will be to monitor the surveillance cameras at all of our schools. This will be in addition to the monitoring that takes place at their respective schools. The Memorandum of Agreement between Perth Amboy Public Schools and the Police Department allows the District to share information obtained from the Emergency Operations Center.
5. **Security Cameras Surveillance.** At the February 9th Board of Education Meeting, \$497,000 was approved for upgrades for video cameras and District-wide security systems.
6. **Manager of Security.** In addition to our current Director of Safety & Security, a recommendation is being put forward to post and appoint a Manager of Security.
7. **School Climate Team.** The administration will be expanding the role of the existing School Climate Team at each building to include addressing discipline, restorative justice and school concerns. Building principals will be required to obtain student feedback to incorporate student concerns to the School Climate Team. Moving forward, the District will be exploring other school safety team measures consisting of a Principal, two teachers, a central office administrator, anti-bullying specialist, two parents, and a security guard.

8. **Trainings / Professional Development.** All staff will continue to be provided with training on student discipline, school climate, and identification of at-risk students during professional development and faculty meetings.
9. **Age-appropriate School Assemblies / Programs.** The administration will continue to work to identify age-appropriate assemblies and programs for students in all school levels to address conflict and violence among peer groups. This initiative may also include after-school assemblies with parents and guardians.
10. **Continuing Partnership with the Police.** The District has been working with the Perth Amboy Police department since the fall to enact two programs that will continue to promote a positive relationship between our students and the Police Department. The “Community Policing” program began in December 2022, while the D.A.R.E. program is scheduled to begin on March 20, 2023. Additionally, the Perth Amboy Police Department holds periodic sessions within school buildings in order to best train the police in case of an emergency within a building.

The Perth Amboy Public Schools will continue to partner with the City of Perth Amboy and the Perth Amboy Police Department in city-wide initiatives. We will also continue to provide more information when appropriate.

Your collaboration and ongoing support are appreciated. Thank you.