



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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County School Administrator

January 30, 2012

Mr. Reuben Mills, Interim Superintendent
Camden City School District
201 N. Front Street
Camden, New Jersey 08102

Dear Mr. Mills:

This memorandum is a report on the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS) monitoring visit conducted by a review team comprised of New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) staff, on January 20, 2012. The report is based upon document reviews and interviews with central office staff and site visits to Pyne Point Middle School, Veteran Memorial Family School, Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy, Hatch Family School, Camden High School and Woodrow Wilson High School.

The following information is provided to the Camden School District to assist them in more accurately reporting incidents of violence, vandalism and substance abuse to the NJDOE and to ensure a safe environment for all students and staff. On December 22, 2011 a newspaper article was published stating that the Camden School District reported only 22 incidents of violence between September 2010 and June 2011; but in the same period of time police officers responded to 249 violent incidents involving students from the Camden School District.

With this information, the Commissioner of Education, Christopher D. Cerf, sent a review team to conduct an EVVRS monitoring site visit in the Camden School District in which data from the 09-10 and 10-11 school year was to be reviewed. The NJDOE notes that not every incident that a police officer responds to requires reporting on the EVVRS.

Based on information outlined in this report the review team concludes that the Camden School District has not accurately reported all of the incidents of violence, vandalism and substance abuse that, by definition, should have been reported on the EVVRS. While the school district makes the decision of reporting incidents on the EVVRS based on an investigation conducted by

school administrators, the NJDOE team reviewed incident reports and nurse's reports which showed that the school district should have reported a number of incidents of violence, vandalism and substance abuse based on the EVVRS incident definitions. In some cases the documentation provided was not enough for the review team to determine if the incident should have been reported on the EVVRS.

Below is a chart of information gleaned from a review of documents from the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, conducted by the NJDOE during the site visit to each school, on January 20, 2012. The chart indicates the number of documents reviewed at each school, the number of incidents reviewed that should be reported on the EVVRS, and the actual number of incidents that were reported on the EVVRS for the respective school year.

Summary of Documentation Review:

School	Total documents reviewed (incident forms, nurse forms, suspension forms)	Number of EVVRS reportable incidents	Number of reported incidents on the EVVRS for 2009-2010	Number of reported incidents on the EVVRS for 2010-2011
Pyne Point Middle School	59	30	0	0
Veterans Memorial Middle School	271	28	1	0
Creative Arts/Morgan Village	70	14	0	4
Hatch Community School*	65	13	5	1
Woodrow Wilson Middle School**	11	10	9	1
Camden High School	25	12	3	7

*In Hatch Family School the team was provided 14 violence, vandalism and substance abuse (VV-SA) forms for review. One incident out of the seven reviewed should not have been reported on the EVVRS because it occurred off school grounds; and one of the seven incidents was misclassified.

**In Veterans Memorial Middle School, the team was provided 1 violence, vandalism and substance abuse (VV-SA) form for the 09-10 school year for review. The principal and vice principal were new to these administrative positions at Veterans and were unable to locate any other VV-SA forms and discipline referrals forms for the 09-10 school year.

***In Woodrow Wilson High School an interview with the nurse showed that between September 2009 and June 2010 there were 77 fights, 1 gang fight, 6 assaults and 5 incidents of drug possession. None of the incidents appear on the EVVRS for the 2009-2010 school year.

Many of the incident report forms reviewed in each school were lacking in specificity and detail. Based on the information provided on the forms, there would be no way for administrators and the Camden School District, director of safety and security to make informed decisions regarding the incidents and whether they rise to the level of reporting on the EVVRS. Critical data for decision-making was not available on the forms. For example, the forms did not include all EVVRS incidents, special education student or general education student involved in the incident, and a detailed incident description.

Below is a chart that describes the results of the violence, vandalism and substance abuse (VV-SA) documents from the 2009-2010 and the 2010-2011 school years that were reviewed by the team in the central office. The chart indicates the number of VV-SA forms entered on to the EVVRS, the number which were correctly reported on the EVVRS, the number that were entered on to the EVVRS but did not meet any incident definition therefore, should not have been reported and the number of incidents that were misclassified.

School Year	Number of VV-SA Forms reviewed in central office	Number correctly reported	Number incorrectly reported (should not have been reported)	Number misclassified
2009-2010	29	23	2	4
2010-2011	30	22	3	5

Review of the EVVRS records revealed the following discrepancies and errors:

- The detail provided on the VV-SA reporting form was not sufficient for the director of safety and security to determine if the incidents should be reported on the EVVRS;
- The incidents were misclassified especially as they related to assaults and fights. It appears there is not a clear understanding of the EVVRS incident definitions. The district identified a victim and an offender in fight incidents however; there are no victims in a fight because it is a mutual engagement and not one-sided. This issue will be resolved with better understanding of the EVVRS incident definitions through training; and
- Most of the reported incidents had multiple victims or offenders in the description detail but no corresponding victim and offender EVVRS forms were provided to the NJDOE. Each incident must include all victims and offenders.

Interviews with District and School staff

Initially, the review team met with central office staff that included the Director of Health, Ms. Renee Wickersty, the Director of Safety and Security, Gaylen Conley, the executive assistant to the Director of Health, Ms. Barbara Palco and Pam Christie, the executive assistant responsible to inputting the EVVRS incidents into the NJDOE homeroom Web site. During the course of the interview with the central office staff, the review team was able to gather information

regarding current practices for reporting incidents of violence, vandalism and substance abuse. Both Mr. Conley and Ms. Wickersty were newly hired to their positions, in the summer 2011. There has been high turnover in the director of safety and security position, which the review team feels is a contributing factor to the inconsistent reporting on the EVVRS.

The review team was able to determine that there is an established reporting process however; each school visited by the NJDOE team revealed a different implementation of the established reporting process. The lack of consistency is contributing to misreporting.

Below is the description of the district-wide EVVRS reporting process provided by Mr. Conley:

1. An incident occurs and an incident report form is completed by the staff member reporting or witnessing the incident;
2. The nurse assesses the injuries (if applicable) and also produces a report;
3. The principal or his designee investigate the incident which includes interviews and fact finding;
4. The principal or his designee determines if the incident rises to the level of reporting on the EVVRS;
5. The incident report form is forwarded to the director of safety and security's office for a final decision on reporting; and
6. The executive assistant inputs the data on to the EVVRS.

Mr. Conley indicated that one of the changes, to this procedure, he is in the process of implementing includes schools sending ALL incident documentation to his office and not only the EVVRS reportable incidents documents. Additionally, Mr. Conley provided to the review team a guideline document which he created that outlines steps to be taken during emergency incidents. The first step of the guidance document is to immediately contact his office which he will help facilitate communication between school administrators and district administrators. On January 4, 2012 there was a district-wide training on a new software program the district is using called, "Genesis." One of the components of Genesis is capturing incidents of violence, vandalism and substance abuse. The director of safety and security will have the capability to review the incidents regularly for each school on this system. A regular review should help to improve consistency in reporting.

Mr. Conley stated that there has not been district-wide safety and security training for him and his staff. Pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-5.1(d)* a district must provide this training as indicated below:

"The district board of education shall develop and provide an in-service training program for all district board of education employees to enable them to recognize and appropriately respond to safety and security concerns, including emergencies and crises,

consistent with the district board of education's plans, procedures and mechanisms for school safety and security and the provisions of this section.

- 1. New district board of education employees shall receive the in-service training, as appropriate, within 60 days of the effective date of their employment.*
- 2. The in-service training program for all district board of education employees shall be reviewed annually and updated, as appropriate."*

Based on the document review within each school, it is clear that reporting is inconsistent within school buildings. Each school building uses a variety of incident report forms, including the standard Camden School District incident report form, which contributes to inconsistent reporting on the EVVRS. This also contributes to the principal's inability to accurately determine if an incident should be reported on the EVVRS. In the Camden High School there appears to be no connection between the application of teacher, security, nurse, administration and EVVRS incident reporting forms. These are separate forms completed by individual staff members according to their job function. It is not clear if administrators have access to all forms/narrative descriptions in order to make an EVVRS determination. Teachers interviewed indicated that they have not received any training on reporting incidents but understand the process of reporting. The department believes that this also contributes to the inconsistency in reporting incidents.

It is unclear what happens once the school building principal forwards the incident forms to the central office. The staff understanding of the reporting process generally stops when the documents are forwarded to the central office. During the interviews, individuals from Camden High School and Woodrow Wilson High School indicated that they do not know why the incidents they send to the central office are not appearing on the EVVRS. In short, the team found that schools were often correctly classifying incidents and forwarding report forms to the central office, but the central office did not enter the data on to the EVVRS.

The Morgan Village Middle School and Creative Arts High School merged this year to create the Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy. The new principal informed the review team that all documents from the Morgan Village Middle School were destroyed therefore; the team was not able to review past incident records. The team was able to review nurse forms which were not always as a result of discipline referrals. However, the team was able to determine from the nurse's forms that some incidents should have appeared on the EVVRS, but did not, as indicated in the chart above. The review team stated that the climate and culture of the newly merged school was noticeably positive. The new principal has maintained a standard regarding acceptable behavior which has contributed significantly to creating a safe environment for students and staff. During staff interviews they indicated that the standard set by the principal has greatly improved the climate of the school and reduced the number of incidents witnessed by the staff.

The Pyne Point Middle School interviews revealed that the climate and culture of this school has vastly improved over the past two years. Mr. Watkins, the head security officer attributes this change to two things; 1) security presence in the building at all times; and 2) parental participation has increased immensely over the past three years. Mr. Watkins the security officer stated that he observed that "in the past when he would walk the halls and look in the classrooms

there was no learning going on, but now the students are learning and the teachers are teaching.” Pyne Point also has a new principal; he indicated that as a result of this visit he is going to go back through his incident reports for this school year to confirm that the incidents have been reported accurately. Staff in this school and all of the schools the review team visited stated that they need a better sense of EVVRS reportable incidents.

The interviews conducted at Hatch Family School also revealed that the climate and culture has greatly improved. Ms. Evans the Vice Principal indicated that the reconfiguration of Hatch from a middle school to a community school grades K-8 is a main factor in the improvement and difference in the climate of the building. The teachers indicated that they understood reporting procedures for the school and the principal stated that he was familiar with EVVRS reporting requirements because he was trained by the principal of Camden High School where he was once the vice principal.

Recommendations:

1. All district staff must become more familiar with the EVVRS incident definitions and reporting forms for increased accuracy and consistency in reporting incidents on the EVVRS. The school district must provide regular in-service training to ensure staff understanding of reportable incidents. The NJDOE has a plethora of useful information for the district to use during this training. The EVVRS definitions, scenarios and forms are found on the NJDOE’s homeroom web site at, <http://homeroom.state.nj.us/EVVRS.htm>.

Additionally, the school district is already in possession but not using the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System DVD that demonstrates specific scenarios of incidents for better understanding and clarity of the incidents that rise to the level of reporting on the EVVRS. Training must include at a minimum the following information;

- a. Incident reporting procedures including what happens once the school administrator send the incident forms to the director of safety and security;
 - b. Detailed overview of the incident definitions and scenarios;
 - c. Description of the type of information required on each incident reporting form. When staff at each school understand the purpose of providing this information, for the school administrators to make informed decisions about reporting, there will be more consistency on EVVRS reporting;
 - d. Proper responses to incidents by staff members; and
 - e. A specific session on the proper procedures for completing the VV-SA, victim and offender pages for school administrators and central office staff.
2. Incident forms need to be revised and the use of the forms in each school need to be consistent. The incident report forms should include every type of incident on the EVVRS, as well as additional student conduct information that the district wants to include. The incident reporting forms should also indicate whether the students involved in the incidents are special education or general education and include space for detail so that the administrators can make informed decisions regarding the incidents and whether they should recommend reporting on the EVVRS. The staff reporting the incident should

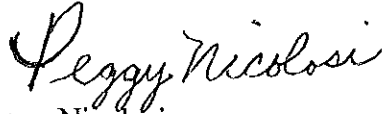
be required to provide every detail of the incident when reporting. There should be one form with appropriate sections for personnel to contribute their comments and/or actions, for example, if a student is injured as a result of a fight, a section should be available for the nurse to complete her assessment and/or actions.

3. The district should improve its communication with the Camden City Police Department. A line of communication should be established between the Director of Safety and Security and the Chief of Police for the Camden City Police Department. With the established line of communication the district will be more aware and track the types of incidents that are reported to the police, so that they will be better informed of school safety issues.
4. Institute a revised incident reporting procedure which includes a system for school building administrators so they can track incidents that are sent to the central office. The purpose for revising the procedures is to ensure uniformity of reporting by every school staff member and administrator. District-wide training on the revised procedures will be necessary and should be included in every new employee training protocol.
5. The NJDOE recommends that the district offer classroom management and assertive discipline training to teachers and support staff. At the Pyne Point Middle School, the vice principal regularly reviews classroom management techniques with his staff. This will reduce the number of EVVRS and non-EVVRS reported incidents in all of the school buildings.
6. A student identification system must be in place that requires all students to wear an ID at all times. It was observed in the Camden High School that the staff do not know the names of students involved in incidents and therefore, the incident referrals are incomplete and proper discipline and remedial actions cannot be administered. Mr. Conley assured the team that the Camden School District has bought a new identification system and will be implementing it in the high schools and will trickle the system down through the middle schools and then the elementary schools.
7. An internal review needs to be conducted on Camden School Districts policies and procedures for reporting, notification and examination procedures for students suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs so that they are aligned to *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-4.3*. Training for administrators on this procedure must be conducted.

It is vitally important for the Camden City School District to provide a safe and secure environment for the students of Camden. As a result of the review that has been completed and the recommendations that have been provided to the district, the County Office is available to provide assistance to the district as it reviews and revises procedures for classifying and reporting incidents of Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse. The district is requested to develop a plan to address the abovementioned findings and recommendations by March 1, 2012 and submit them to the Camden County Office of Education. The district may also refer to student behavior resources located on the Department of Education's website at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/behavior/>, and the EVVRS specific information

at <http://homeroom.state.nj.us/index.htm>. The Camden County Office of Education can be reached at (856)401-2400. We appreciate your cooperation during the visit and in completing and implementing a plan to address the deficiencies found through the monitoring visit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peggy Nicolosi".

Peggy Nicolosi

Camden County Interim Executive County Superintendent

- c. Andy Smarick
- Barbara Gantwerk
- Bing Howell
- Justin Barra
- Paula Bloom
- Gaylen Conley