

**Preliminary Report of the LS Safety Review Subcommittee
of the Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School Committee**

Adopted at the public meeting on June 28, 2007

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INTRODUCTION

Background

One of the many responses in the aftermath of the tragic death of a student on the school's premises on January 19, 2007 was the establishment of a subcommittee by the LS School Committee, the LS Safety Review Committee (LSSRC), with the charge:

To review, report and make recommendations on all operational, physical and educational aspects of Lincoln-Sudbury as they relate to the safety of students, faculty, and staff.

During the initial process of discussing and interpreting this charge, the LSSRC adopted the following clarification: *that it would evaluate what Lincoln Sudbury Regional High School (LS) does or needs to do to ensure the social, emotional, and physical well-being of all the members of the LS community. It will place special emphasis on how the LS community responds to reports of interpersonal aggression on school grounds and related violations of school policy. The LSSRC will pay attention to both physical and psychological violence and their precursors.*

While the catalyst for the formation of the LSSRC was the specific frightening and grave incident on January 19, 2007 it should be emphasized that the LSSRC was not focused on this single incident, but embraced its charge in the broader context of reviewing all aspects of school safety. The LSSRC sought to review existing policies, procedures and practices at LS. The LSSRC also sought professional and public input relevant to its work, searching for "best practices" as they relate to the broad view of "school safety."

Membership of the LSSRC consisted of:

- Two members of LS School Committee (one Lincoln and one Sudbury)
- Three members of Town Board of Selectmen (two Lincoln and one Sudbury)
- Two members selected by the Sudbury Board of Selectmen
- Four members selected by the LS School Committee (plus three alternates)
- One LS Administrator
- One LS Teacher (plus one alternate)
- Two LS students (both juniors) selected by the LS School Committee

Meetings of the LSSRC commenced on March 21, 2007 and convened every Wednesday evening (with the exception of April 4, 2007) until June 27, 2007 and two additional meetings were conducted on June 26, 2007 and June 28, 2007 to facilitate drafting of this preliminary report. All meetings were subject to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, where the public could fully witness the entire process and all discussions, dialogues, and information exchange. During each meeting time was allotted for public comment. The LSSRC also formed two subcommittees, one to deal with obtaining input from students, faculty, and staff, and the other to organize the exploration into the causes of and prevention of violence. All subcommittee meetings issued public notices and the public was invited to attend. A web site was also established to publicly post meeting agendas,

approved meeting minutes, and scheduled video broadcasts of recorded meetings on the public access channel. The public could also bring issues and questions to the LSSRC's attention by sending email to safetycomm@lsrhs.net.

As a result of this review, the LSSRC has produced this preliminary public report containing the findings and recommendations for actions that it believes may contribute to improving the overall safety, in the broadest sense, of students, faculty and staff at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School.

Information Sources

In order to thoughtfully consider any recommendations, the LSSRC began the process of educating its members by gathering information about the specific events on January 19, 2007, as well as about relevant existing school policies, current expert reports on school safety in general, and input from the many school and community constituencies.

- Both live and written input was gathered from LS administrators and faculty, including:
 - two separate presentations to the LSSRC (as well as submission of written answers to questions posed by the LSSRC) by the Superintendent of LSRHS on the events of January 19, 2007 and the ongoing follow-up responses by the LS Administration;
 - a discussion with the LS Housemasters on current policies and practices at LS as they relate to safety;
 - a presentation on the iPASS system used by LS faculty and staff for recording and maintaining information on specific student behavioral events relevant to student safety;
 - a presentation on the CASE Collaborative (CASE) in particular, and on Special Education in general, by the Director of Student Services at LSRHS.
- The Lincoln and Sudbury police chiefs and town managers were invited to address the LSSRC and present their recommendations. At another meeting, two lieutenants, one each from the Lincoln and Sudbury police forces, made public remarks.
- One entire meeting was devoted to public input. In addition, LS community input was received during a public comment period at each meeting, as well as from emails sent to the LSSRC.
- A leading national expert on school safety, Dr. William Pollack, Director of the National Violence Prevention and Study Center, and a co-author of the joint U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education report *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates* (the *Guide*) also generously addressed the committee and public during one LSSRC meeting.
- A subcommittee of the LSSRC facilitated numerous focus group discussions with members of the LS community in order to gather additional primary information about how those persons actually at LS were feeling about safety at the school.

- Members of the LSSRC and the LS Administration visited Whitman-Hanson Regional High School to observe its approach to school safety as an example of a newly built high school, which invested heavily in various physical security measures.
- Reading material was circulated to LSSRC members throughout the review period, and included:
 - *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates* by Fein, R.A., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W.S., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M., 2002 (referred to as the *Guide* throughout the rest of this report)
 - *The Appropriate and Effective Use of Security Technologies in U.S. Schools* (National Institute of Justice)
 - 2006-2007 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey Results (MWAHS)
 - Special Education Services
 - School policies handbook
 - List and descriptions of curriculum and programs relating to school safety

Summary

During the course of meetings, many topics relevant to school safety were considered and discussed. Major areas of discussion included weapons policy; campus supervision; data collection of student behaviors; visitors and building access; considerations from the Pollack report; staff/student ratios; Special Education / CASE and out-of-district placement issues; current LS policies and procedures regarding safety; violence prevention as addressed by current LS curriculum and programs related to safety; drugs and alcohol; and LS culture. The content of these discussions are available via the video recordings of the LSSRC meetings. Much of the content of these discussions is also reflected in the posted LSSRC meeting minutes.

It became clear to the LSSRC that most of these topics involved an interconnected and complex set of issues, often requiring additional information from expert sources and further input from appropriate LS authorities. As LSSRC members began discussing possible recommendations, weighing the potential effectiveness on increased school safety with impacts on other considerations such as fiscal limitations, educational requirements, and LS culture became a process of developing and appreciating nuanced understanding. Many topics simply require more time for additional input and consideration – more time than was available in the timeframe afforded this preliminary report – if effective recommendations are to be made. Although to date the LSSRC has held 16 meetings each approximately 3 hours in length, as well as multiple additional subcommittee meetings, there was a general feeling among LSSRC members that there was not sufficient time during these public meetings to fully explore and discuss the topics of interest. This was further constrained by aspects of the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, which precluded discussion outside of the LSSRC meetings.

The remaining chapters in this report will cover those topics the LSSRC decided it could address at this time. The report includes a detailed summary of what the LSSRC has

learned to date, the complexities of the issues, and where appropriate, a presentation of recommendations and discussion of the opposing considerations when there was disagreement among LSSRC members. These major areas of discussion include:

- Weapons Policy
- Campus Supervision
- Outsiders on Campus
- Prevention of School Violence/Threat Assessment
- Staff/Student Ratios
- Collaborative Program Enrollments at LS

One area impacting school safety initially considered by the LSSRC that is not discussed in greater detail in this report is the distribution and use of drugs and alcohol on school premises. The LSSRC was unanimous in acknowledging that this topic was of utmost concern when considering school safety. Indeed, the LS Housemasters, in their presentation to the LSSRC, expressed their belief that this area was of singular and primary importance, and the results of the MWAHS raised yellow and red flags for the LSSRC. The LSSRC decided, however, that given the widespread and pervasive nature of the drugs and alcohol problem in our culture, this topic was better suited for a targeted and exclusive evaluation and review. ***The LSSRC recommends that the LS School Committee facilitate the formation of a separate committee composed of representatives of all stakeholder groups including public safety officials, LS school administration/faculty/staff, parents, citizens at large and students to address the problems of drug and alcohol distribution and use directly.***

The LSSRC confirmed what many in the LS community recognize, notwithstanding the attitude that there is room for improvement, there has always been considerable effort on many fronts already in place at LS to address the safety of students and adults in the building. In addition, the LSSRC respects the existing learning and working culture at LS where the emphasis is on sensibly trusting students and faculty alike, treating them responsibly, and encouraging them to care and look out for one another. LS students, faculty, and the broader community frequently and proudly point to this culture as something worth protecting. The LSSRC discussed how this culture plays an important role in establishing a safe school. This point was supported in the *Guide* and strongly emphasized by Dr. Pollack in his presentation; development of such a school culture was one of the most important ways to create a safe school. Dr. Pollack confirmed that while it is impossible to create an environment that guarantees no violence, “the principle objective of school violence reduction strategies should be to create cultures and climates of safety, respect, and emotional support within educational institutions” (the *Guide*, p.16). During discussions of implementing various changes that could address aspects of improving school safety, the LSSRC considered how these changes might also chip away at this culture and result in contradictory messages and unintended consequences. In this regard, the LSSRC feels that while it is important to keep in mind the potential for eroding the positive aspects of the culture when considering any safety related changes to the school, the ‘culture flag’ should not be used as a barrier for considering safety related changes. It is the belief of the LSSRC that one of the hallmarks of this very special school

culture is the school community's ability to allow for a respectful discussion among all constituents and that a balance can be found between carefully considered changes designed to improve school safety and the preservation of the positive aspects of the culture.

Finally, there was a question whether the ongoing legal proceedings around the events of January 19, 2007 limited the ability of the LSSRC to discover what actually occurred before, during, and immediately after the incident. Certainly there are some constraints to what those involved in the legal investigation were allowed to say, and there are both ethical and legal constraints on the release of some personal information for the involved LS students and administrators. It should be emphasized, however, that the LSSRC consistently experienced a candid offering of information, observations, and self-reflection from LS authorities, encountering only a spirit of sincere cooperation to provide any and all information that ultimately could help make LS a safer place for students and faculty.

Weapons Policy

The current LS weapons policy states that students found to be in possession of a weapon, as defined by state law or in the student handbook, will be immediately suspended pending a formal expulsion hearing that will determine the disciplinary consequence. Such possession will be reported to the local police, as required by law and by the existing memorandum of understanding between LS and the local police departments. In reviewing this policy with LS administration, it was determined that expulsion hearing officers have discretion as to the penalty imposed for the infraction discussed at the hearing. However, LS administrators indicated that a three week suspension has been the minimum disciplinary consequence.

The LSSRC believes that there is no indication of ambiguity in the LS discipline code or Crisis Response Manual and that there is no degree of tolerance for the possession of a weapon, under any circumstances. This policy includes the voluntary turning-in or admission to possession of a weapon, by a student to a school administrator or person of authority on campus. Nonetheless, the LS administration informed the LSSRC that the policy was not followed in an incident prior to January 19, 2007 involving a weapon that was turned in voluntarily.

One potential recommendation discussed by the LSSRC dealt specifically with “enhancing” the LS weapons policy and promoting “zero tolerance” for weapons possession in all circumstances. In relevant part it stated:

“...Although the LS culture favors granting discretion to teachers and administrators so that students can be dealt with individually, which in many situations creates the kind of community that discourages violence, the potential harm in this area is such that zero tolerance should be the policy in this area

Suggested course of action

“The LS weapons policy should be strictly enforced in 100% of the cases. The wording of the policy should be enhanced to ensure there is zero tolerance for the possession of a weapon on campus, including the voluntary turning-in or admission of possession of a weapon. Consistent with the collective bargaining agreement and after consultation with the Teachers Association (TA), specific, clear, disciplinary consequences should be developed for failure to follow this policy.”

During the ensuing discussion, several LSSRC members expressed concerns about such an approach. Their interpretation of the *Guide* was that the only way to increase the possibility of identifying and preventing the use of weapons in schools was to design policies that encouraged students, parents and administrators to report behavior which indicated that a student is at serious psychological risk (for example, students struggling with issues of loss, depression, or personal failure) and in need of intervention. Additionally, because the consequences for violation of the current LS policy are so serious, there was concern from LSSRC members that a zero tolerance policy would mandate the immediate suspension and an expulsion hearing could discourage reporting

of information in ambiguous situations in order to avoid such serious consequences. An email received by the LSSRC contained the reported personal ambivalence of a parent when it was discovered that her child had inadvertently brought a knife to LS. The decision made by the individual was to not report the inadvertent action of their child to the LS administration. There was a report of a weapon found hidden on school property, apparently abandoned by its owner rather than being voluntarily reported. This information was referenced by a LSSRC member as evidence of what would likely be a more common occurrence if a zero tolerance policy were to be enforced.

Some LSSRC members then suggested that the LS School Committee and LS Administration should consider amending the existing LS weapons policy, after consultation with the police and the teachers' association, to maximize reporting of all weapons incidents, but to provide more discretion to the administrative personnel to investigate before deciding whether an immediate suspension and expulsion hearing was the most appropriate response in a given situation. Weapons incidents would continue to be reported without exception to the police as is legally required. This type of policy could provide the LS administration with the discretion to investigate all incidents before undertaking consequential disciplinary action. The belief was that this would be perceived as a more "fair and balanced" process, and therefore might facilitate more reporting of weapons possession. It was noted that this would not prevent school personnel from immediately suspending a student and scheduling an expulsion hearing if the facts available seemed to indicate that this was the most appropriate response.

The LSSRC then recognized that there are problems with this approach. Where a policy involves discretion, it is more difficult to send a clear message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated. Adolescents may test the limits of the system. Nevertheless, better reporting might increase the likelihood that serious, potentially homicidal or suicidal events could be foreseen and possibly prevented.

The LSSRC also briefly discussed whether other approaches, in addition to policy, might prove helpful in decreasing the presence of undetected and unreported weapons at LS. For example, a LSSRC member suggested perhaps an anonymous "weapons drop box" could be used to encourage students who mistakenly brought a potential weapon, such as a pocket knife, to surrender it before entering LS without experiencing any adverse consequences.

After weighing these various factors ***the LSSRC recommends that the LS School Committee and LS Administration consider amendments to the current weapons policy that would promote more comprehensive reporting of weapons by providing more discretion in disciplinary proceedings where feasible, legal and desirable while requiring and implementing procedures to increase the likelihood that all weapons-related incidents will be reported.*** This may raise legal issues and thus require discussions with legal counsel, the District Attorney's Office, and local police officials. It may also raise collective bargaining issues requiring discussion with the teachers association.

Campus Supervision

The LSSRC has received a tremendous amount of input concerning campus supervision at LS from a variety of different sources, including LS students, faculty, and staff, the public at large, and from the police chiefs of each of the two towns. In addition, although the document the LSSRC read, the *Guide*, does not concern itself primarily with campus supervision, it is important to keep in mind one of its central themes; that an emphasis on caring and trusting relationships between students and adults is an important characteristic of any safe school.

Although the LSSRC has not come to any conclusions, it has discussed a number of ideas regarding campus supervision over the last three months, including the following. (the LSSRC noted that many of these are alternative ways to deal with similar issues):

- Increase the number of LS campus aides, to help supervise an extremely large building complex with many isolated areas. An interesting point raised by the two police chiefs when they appeared before the LSSRC was that a medical emergency in one of these areas might go unnoticed for too long, possibly resulting in a very real threat to safety. Support for this idea was expressed in several of the focus groups.
- Consider the appointment of a School Resource Officer (SRO) from the ranks of the Lincoln or Sudbury Police. Although, this idea was originally put forth by the two police chiefs, some members of the LSSRC and LS students who expressed an opinion were uncomfortable with this. There were particular concerns regarding the possibility of an SRO carrying a weapon in the school. Dr. Pollack, in his presentation to the LSSRC, spoke positively about the potential benefits of an SRO, but suggested that if the LS School Committee is considering this option, LS students should meet with successful SROs.
- Provide designated areas (supervised by LS staff members) before and after school where students should congregate if they are not in a supervised academic or extracurricular setting with a member of the LS staff. However, this could complicate student access to teachers for extra help and could be logistically difficult with regard to insuring easy student access to club meetings, practices, rehearsals, etc.
- Install security cameras at various points inside the building.
- Limiting the number of doors open when classes are in session, with monitors (possibly community volunteers) at the doors left open
- Encourage all students to carry their LS ID cards at all times.

The LSSRC has not had the time to fully explore and discuss these ideas offered by thoughtful and concerned people who care deeply about the safety of the entire LS community. The LSSRC believes that any increase in campus supervision must be respectful of the culture of responsibility and trust that is such an important part of LS. With this in mind, *the LSSRC recommends that the LS School Committee give careful consideration to the issue of campus supervision, and work with the LS Administration, Faculty and Staff, students, and local police in Lincoln and Sudbury to take appropriate steps that would enhance the overall safety at LS.*

Outsiders on Campus / Access to the School Building

The topic of outsiders on campus and access to the school building focuses primarily on how well LS Administration is able to determine who is on campus at any point during the school day and whether or not outsiders pose a safety threat on the LS campus. LS has a long tradition of being an “open campus” and as a result the LS administration has treated the school as a public building accessible to all. For example, community groups use the auditorium, the lecture hall and various conference rooms for functions (particularly outside of normal school hours). Additionally, the fitness center is available for use by the community. During our many LSSRC meetings we had several discussions on whether the current practice at LS, i.e. open campus environment, should be adjusted in some manner that might result in a higher degree of safety for the occupants of the building. However, the LSSRC has not reached any conclusions in this area.

The LSSRC received much input from a variety of sources, and with every new piece of information reviewed and discussed, opinions on possible recommendations varied greatly. Input sources included the existing School Policy and Procedures; the National Institute of Justice document titled “The Appropriate and Effective Use of Security Technologies in U.S. Schools”; public comments via email and at our LSSRC meetings; student and faculty comments provided during the focus group sessions conducted at LS; LS Administration comments received at our LSSRC meetings and at focus group sessions conducted at LS; and input from the Chiefs of Police of Sudbury and Lincoln who provided the LSSRC with several recommendations in this area.

Discussion of the input received brought out a variety of opinions on both sides of the issue. Those not wanting any change in this area felt the school’s open campus culture would be altered to the detriment of the trusting relationships that have been built between students and faculty. Those in favor of making some changes believed that being able to determine who is on campus and to easily identify LS faculty and staff would enhance the ability of the LS administration and students to keep LS a safe place for all occupants by making it more difficult for those intending harm to enter the school. It was also noted that these measures would not have prevented the incident that occurred on January 19, 2007. The LSSRC discussed whether or not a strictly enforced visitor sign-in and ID process would prevent a visitor intent on causing harm from misrepresenting his/her identity and committing a dangerous act once in the building. These measures might, however, deter less organized dangerous activity. In addition, a developmental approach to this issue was noted, i.e. high school age students, in contrast to younger students, spend more of their time in environments where access is not monitored.

One piece of input recognized as being important by folks on both sides of this issue was relayed to the LSSRC on behalf of the Sudbury Fire Chief, this was his desire to be able to know who is in the school building, at any point in time, to help determine whether the school building has been fully evacuated during an emergency situation.

Many ideas for possible changes were proposed including:

- Improving the signs at the school building entrances to warn against trespassing
- Improving the signs to direct visitors to the main office for sign-in (already implemented)
- Having an adult (possibly a senior citizen earning tax credit) at the door to insure sign-in
- Increasing the presence of LS campus aides, providing some form of ID badges to all people present in the building including staff, students and visitors
- Limiting access to the school building during the hours that classes are in session by locking doors (the number of access doors was reduced from 13 to 3 in the fall of 2006 in response to suggestions coming out of safety exercises with the Police)
- Having ID badges serve as access passes
- Adding cameras to the outside of the school that would enable ingress and egress to be monitored and recorded (being installed this summer)
- The possible establishment of a School Resource Officer (SRO)

The discussion on these many ideas proved to be very enlightening, as the varying viewpoints of LSSRC members demonstrated that there are no simple answers. Two key questions were raised and debated during these discussions. The first question was whether or not tighter controls (such as ID Badges and mandatory sign-in) really help to ensure safety and/or help to account for who is in the school building. The second was whether or not the imposition of tighter controls regarding access and outsiders on campus would ultimately reduce safety because it might compromise the trust and responsibility aspects of the LS culture that currently contribute positively to the overall safety climate at LS. In general, the LS students who expressed an opinion were strongly opposed to making any changes, whereas the view from adults was mixed and included some acknowledgement that changes would not necessarily result in the loss of trusting relationships.

Over the course of these many discussions it became increasingly clear that the LSSRC was not going to be able to consider the issues in this area thoroughly enough to make specific recommendations for inclusion in this report. Therefore, the LSSRC suggests that the LS School Committee facilitate additional dialogue with representatives of the LS administration, LS student body, local police & fire departments and that the dialogue include further exploration of physical security measures as outlined in the National Institute of Justice's guidance document, before the LS School Committee reaches any final conclusions in this area.

Prevention of School Violence/Threat Assessment

The LSSRC read and discussed the *Guide*. This document describes a process designed to assist schools in their efforts to prevent school violence. It is based on the findings of the Safe School Initiative, a collaboration of the US Secret Service and the US Department of Education. The goal of this collaboration was to identify information about previous school violence that might be useful in preventing future violence. In addition, Dr. William Pollack, one of the authors of the *Guide* and a nationally recognized expert on school violence, donated his time to present his work, in person, to the committee and members of the LS community and to respond to questions.

The *Guide* has two themes: one addresses the development of safe school climates and the other addresses the prevention of targeted school violence. The LSSRC discussed both themes.

The first theme is very briefly summarized as follows. “The principle objective of school violence-reduction strategies should be to create cultures and climates of safety, respect, and emotional support within educational institutions” (the *Guide*, p.16). The primary components of this type of school climate are quoted below (the *Guide*, p.19):

- Assessment of the school’s emotional climate;
- Emphasis on the importance of listening in the schools;
- Adoption of a strong, but caring stance against the code of silence;
- Prevention of and intervention in bullying;
- Involvement of all members of the school community in planning, creating, and sustaining a school culture of safety and respect;
- Development of trusting relationships between each student and at least one adult at school; and
- Creation of mechanisms for developing and sustaining safe school climates.

The LSSRC recognizes the extent to which LS values and has focused upon the “emotional climate” of the school, interpersonal “respect”, the “development of trusting relationships” between students and adults and upon “listening” by students faculty and staff. Since January 19, 2007 there has been an obvious and major effort to challenge the “code of silence” via student education and the development of an electronic means for students and other community members to communicate safety concerns anonymously. LS has a substantial array of programs designed to develop positive behavior and improve school climate, including programs to address “bullying”. A presentation about these programs was given at one of our weekly meetings. Education regarding respect for human rights and differences is also systematically integrated into school curricula. The environment described along with these programs and additions to curricula are the foundation of safety at LS. The LSSRC is not in a position to evaluate each program or to evaluate the need for additional programs, but the LSSRC hopes that the LS School Committee and the LS community in general will consider programs related to the development of these values as a safety related priority.

Dr. Pollack's presentation (to the LSSRC on June 13, 2007) emphasized the importance of formally assessing school climate using instruments that have been shown to be valid for that purpose. ***The LSSRC recommends that the LS School Committee budget for a bi-annual assessment of the school's emotional climate and health and safety of its students, produce a longitudinal analysis of the results, review the results, establish a prioritized list of initiatives to address concerns raised, and present the results to the entire LS community.***

The *Guide* (p.18) notes the importance of "trusting relationships between each student and at least one adult at school". In fact, the MWAHS, conducted in the fall of 2006, confirms that the majority of students at LS feel that they have an important relationship with an adult at school. However, we learned from the MWAHS that about 32% of LS students do not feel that they have a relationship with an adult at school. This percentage was not meaningfully different from that observed at other high schools in the Metrowest area. The LSSRC recognized that because the survey was administered in the fall a number of those feeling disconnected could be first year students who have not yet had the time to develop this type of relationship. On the other hand surveys in past years were administered in the spring and their results indicated that a similar percentage of students did not feel they had a trusting relationship with an adult at school. ***The LSSRC recommends that the school develop approaches to further promote the development of trusting relationships between students and adults at school, particularly for those students just entering LS.*** One possible way of approaching this, noted in the *Guide* (p.18), involves asking faculty to identify students with whom they have a trusting relationship. In addition, a similar technique should be applied with students.

The second theme of the *Guide* (p.14) describes an approach to identifying students whose behavior may suggest the potential for violence and discusses the steps in carrying out a threat assessment based upon behavioral information. Research indicates that there is no profile of potentially violent students. Other than the fact that violent actors are predominantly male, there is simply no "type" or set of characteristics that can be relied upon to provide an accurate indicator of an elevated likelihood of violent behavior. Similarly, the LS faculty and administration report that problematic behavior is no more prevalent among special education students or those from out-of-district placements than it is among the general student population. There appears to be no justification for deciding to scrutinize one group of students over another based upon particular characteristics. However, the research does indicate that it may be possible to identify students who may pose a threat on the basis of their behavior. Analyses of incidents of student violence have shown that perpetrators rarely act impulsively, rather their plans develop over time. Many are trying to cope with personal loss or failure or feel that they have been bullied or persecuted and they have been unable to find nonviolent solutions to their problems. They may communicate some aspect of their plans or their activities, and their words or actions may raise concerns in others. In short there may be behavioral precursors to violence that could be detected. Thus it makes sense to look for and respond to such behavioral cues.

LS has always made an effort to attend to such behavioral cues, an already existing system called iPASS could be enhanced to better support this effort. A teacher, at LS, explained the iPASS system to the LSSRC. iPASS is an electronic system that allows staff and administration to report and track behaviors of concern (ranging from cutting class and eating in the corridor to assault and weapons possession). A report from iPASS goes to the appropriate housemaster, who in turn reviews and responds to the report. When the behavior has been responded to (by the housemaster), notification of any action is sent to the reporter. This information does not go into a student's permanent record.

The LSSRC recognizes the complexity of connections among school policies, disciplinary procedures and problematic student behaviors and the limit to what can be achieved through data collection. At the same time the LSSRC believes there are ways that the iPASS system could be enhanced to better support safety at LS:

- Improve its ability to identify students who are struggling with a psychosocial problem and are in need of help. It could also enhance the ability to identify students who may pose a threat to the safety of others or themselves
- Assemble a composite picture of a student's behavior from isolated behavioral observations that might have been made by various members of the faculty and staff. This is the concept of "assembling the puzzle pieces" referred to in the *Guide*.
- Use iPASS to evaluate the degree to which the behavioral data collection is helping to identify students in need of help, and to a certain extent, evaluate the effectiveness of the school's overall success in preventing violence
- Use iPASS to help evaluate the consistency and effectiveness of school policies and practices regarding discipline and intervention

The LSSRC also noted that there could be opportunities to extend iPASS so that it could serve as a vehicle for collecting data on student successes and positive behaviors and using that information to foster relationships between faculty/staff and students.

The LSSRC believes that the benefits related to improved safety that could result from enhancing iPASS and the practices governing its use are worth pursuing. Therefore, ***the LSSRC recommends that LS School Committee implement some form of ongoing training and dialog with the faculty and staff regarding the value, with respect to safety, of recording behavioral data and gathering it in one place, as well as education regarding what types of behavior should be reported. The LSSRC also recommends that the school continue to explore ways to extend both the capabilities and the use of iPASS. The LSSRC recommends that there be an exploration of ways to improve the ability to collect and analyze behavioral data, of ways to improve the tracking and analysis of follow-up actions, and of ways to analyze the effectiveness of the data collection and analysis efforts in providing a safe school climate.***

The LSSRC recognizes that there needs to be a balance between the value of extended collection of behavioral data and the following potential adverse consequences:

- Without consistent use of iPASS by all faculty and staff regarding types of behaviors and incidents reported, the ability to rely on the data in iPASS for identifying students at risk is compromised and potentially dangerous
- Mandating specifics regarding use of iPASS to faculty and staff and reducing or eliminating the judgment that individuals can exercise regarding iPASS could erode the feeling of respect, trust and responsibility that exists between the faculty and the administration.
- There is a difficult balance between trying to capture “small pieces of the puzzle that may help identify students at risk” with “capturing too much information that is viewed as an invasion of privacy.” If the balance is not maintained, it could erode the feeling of trust and responsibility between students and faculty that is an important part of the LS culture and which helps create a safe school environment.
- Consideration needs to be given to the fact that a student or parent might challenge the appropriateness or validity of behavioral information captured in iPASS.
- Special attention needs to be paid to policies regarding who has access to information in iPASS and in what form, and to the privacy and security of the information. The implications of an expanded iPASS regarding federal and state student records laws would need to be explored.
- Special attention needs to be paid to the longevity of information entered into the system and to policies regarding the deletion of information.

The *Guide* notes the importance of helping students to break the “code of silence.” Students may be aware of, but reluctant to report, risky behavior, serious problems or dangerous plans on the part of their peers. The LS administration explained steps it has taken since January 19, 2007 to further encourage student reporting of behavior that is of concern. This includes the ACT (Acknowledge, Care, Tell) program and the means for students to report anonymously their observations. ***The LSSRC recommends that these efforts be continued and expanded.***

As part of its second theme, the *Guide* describes recommended methods for proceeding with threat assessments and threat investigations once there is a concern about possible violent behavior. ***The LSSRC recommends that the LS School Committee together with the LS Faculty and Administration consider these methods and decide whether to include any that are not a part of present procedures.***

Staff-Student Ratios*

While the LSSRC has not focused specifically on staff-student ratios, there has been considerable discussion on the importance of creating and maintaining strong connections between each student and at least one adult at LS. These relationships, and the information and insights they can yield, serve as a key contributor to the safety of all in the LS community.

The *Guide* emphasizes the role and importance of these relationships in creating a safe school environment and also in detecting and preventing potential violence. These points are clearly stated in the following two excerpts:

- “Cultures and climates of safety, respect and emotional support can help diminish the possibility of targeted violence in schools. Environments in which students, teachers, and administrators pay attention to students’ social and emotional needs-- as well as their academic needs—will have fewer situations that require formal threat assessments. This climate is defined and fostered by students having a positive connection to at least one adult in authority.” (the *Guide*, p.13)
- “Ensure that every student feels that he or she has a trusting relationship with at least one adult at school. ... Schools with cultures and climates of safety monitor students on a regular basis. School administrators should take steps to ensure that at least one adult at school knows what is happening with each student.” (the *Guide*, p.84)

The LSSRC has discussed these concepts and expressed agreement with their importance and relevance to LS.

The connection between these adult/student relationships and the ratio of staff to students has been raised in some of the focus groups and via two draft suggestions put forward by members of the LSSRC. The LSSRC did not have the time to explore those draft suggestions, but did make several observations about the connection, including:

- Although there is a connection between the staff/student ratio and the ability to establish and maintain adult relationships with every student, it is impossible to quantify. There is no magic number to target for the staff/student ratio in an attempt to optimize the contributions these relationships can make to safety. But clearly, there is some level of staff/student ratio at which the ability to maintain these relationships will be significantly impaired.
- Related to the ability to maintain appropriate staff/student ratios is the ability to provide support staff such as counselors, social workers, and psychologists who can provide assistance or mental health referrals for students who need that.

In addition, the LSSRC noted that over the years, due to financial constraints, there have been reductions to and elimination of various programs at LS that addressed violence prevention and safety.

The LSSRC suggests that the LS School Committee continue to factor in potential effects on school safety when it evaluates tradeoffs and makes decisions regarding budget requests and the allocation of resources under specific budget scenarios. In addition, the LSSRC suggests that the respective Finance Committees and Boards of Selectmen of Lincoln and Sudbury, and the community at large be made aware of these important, but difficult to quantify, connections in the context of budget building deliberations and decisions.

* “Staff-Student Ratios” is meant to encompass all the various relationships that have an impact on safety: teacher-student, counselor-student, housemaster-student, campus aid-student, etc.

Collaborative Program Enrollments at LS

Due to the events of January 19, 2007, the LSSRC decided to explore the procedures and protocols of special programs such as the GO program, of the CASE Collaborative (CASE). The *Guide* concludes that targeted school violence is not linked to psychological diagnoses or participation in special education programs. However, some observable behaviors may be precursors of targeted school violence and it would be helpful to be aware of possibly relevant behavior when enrolling a new student. One question the LSSRC discussed was whether LS Administration had access to sufficient information in order to make decisions relating to accepting students from outside the district. It should be noted that the LSSRC did not have access to student files relating to the January 19, 2007 incident for legal reasons. All student school records are protected by federal and state law and were therefore not available for review by the LSSRC.

The LSSRC invited the Superintendent of LSRHS and the Director of Students Services at LSRHS to provide information to the LSSRC both orally and in writing. The LSSRC invited the Director of CASE to a meeting to discuss the acceptance procedures and protocols of the GO program, however, the invitation was declined at the recommendation of legal counsel. It should be noted that the GO program will not be offered at LS during the 2007-08 academic year because the CASE students who are presently at the high school are graduating and no other students have requested enrollment for the fall of 2007. It was noted that development of in-house programs at LS and other schools have resulted in a decline in the demand for collaborative programs such as the GO program.

After the events of January 19, 2007, the LS administration reviewed the prior admission policies and began the process of drafting new proposals. ***The LSSRC recommends that the LS administration continue to refine how it reviews out of district enrollments at LS.*** Proposed areas for review are the criteria for accepting a student, the types of documentation required (e.g. IEPs, discipline and behavior reports) and the process and content of interviews between prospective students, parents and present LS staff.

The custom during the 2006-07 academic year did not include the LS administration's participation in or review of the GO program's student applications. The entire enrollment process was performed by CASE staff. Prospective students did visit LS during which they met with and were interviewed by LS staff. In the proposed new policies, the LS administration will be taking a larger role in the admission process. As part of the new policy LS administration should have the ability to review the application and documentation that is provided by the student and his/her present school.

As part of the proposed new policies the LS administration should consider requiring the applicant and/or current school to provide relevant information in the areas of behavioral issues, including incidents of physical aggression, prior suspensions, etc. This additional information may assist the LS administration in making the decision of appropriate placement. The LSSRC recognizes that legal constraints may exist and that this information may be available only if the applicant, parent or guardian voluntarily releases it. As a final note, it would seem to be logical and helpful for the LS administration to be able to receive as much information as seems useful for all students it enrolls, but this may not be legally possible. The LS administration may be limited by the laws that are presently in place which means that they may not be able to require a student to produce certain documents. Once a student is enrolled, the LS administration should continue to perform a periodic review of student files to ensure the information is accurate and complete.

Conclusion

The LS School Committee formed the LSSRC subcommittee in response to the tragic events of January 19, 2007 with the charge:

"To review, report and make recommendations on all operational, physical and educational aspects of Lincoln-Sudbury as they relate to the safety of students, faculty and staff."

The LSSRC has taken a broad view of this charge and endeavored to explore a wide range of factors and approaches that can contribute to school safety. In doing so, the LSSRC acknowledges that there is no way to guarantee safety, but there are effective ways of fostering a safe school climate and working to minimize the possibility of unsafe incidents.

The LSSRC has found that there are programs, policies and practices already in place at LS that contribute positively towards school safety. In addition, the LSSRC was impressed with the commitment of LS staff to building strong relationships with students, which in turn help make the school safe. The LSSRC has offered a series of recommendations that we feel are worth further consideration as pathways toward further improvements in safety. In its discussions, the LSSRC discovered that there are very few simple solutions available to improve safety at LS. Many promising ideas have been explored, but in virtually every case, we also uncovered possibilities for unintended consequences. The LSSRC has tried to capture these complexities and nuances in this report. The LSSRC has learned the importance of maintaining a balanced approach when it comes to implementing changes aimed at improving safety. The LSSRC has also come to understand that we, although composed of dedicated and talented individuals, did not have the time, expertise, or detailed knowledge of the day-to-day workings of LS to be able to responsibly make specific detailed recommendations. The LSSRC does believe, however, that our recommendations can serve as a solid framework around which ongoing work can be structured in the quest to continue to improve safety at LS.

Finally, the LSSRC would like to emphasize that there are many different approaches and techniques that can be used in attempts to improve school safety. Many of these are inter-related and some of these require significant resources. The LSSRC did not attempt to assess the budget implications of any of its recommendations in this report. In addition, the LSSRC did not attempt to prioritize its recommendations with respect to one another or with respect to other programs and priorities at LS. The LSSRC would like the LS School Committee and the LS community to view this report and its recommendations not as a recipe for success, but rather a series of ideas and reflections that we hope will provide useful pathways toward real and meaningful improvements in school safety.

Appendix A

Report of the Sub-Committee on Student/Staff Focus Group Input

June 7, 2007

The LSSRC decided to conduct focus groups with members of the LS community in order to gather more information about how those actually at LS were feeling about safety. A subcommittee including John Ollquist (Chair), Bill Ray, Karen Thomsen, Tucker Krone, Alexandra Sliwkowski, and Barbara Pedulla organized these groups. The focus groups, approximately 45 minutes long, occurred on May 22 and 23, 2007. There was a group for each of the following: all students, buildings and grounds staff, non-teaching staff, female students, administrative team, students of color, and all adults. There were two facilitators for each group, one of whom was a LSSRC member. Facilitators were trained by Barbara Pedulla and Karen Thomsen. All groups were asked to respond to the questions listed in these guidelines. A note taker was hired from Office Team in Framingham to record the content of the group discussion. On May 23, 2007 the note taker asked to use a small tape recorder to attempt to record the discussions. She did this, with participants' permission. (NB: A technology consultant had told Barbara Pedulla that this means of recording group discussion would not be effective.)

The opportunity to participate in these focus groups was publicized at LS in multiple ways, including the morning announcements, announcements by teachers in classes, announcements in clubs, and personal requests by Bill Ray and Karen Thomsen of students and staff. Very few people were interested in participating. Karen Thomsen and Bill Ray actively sought and encouraged people to participate and groups involved 4 to 18 participants. We can't know why so few people were interested in participating without asking them.

There was an additional major problem with the focus groups. Unfortunately, the note taker did not transcribe her notes and we have not been able to obtain them or the tape recording, despite multiple attempts. "Personal problems" were the stated reason for this. When we became aware of this problem, facilitators were asked to make notes regarding what they remembered of the content of the focus groups they led.* This was done about a week after the groups took place. This remembered content of the focus groups is unlikely to include all of the major themes of the group conversation and is likely to be affected to some extent by the facilitators' own opinions. Even with these major limitations it seemed important to us to present what we could remember of the LS community members' thoughts. These people took time from busy schedules to contribute to the work of the LSSRC.

We have organized the remembered content of the focus group into a series of major themes that appeared across multiple groups. These themes may represent perceptions shared by a significant number of people in the LS community, but it is important to remember that the focus groups certainly did not include a representative sample of the LS community.

We also prepared a summary of remembered content that was not expressed across multiple groups so that these perceptions and opinions could be reviewed by LSSRC members.

**Notes for the administrators' focus group were taken by a participant and were transcribed. Barbara Pedulla facilitated the non-teaching staff group. She happened to make some notes immediately after the group meeting. Though these do not reflect the complete content of the group, what was noted was probably less limited by the erosion of memory.*

The LSSRC subcommittee decided to present its findings in two parts, a summary of themes that arose in most of the group sessions, and notes based on discussions in each of the sessions held. The following is a summary of the main themes that emerged from these focus groups:

1) IDs or passes for faculty, staff, students, and visitors

There was a wide range of opinions on the idea of requiring badges, IDs, or passes for people in the building. A summary of the position of each focus group is as follows:

Focus Group	Students	Staff	Visitors
Non-teaching Staff	no	yes	yes
Building/Grounds Staff	?	yes	yes
Administrators	open	open	open
Faculty	small number favored, most did not		
Students	no	?	no

Examples of feedback from different group participants regarding IDs is helpful in interpreting some of the data in the previous table. For example, those participating in the non-teaching staff focus group felt that student IDs would be problematic because many would get lost, but thought that staff IDs would be helpful because there are so many faculty and staff members now that they don't always recognize people. They also thought visitors should wear a pass because non-teaching staff felt uncomfortable approaching visitors they don't recognize, often because of a rude reaction from some visitors when they are questioned. Buildings and grounds staff also expressed concern that with such a large faculty and so many new faces each year, they often simply do not recognize everyone, and want to be sure that everyone in the building has legitimate reason to be there.

2) Relationships/Communications

This was viewed as a real positive in terms of promoting a safe atmosphere at the school. There was uniform praise for the caring relationships fostered by faculty and staff. Students in particular seemed to appreciate the open communications policy followed by the school.

3) Supervision in the Building

There is some concern about supervision of students in the building. Adding additional campus aides was an idea that surfaced, with special attention to the time just before and after school. Some people expressed concern that with occasional teacher absences and a shortage of substitutes, there are often large numbers of students in the halls unsupervised when their classes are cancelled. Directed study programs were also mentioned as contributing to this problem. The use of walkie-talkies was mentioned in a number of groups as being very helpful and important in maintaining a safe environment at the school.

4) Size of Building, Student Body, and Faculty and Staff

There was concern expressed about how the physical growth of the school because of the new building, as well as the increased number of students and staff has made it more difficult to monitor safety issues. The large new building inevitably leads to more “nooks and crannies” that are not always supervised. The large number of students and staff make it more difficult to maintain the kinds of relationships that are such an important part of the culture of LS. Additional campus aides were mentioned as a possible solution to the supervision problem at such a large school.

5) LS Culture

There was an overwhelming sense that the culture at LS makes a very positive contribution to the sense of well being that exists at the school.