



**The Octorara Area School District
Presents**

“A Community Conversation Around School Safety”

May 7, 2014

**At the Octorara Area School District Campus
Atglen, PA**



Community Conversation facilitated and report provided by:
Chester County 2020

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Conversation Topic:

1. What actions can the Octorara Area School District take to improve student safety at school?

Sponsor: The Octorara Area School District

Facilitator: Chester County 2020

Attendance: 46

Safety Survey: An online School Safety Survey was sent to School District families in May 2014. An invitation to participate in the May 7 *Conversation* was included in the survey. Of those who indicated they would be interested in participating in a *Conversation*, approximately 18% attended on May 7.

Groups represented: Octorara Area School District parents; Octorara Area High School students; Octorara Area School Board; Octorara Area School District faculty; Octorara Area School District administration; municipal law enforcement; regional private security service.

Group Discussion:

Facilitators asked the participants to suggest discussion points: ways to improve safety in school and related issues. At the end of the group discussion period, the discussion points were printed on posters for review. The facilitators consolidated some of the discussion points for clarity.

Rating the Discussion Points:

The participants rated the discussion points by affixing colored adhesive dots on the posters next to the discussion points they considered most important. Each participant had five dots to use. Participants were free to affix more than one dot to a single point they felt strongly about.

The following points received the highest ratings:

- Does the School District need increased security?
- Should the School District seek examples of best practices from other school districts?
- What form should increased security take? An armed officer?
- What are the relative benefits of outside security vs. enforcing existing policies?
- What are the response times for different types of security?

Initial Follow-up:

The draft report of the Conversation will be provided to the Octorara Area School Board prior to its regular monthly meeting on May 19.

Initial Follow-up Activity:

Five volunteers from the *Conversation* committed to following up on their respective groups' findings, including discussing their findings with the School Board and taking leadership roles in implementing the Recommendations.

Quality Assessment:

The sponsor will provide a written assessment of this program, including suggestions for improvement, by June 19, 2014.

II. IDENTIFYING AND RATING THE DISCUSSION POINTS:

The full list of suggested discussion points is shown below, with the number of rating votes each point received.

- 30 Do we need increased security?
- 20 Should we seek best practices from other school districts?
- 16 What type of additional security do we need? An armed officer?
- 15 Outside security vs. enforcing existing policies
- 14 Response time
- 13 Policy on use of force
- 12 Security officer job description
- 11 Safety training for district employees
- 9 Effect on current drug problem
- 6 Protection of student information
- 6 Cost impact (taxes)
- 5 Emotional impact on students
- 4 Improve current access procedures
- 3 "EMT" training for employees
- 1 Infrastructure
- 0 District liability / exposure

III. WORKING THE TOP-RATED DISCUSSION POINTS

The participants were divided into five work groups to address the discussion points in further detail. The groups were asked to list prioritized goals and action items to achieve the goals, with deadlines.

Work Group #1 chose the discussion point, **"Do we need increased security?"** The group proceeded from the assumption that the answer to this question was, "yes."

Work Group #1's prioritized goals were:

1. **Assess student comfort level in school** (as issues build, the level of student "trust" suffers.)
2. **Drugs and violence are real issues.**
3. **Mental health is a factor in destructive behavior.**

Work Group #1's action items, with deadlines, were:

1. The job description of any security officer must be strictly defined – **prior to hiring.**
2. Any trained security officer should in turn educate staff and students and work to build relationships – **to begin as soon as the security officer is in place.**
3. One or more teachers should be trained to be "emotional support" workers – a resource for students concerned for their own safety. **The process of identifying and training one or more teachers should begin immediately.**

Work Group #2 chose the discussion point, “**Should we seek best practices from other school districts?**” The group modified the question to, “**What information should we seek from other school districts?**” to facilitate discussion.

Work Group #2’s prioritized goals were:

1. **Discover how school districts improve security and plan for emergencies aside from using security personnel** (Raptor System visitor tracking, for example.)
2. **Learn which school districts are currently using armed security, and which may have tried armed security and later removed it.**
3. **Ask other school districts to share information about parent responses to security measures.**

Work Group #2’s action items, with deadlines, were:

1. We understand the School District is obtaining the Raptor System; the system’s capabilities and limitations should be publicized – **before system installation.**
2. Draft a document to inform district families about the findings of this meeting and other findings from Chester County and Lancaster County districts – **this process can begin with the release of this meeting’s report.** Volunteers from this work group are willing to work on the draft of this document.

Work Group #3 chose the discussion point, “**What type of additional security do we need? An armed officer?**”

Work Group #3’s prioritized goals were:

1. **Ensure student personal safety; prevent student injury or death.**
2. **Deter drug activity.**
3. **Deter/prevent other crimes.**

Work Group #3’s action items, with deadlines, were:

1. Survey students’ attitude towards an armed security officer - **prior to putting the officer in place.**
2. Inform students fully about security measures and the reasoning behind the choice to increase security – **before implementing security measures.**

Work Group #4 chose the discussion point, “**Outside security vs. enforcing existing policies.**”

Work Group #4’s prioritized goals were:

1. **Inventory existing security infrastructure** – entries and exits, “Panic Buttons,” etc. and put them all in working order.
2. **Review current I.D. checking procedure** – keep it consistent.

Work Group #4’s action items, with deadlines, were:

1. Younger grades take security issues and practices more seriously than older students. We have an opportunity to promote that attitude in high school when informing students about improved security, **starting right now.**
2. An armed officer will present the school as less of a “soft” target. If we have an officer, armed or not, include the officer in student education and the existing infrastructure repairs and improvements. **Begin as soon as the officer’s employment begins.**

Work Group #5 chose the discussion point, **“Response time.”**

Work Group #5’s prioritized goals were:

1. **Define response time; who is responding?** Teachers? Local police? In-school officer?
2. **Find out: who makes the emergency call?** What mechanism enables them to do it?

Work Group #5’s action items, with deadlines, were:

1. Train teachers and students for emergencies – currently, teachers have “ALICE” (active shooter response) training only; students know only to “hide in a corner.” **Volunteers from this work group are ready to help define needed training, now.**
2. If there is to be an officer, armed or not, student and teacher training should be a part of the officer’s job description. **The job description should include this prior to any decision about hiring security personnel.**

V. CHESTER COUNTY 2020 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Each work group at the May 7 *Conversation* produced at least one committed volunteer to serve as the group’s liaison to the School Board. The Board should use these volunteers to help share the information gathered through the May Safety Survey and from this *Conversation*.
2. School District administration should request information from surrounding districts about their experiences relating to school safety; *Conversation* volunteers can be used to help share this information.
3. Existing entry points, alarm equipment and visitor tracking should be assessed, put in working order, and used consistently.
4. Notwithstanding purchased aids like Raptor visitor tracking and ALICE training, there is a clear desire for professional safety training for staff and students. All the *Conversation* participants advocate having any on-campus security officer play a leading role in this training, as a step towards building a relationship between security personnel and the students and staff. It’s recommended that this goal be clearly spelled out in the job description of any security officer.