



May 8, 2015

To the Members of the Stamford Board of Education and Dr. Hamilton, Superintendent of Schools:

As the executive board of the Parent Teacher Council of Stamford, we felt that we must voice our many concerns regarding the investigative report conducted by Pullman and Comley.

The report sheds light not only on the situation that happened at SHS, but also highlights the many issues affecting our school district as a whole: administrators and staff stretched thin due to budget cuts over the past few years, teachers not doing their jobs but allowed to keep them because of contractual protections, and a general misunderstanding or disregard of district policies and state statutes. Every day, we place our children in your trust. Every day, they walk into your buildings with the expectation of a safe environment conducive to learning. It is appalling to find out how many people, departments and agencies looked the other way and chose not to take action regarding the situation at SHS, and it has left many questions unanswered with regard to the safety and well-being of ALL of the students in Stamford Public Schools. Our concerns are listed below:

A. Safety and Security

What policies are in place to ensure that students can walk and speak their minds without being afraid of the “violent crowd” that can hurt them and teachers alike? Why put a School Resource Officer on a school campus if he fails to enforce the laws that protect our children and ensure their safety, or at the very least enforce traffic laws? Why did the police officer at SHS choose not to act? What piece of mind or added value does it give us to have a school resource officer in the building if he chooses to look the other way when it is obvious that laws are being broken? Every child should feel safe in our schools and have at least ONE adult they can trust in the building.

B. Teacher Expectations

As parents, we have neither the knowledge nor the means to learn about the teachers entrusted with our children’s education-what are their qualifications? Have they met all of the mandated training? Why is it that up until now, we have never had a report of which building is in compliance with the training mandates? Why was this policy never updated by the board? Why aren’t teachers held accountable for their attendance, or lack thereof? Why is it so difficult for school administrators to reprimand the teachers working in their schools?

If the district can call parents to inform them that their child was absent today, why not call parents to tell them that their child’s English teacher missed class AGAIN today? If a student is expected to attend class every single day, why aren’t teachers? Every child that sat through Mrs. Watkin’s English class did not receive the education that they deserved.

C. Child Well-Being

Much has been said throughout this whole situation about the failure to call DCF, as if that is the only offense. The sad truth is that during the entire time that these events unfolded, this student was already under the custody of DCF. Where was DCF all this time while this child missed class and was in an abusive relationship that he was afraid to terminate? Who was looking out for the well-being of this child on a daily basis? Did any adult entrusted with this child’s

wellbeing at DCF or DOMUS ever ask: why are you missing class? Why does that teacher keep calling you? As parents, we question the daily comings and goings of our children and try to find out who their friends are and what is going on at school, etc. These are very basic questions that every caring parent asks, but sadly no one ever cared enough to have a conversation with this child.

D. Leadership and Quality of Education

We would like you to know that parents want to be reassured that something like this will never happen again in any high school, middle school or elementary school in Stamford. We want to be assured that our children are receiving the education to which they are entitled. We want to know what proactive steps and provisions are going to be put into place so that the adults, who we rely on to care for our children, know the difference between right and wrong, and we want to know that they are all carrying their mandatory reporting cards. We want to know that SPS employees will never be allowed to feel indifference toward a student or their circumstance. We want to know that the teacher's union is not enabling bad behavior and protecting their union members above the interests of our students.

The district and Board of Education has an obligation to regain our trust. The first step is acknowledging all of the mistakes that were made and following through with preventative strategies. All of this needs to be performed transparently and must be a coordinated effort among ALL stakeholders: Stamford Public Schools' teachers, administrators, central staff and unions; Board of Education members; Stamford Police Department; outside agencies; community partners; and parents.

Together we can learn from this terrible incident and move forward to build a stronger, safer school district for all of our children.

Sincerely,

Susana Vidan, Senior Co-President
Stephanie O'Shea, Past President

The Parent Teacher Council of Stamford