

Hi Bernie,

In response to concerns that some members of the public have stated in light of our recent arrests related to substance abuse, I would like to share some of the steps we have taken to ensure a safer climate at the high school.

1. In 2007-2008 we started using the security sign-in in the main lobby. The doors to the rest of the building are locked by 8:30 am.
2. In 2009-2010 we brought Pam Walker into the staff as a full-time student assistance counselor.
3. In 2010-2011 we re-organized the Student Assistance Team into the Student Assistance Intervention Team and now automatically refer students involved in substance abuse to the SAIT team for review. This also serves as our screening process for intervention prior to referral to special education.
4. In 2008-2009 we moved the X-Period, or activity period, from the end of the school day to the middle of the day. This prevents students with cars from leaving and it promotes social interaction. We have gone from 32 clubs to 53+ clubs.
5. Since Mary Ann Sheehy took over as dean four years ago, we have tracked student discipline data and we adopted a different approach to the office of the dean. We looked for a person who could continue that work and still have a firm, no-nonsense approach to discipline as needed, and that is why/how we found Patrick Higgins.
6. In 2008-2009 we introduced the advisory program for all students.
7. Thanks to a grant from Homeland Security, working with Doug Fuchs at the Redding Police, we installed hallway security cameras about three years ago.
8. In the mornings before school, we have a staff member on duty in the junior parking lot to monitor students; this has been in place for at least seven years.
9. The administrators have all made a firm commitment to be highly visible throughout the building and at all major school functions such as dances, concerts, etc.
10. We schedule all night security patrols of the buildings on Halloween, Graduation, and other designated weekends or nights.
11. In 2009-2010, we installed mullions at all the exterior doors, which secures them and prevents students from being able to open them with a hard pull.
12. In 2010-2011 we put a coded access lock on the auditorium's soundbooth.
13. The security staff works for us. They are not members of a rental agency, but members of our community, so they know our kids by name. The security staff is in the parking lots in the morning and regularly circulates around the building during the school day. They offer three levels of escort to students who are being disciplined, which means we keep track of some students every period of every day and if they need a bathroom break, a security guard comes to escort the student.
14. Two or three years ago we collaborated with the Redding Police, who arranged for more than a dozen drug-sniffing dogs to conduct an extensive search of the building. This took place during a holiday break. They found no evidence of marijuana at that time.
15. Students who drive are assigned a numbered spot, so the guards can become familiar with their cars and spot a different one.
16. We have successfully waged an anti-graffiti campaign in the bathrooms.
17. On several occasions we have made presentations to the PTSA, often including one or more police officers.
18. Contrary to what some members of the public believe, we do and we have always honestly reported any and all incidents that involve drugs. Some schools choose to report these incidents as lesser offenses, but we do not.
19. BOE Policy 5131.6 "Drugs and Alcohol" was updated and adopted by the BOE on May 20, 2007.
20. Several administrators, our social worker, a student representative, and parents all serve on the Easton Redding Community Coalition against Substance Abuse.
21. The Head of School attends at least one event each year sponsored by The Housatonic Valley Coalition Against Substance Abuse.
22. An area private substance abuse counselor offers orientation to parents of freshman at the beginning of each year (although due to Hurricane Irene this didn't happen this year.)
23. Teachers and support staff receive training from our Social Worker and the Nurse on topics involving student safety each year at faculty meetings.
24. Unlike most of our sister high schools, our Wellness program is required in each of a student's four years.
25. We have successfully negotiated to have the Dean's position made into a 12 month job.