

ARIZONA STATE LEGISLATURE
Forty-fifth Legislature - Second Regular Session

SCHOOL SAFETY PROGRAM OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Minutes of Meeting
Tuesday, November 19, 2002
Senate Hearing Room 1 -- 10:00 a.m.

(Tape 1, Side A)

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m. and roll call was taken by the secretary.

Members Present

Senator Smith, Cochair
Alice Bustillo
Rani Collins
Dr. Fred DePrez

Mrs. Pickens (Advisory)
Mrs. Gray, Cochair
Alberto Gutier

Members Absent

Senator Lopez (Advisory)
William Udall

Detective Stan Morrow

Speakers Present

Danny Orr, National Director, Rachel's Challenge

Opening Remarks

Chairman Smith stated that this should be the last meeting this year. It will be his last meeting since he will no longer be in the Legislature, but Mrs. Gray will keep the School Safety Program operating. He opined that it is an excellent program that everyone has worked diligently on and produced good results. Superintendents and principals believe it is "the greatest thing since sliced bread." He added that there have been turnovers in staff at the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), but the program kept functioning.

Dr. DePrez thanked Chairman Smith and Mrs. Pickens for their leadership and keeping the program on track. He stated that as a school principal, he greatly appreciates the program and what they have done for the schools.

Mr. Gutier remarked that he probably will not be reappointed next year as a representative of the Governor's Office, but he enjoyed participating on the Committee over the last four or five years. He indicated that with 10 grandchildren attending school, he is very grateful for what the Committee does.

Consider Recommendations from the School Safety Working Group's Guidance Manual Revisions

Ms. Collins reviewed recommendations made by the School Safety Working Group for revisions to the Guidance Manual (Attachment 1).

Mr. Gutier, referring to the last page, indicated that a 10-month school year was always used, but the problem was to pick up the extra two months of salary to maintain the officer rather than having the officer reassigned to a district. With the budget difficulties most police agencies will face this upcoming year and major shortcuts in how agencies will deal with administration, he is concerned that some departments may reassign the officer during the summer break and the officer may not return after spending the money for training. He questioned if that is a problem.

Ms. Collins responded that she does not know if that would happen, but the revision allows the schools to have a 12-month position and provides guidance on how to employ the officer for 12 months. Contact with teachers and students in the school would be required and there is guidance for continuing the integrity of the program.

Senator Smith commented that it is impossible to put everything in writing to replace common sense. He expressed hope that in the future, attempts will be made to reduce the manual, although it is up to the working people, and he respects and supports their input.

Mr. Gutier moved that the Committee adopt the recommendations from the School Safety Working Group's Guidance Manual Revisions. The motion carried.

Senator Smith asked that any future recommendations be mailed to the Committee Members four or five days before the meeting.

Mrs. Pickens pointed out that she received the document by e-mail, made suggestions, and received the information back so she did know what the Group was working on, but maybe the completed changes should be mailed out in advance.

Funding Update and Discussion

Chairman Smith stated that there will probably be some tough times in the budget over the next year or two. Money is obtained for the program from the .6 percent sales tax that was implemented, and a bill was passed last year so nobody can touch those funds, which amount to about \$7 million annually. Last year, there was a line item in the ADE budget. He does not know the present status, but Mrs. Gray will make every effort to protect the money so the program can continue.

Mrs. Pickens indicated that a staff person advised her that there was a \$1.2 million voluntary return and a lump sum reduction to ADE of \$15,300 in the last go-round. She expressed concern that the money will disappear resulting in less for the program.

Chairman Smith recalled that some of the money was given back voluntarily with the understanding that it will be returned, and Richard Stavneak from the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) is aware of that, but perhaps he can be reminded.

Mrs. Gray pointed out that leftover money was voluntarily given up. Not everybody qualified when the applications were received, so there was another bid, and therefore, officers were not in place for about six months.

Dr. DePrez remarked that other principals have talked to him because, like this year, new schools were not added, and so many schools would like to be part of the program. He questioned if funds not spent from this fiscal year can be carried into the next year to keep the program growing.

Chairman Smith related that funds can now be carried over to the following year, which is in statute; however, for clarification, he asked Kimberly Yee, Senate Research Analyst, to make sure.

Mrs. Gray indicated that at the last meeting the Committee denied one school from participating because the school wanted to share an officer with the junior high school. She is concerned about that decision primarily because children move from junior high to high school; therefore, she does not see a problem with an officer who works at a high school also working with a brother, for example, in junior high, which, in fact, would be a good continuum.

Chairman Smith stated that it was an individual decision and he does not believe there is anything in writing. Mrs. Gray agreed and suggested a review of the guidelines on the issue.

Dr. DePrez explained that the concern was that the grant money was provided to help the high school, and in some situations, the school district or police department was sharing an officer funded for a particular school with other schools. The intention was that if the grant is given for a specific school, the money should remain there, or the school should at least be involved in the decision to share the officer. He added that he depends on the school resource officer (SRO), but some days he is not there because he had to go to another school or help the Police Department. That is what brought about the decision.

Mrs. Gray commented that part of the policy should be communication so the SRO would not go to another location without approval of the principal, so perhaps something could be worked out.

Ms. Collins pointed out that the grant was written and the program was established so the officer would serve the site that is approved. Often, if the officer is allowed to go to other sites within the district (and several districts have many sites), the officer may “put out many fires” at the different sites as opposed to fulfilling the other requirements at that specific site. She added that during the expansion in the second round on the applications, school districts were able to apply for other sites that need officer intervention or presence, which she believes addresses the issue.

Chairman Smith remarked that the guidelines should never be so firm that there is not allowance for individualization in the districts.

Mrs. Pickens remarked that there seems to be clarification that the money not spent this year will be carried forward to the next year to fund the program, but questioned what prevents the Appropriations Committee from sweeping any surplus money from the fund into the general fund.

Chairman Smith responded that he does not believe there is enough money in the fund for the Appropriations Committee to bother, but also, if it is part of the .6 percent sales tax, it cannot be touched. He added that Mrs. Gray will make every attempt to keep the fund protected.

School Violence Prevention Program Presentation

Danny Orr, National Director, Rachel's Challenge, provided an overview of a violence prevention program for middle schools and high schools called Rachel's Challenge (Attachment 2). He indicated that it has been used in over 400 schools nationwide, and he has been told by principals, teachers, and students in every school the program has been utilized that it is the best program they have had. He said he believes it would work well in conjunction with other local level programs, such as the School Safety Program. He added that the first school to use Rachel's Challenge in Arizona will be McClintock High School in Tempe in January 2003.

Mr. Gutier suggested that Rachel's Challenge could be used with a program the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) has every year in March that brings between 4,000 and 5,000 students to Pima Community College to talk about alcohol, drugs, and other issues. He indicated that Mrs. Gray can tell him how to contact Richard Fimbres, who is the Vice President, in Tucson. Mr. Orr indicated that he would follow-up.

Mrs. Pickens asked how Rachel's Challenge is different from other programs in the schools that teach students good decision making, conflict resolution, etc. Mr. Orr responded that using a story to teach a lesson is much more powerful than just talking about logical reasons why people should be kind to each other. Students are touched by the story and Rachel was a student from their peer group. He said he has seen bullies in schools apologize to other students before the student body during seminars.

Mrs. Pickens said she understands that one of the reasons the Columbine tragedy occurred was that the two students felt discounted and excluded. She asked what was not happening if Rachel believed everyone should be included. Mr. Orr replied that there were many lessons learned from the Columbine tragedy. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two gunmen who inflicted the massacre, were alienated and teased. Their best friend, Brooks Brown, wrote a book that came out in September 2002 that takes the reader through their entire childhood. The first time Dylan was ridiculed was by a teacher in the second grade. They reached an age where they no longer excelled at sports and were ridiculed by the athletes in the school, so they turned to each other, their computers, and violence, and planned the massacre well over a year before it occurred. Rachel reached out to them, but it requires more than one person.

He advised Mrs. Pickens that the program costs \$3,500 plus expenses for the program presenter. In order to obtain grant money from the federal act *No Child Left Behind*, more research is needed, so a generous donor offered a \$1,000 discount to schools that will take the time to conduct a brief survey before the program is used on campus, immediately after, and several months afterward. McClintock High School agreed to that and will pay \$2,500.

Chairman Smith stated that it is an excellent program and he agrees that emotion, along with the facts, make it much more impressive.

General Discussion

Cochairman Gray stated that in 1997 when the first legislation for the School Safety Program was brought forth, Chairman Smith was totally in support. The program benefits many students and provides safety at the schools. She thanked him for being a true leader in this effort.

Without objection, the meeting adjourned at 10:47 a.m.

Linda Taylor, Committee Secretary
November 22, 2002

(Original minutes, attachments, and tape are on file in the Office of the Chief Clerk.)