

Schools: Fight policy is straight, clear

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Don Cowan said the procedure for dealing with fights is straightforward in Farmington Public Schools.

Fighting is a category one violation of the Code of Conduct. Students involved are suspended three to five days, depending on the severity, said Cowan, the director of Building and Student Services. Parents are notified of the suspension.

A school administrator, usually a principal or vice-principal, fills out an incident/injury report. If there is an injury, action is taken immediately.

Most of the time in a fight, you're talking about a bloody nose, black eye or a red face. In those cases, the parents are notified as soon as possible.

Don Cowan
school spokesman

"Most of the time in a fight, you're talking about a bloody nose, black eye or a red face," Cowan said. "In those cases, the parents are notified as soon as possible."

If the injury is severe, Cowan said, 911 is called. But he added: "(The) staff has to make some

judgment as to the severity of the injury." Many administrators and staff have training in first aid, Cowan said.

Some parents say a more comprehensive policy is needed on fighting and possible injuries resulting from them.

Concerns have surfaced since a

Farmington High student was hospitalized after being punched by another student. According to reports, the boy was given an ice pack for his bleeding nose and was picked up by his mother.

He was later diagnosed with a cerebral concussion, a cracked jaw and two broken facial bones at Providence Hospital.

Cowan said it's not practical to call emergency help for every fight, though. "If we called the EMS every time there was a fight, we would have a lot of unnecessary calls because not every fight results in an injury sufficient to

call EMS."

Cowan added he doesn't believe fighting is a major problem in the schools.

Further fights lead to a request for an extended suspension of more than five days. A hearing takes place with Building and Student Services director and the parents as to the length of the suspension.

Cowan said there are only six to eight extended suspensions a year in the district. "It (fighting) goes in streaks," he said. "Sometimes you have two or three a week. Sometimes you have none at all."

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district headquarters at Shawwassee and Farmington roads, is to answer such questions.

Superintendent Michael Flanagan will moderate the session, which will be broadcast live on Channel 10. Board members as well as Flanagan and Barrett will answer questions.

The League of Women Voters' format will be followed. People at the meeting are asked to fill out comment cards with their questions. Viewers can phone in questions by calling 489-3300.

So far, Barrett said there haven't been a lot of questions. "I don't think there's a ton of confusion out there," Barrett said. "If this was an increase instead of a renewal, there would be a different story."

The word "increase" will be on the ballot, according to Barrett. That's only because 4,315 mills expired in 1992, and is technically an increase from zero. A legal requirement stipulates the ballot language includes the word in that one instance.

Richard DeVries, an unsuccessful bond candidate who had questioned the millage, said he plans to attend Tuesday's meeting.

His primary concern, he said, was if the 1993 Amendment to the General Property Tax Act applied to the renewal, though that's already been resolved.

But DeVries also questions combining renewals. Added DeVries, "I think we should maintain the option to examine school financing on a year to year basis."

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who added she had to ask that an incident/injury report be filed.

Wood Creek principal Barbara Novatis declined comment, citing the lawsuit.

Rott is concerned. "I don't expect that these teachers can keep kids from attacking other kids," Rott said. "That can happen, but have a plan to seek help and action immediately. Call 911, call a parent. Give them an option."

Another incident

Marilyn Abdilla expresses similar dismay.

Her daughter, 17, was involved in a fight with another girl in the parking lot at Harrison High last June. Her daughter sustained what she describes as a bump on the head.

After the fight, which was broken up by other students, she phoned her mother and went into the principal's office.

Her older sister went to pick her up and ended up arguing with Harrison principal Clayton Graham over the handling of the incident. She was asked to leave several times, but didn't.

Farmington Hills police were

called and the older daughter was arrested for trespassing. She later pleaded guilty.

Meanwhile, Marilyn Abdilla said she didn't know the condition of her daughter. "He (Graham) never called me back after hanging up the phone," Abdilla said.

The daughter left the school on her own without having the injury examined. She was later X-rayed at a clinic where no serious injury was found.

No suspensions resulted, though a police report was filed. Last week, Abdilla decided she

wanted a copy of the accident/incident report. She went with her husband, Frank, to the board of education.

The mother was told she would need to see Don Cowan, who is director of building and student services. Cowan was busy, and they were told to come back Monday.

They decided to go to the high school instead. They say Graham was abrupt with her and her husband, Frank.

"He told us, 'You people are very rude,'" Abdilla said. "You people expect me to find a report on the drop of a dime." In the meantime, he's yelling at me."

Graham denies being rude. The principal added he was on his way to a meeting when the Abdillas arrived without an appointment and spent nearly an hour trying to find the report.

But Graham admits an incident report wasn't filed. He said that was probably due to the confusion involving her older sister.

"I think in hindsight, even though school was ending, I prob-

ably should've called and said to them, 'What was going on?'" Graham said.

Graham said school policy is to call the Farmington Hills police. A report is then filed with the department.

Said Graham, "We've told the students if there is a fight, we're going to get the police involved."

Farmington Hills police detective Bert Cook confirmed this.

"They're the quickest to call us," Cook said. "They run a tight ship over there."

Cowan, who handles discipline matters on a district-wide basis, said an incident report is usually filed by an administrator if there's a fight of any magnitude.

The incident still upsets Abdilla. She said her daughter has since withdrawn from Harrison and is trying to enroll in the Alternative Academy to complete her senior year.

"To me, it looks like there's either a lot of cover up or one hand doesn't know what the other one is doing," Abdilla said.

Fight prevention training set for some

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Some teachers will be in training to prevent fights.

"Teaching Children to be Peacemakers" will be taught to teachers in the Farmington Public Schools during two sessions in February and April.

This is the first year for the training, which is offered as part of the district's Staff Development program.

The curriculum has been developed by two brothers, Drs. David and Robert Johnson, who are professors at the University of Min-

nesota.

In the two-day training session, participants learn how to teach children to negotiate, manage anger, mediate conflict involving other students and to understand an overall concept of peace.

"I felt there was a need for children, in their minds, to understand the concept of peace," said Marilyn Carlson, who works in the district's Curriculum department and has taken the course.

"Teaching Children to be Peacemakers" also falls in line with state law. Public Act 62 passed in 1990 mandates the

state board develop guidelines for districts in teaching dispute management and resolution.

So far, 11 teachers have signed up including two from Hillside Day School. Most are elementary and middle school instructors.

No high school teachers have registered yet. The class size is 15, and participants must have completed the Cooperative Learning training.

Carlson believes the training will be a success in the long run. "The goal would be for children to use it on their own in an authentic context of a conflict," Carlson said.

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458 N. Telegraph Rd.

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Wed: 10 a.m., 6 p.m.

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Sat: 8:30 a.m., 10 a.m.

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6:45 p.m.

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