The Meeting of the Ad-Hoc Committee was held at the Blake Building, 25 Ogden Street, West Haven on October 3, 2006. The meeting was called to order by Howard Horvath Jr. at 6:30 p.m.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Howard Horvath, Chairman
PRESENT
Eric Murillo
George Monahan
Gerald A. Calabritto

OTHER BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: M. Toni Paine
Krista Pickering
Robert Guthrie

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Raymond Collins
Mark Palmieri

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT: Dr. JoAnn Andrees, Superintendent
Neil Cavallaro, Assistant Superintendent
Ronald Stancil, Principal
Kurt Ogren, (Provost)
Lester Hawley, Director Alternate School
Paul DeFonzo, Assistant Principal

Howard Horvath, Chairman for the Ad-Hoc Committee on Safety and Security opened the meeting by thanking all in attendance.

He felt that everyone here was in attendance at the first meeting which was held on June 19, 2006 as a result of concerns over weapons in the schools but after investigating and talking about this it wasn’t what it appeared and we were content that the issues were under control. We also heard about programs which were being implemented at the high school and middle schools relative to discipline in general specifically relative to suspensions and expulsions. This is where we will pick up. He asked Kurt Ogren, Provost at the high school to give an update.

Kurt handed out a sheet regarding monthly disciplinary statistics. Before explaining the sheet he stated he met with students who were previously expelled from Carrigan or Bailey and were returning on the first day of school. He met with them before the beginning of school as a positive prevention measure and stated that he knew they had
gotten into trouble previously and were expelled. He showed them his office along with the guidance counselor’s office and stated that if they needed help this is where to find the social workers and guidance counselors. He reviewed the real basics of what had happened to the students earlier. He met with all the students who did return in that situation within the first three days of school and none of these students have gotten into any trouble.

On September 18, 2006 through Dr. Rose Paolino and the Counseling Office the Counselor of the Day Program was started. This program was started in Kingston, RI and has been successful throughout the country. They target freshman with minor behavioral issues. Kurt will speak to them and give them a verbal reprimand but then they will go down the hall to see the Counselor of the Day. There are eight rotating counselors. Each counselor is there one day during every eight school days. They meet the students have them sign a contract and write about why they were removed from class. We are taking preventative measures so it doesn’t happen again. We also talk with the student’s parents. This has been proven to be successful. There are fewer students retained in the ninth grade two years in a row. This has shown itself to be a positive intervention.

As far as weapons at the high school we have none to report. We had two students with a box cutter (carpet cutter) both students are awaiting a manifestation determination as they are special education students. They were suspended for 10 school days. Based on their disability and the reasons they gave it may not result in expulsions. This issue will be decided. They had gone fishing the night before and had been using the carpet cutter for fishing and had forgotten it was in the backpack. He remembered he had it and said look what I have and the teacher acted appropriately.

In looking at the disciplinary sheet from last September to this September the number of Verbal Reprimands is higher. One reason is because we are documenting the removal of student’s cell phone and baseball cap. We are documenting this when they retrieve them. They can get them back for the first time at the end of the day on Friday. This is why the number is so much higher. Central Detention is higher as well. A system was developed where the kids aren’t going to fall through the cracks. Last year things were so busy that some central detentions were lost in the shuffle. In School Suspensions the number is down slightly. In Out of School Suspension the number is down and if we didn’t have the incidents of last Monday and Tuesday that number would be down by fourteen. (56 rather than 70) This fits right in with the Arrests. In September five of the arrests were related to the bomb scare incident. One arrest happened while the students were out on the football field during the evacuation. So you can really tie six into those two days. There were a total of two fights which is a high number. This is where our numbers are and I think we did get off to a good start.

With the incidents of September 25th and 26th with the bomb scare I have a great deal of praise for the West Haven Police Department. We did go into our policy mode right away Dr. Andrees and the police were there. I think things went as smoothly as you could expect. Monday was difficult because the incident happened prior to the students
arriving. By 7:05 a.m. we were evacuating the building and many students and teachers were not there yet and had no idea what was going on. Tuesday went a lot smoother. There will be a further developed plan for this with the community, city, police and fire departments along with the school district.

Howie Horvath stated that last year they were successful in reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions and knows they are shooting to do the same this year and asked what he thought allowed them to accomplish this last year and what will be applied over and above that this year.

Kurt stated that last year the number one count from 2004 - 2005 was brought down from 38 to 16 (Expulsions). This is due to positive interventions. We got the parents involved early and talked to them about the road their children were taking. Some students did end up going to Adult Education and Stiles the Alternate I Program and some went Alternate II. This helped them. We still want them to get their high school diploma. There are basically mandated expulsions for drugs and bringing in a weapon. We didn’t get this type of conduct like we did in the past.

Howie asked what transpired with the teachers this summer as it was pointed out as a key piece of Kurt’s strategy. Kurt stated he didn’t meet with the teachers; he planned on his own this summer. Last year they were point targeting the teachers who were having problems with classroom management. This year things are going very well. No teacher really stands out in working with the department heads as having a problem. Teachers are doing a much better job and are making the calls home to the student’s parents to help document any issues. Power School really empowers them where they can make the calls, log in entries and this helps document everything and they can see how things progress.

Ron Stancil, Principal of WHHS stated the consistency from the Office of the Provost is a key factor. The lion’s share of this is (95%) is handled through Kurt and this has been most important in reducing unwanted conduct.

Dr. Andrees also wanted to compliment the administrative team at the high school their method of intervention and communicating that to the staff at the very beginning of the school year. The staff knew the level of intervention and what they could do and that type of communication appeared as we have seen here tonight. Communication is a real key as to how the school year opened this year and I want to commend them.

Toni Paine, Chairman of the Board of Education stated she was impressed when she heard that students who were previously in trouble or expelled at the middle schools were shown that somebody is looking out for them not post predicament but before anything happens to them.

Ron Stancil stated they asked each school to give them a list of students who they should be looking to help and we had about 25 students to meet with. Kurt met with these
students. Toni thought this was important to the students to know that they were being
looked out for.

Eric Murillo asked Kurt or Ron to explain the role of Counselor of the Day. The
Counselor of the Day is a Provost that Dr. Rose Paolino has brought to West Haven High
School. The counselors spend one day in rotation with every eight days they spend in the
Student Assistant Center in E-115 which is where all the counseling, college references
take place. The teacher can refer them down to this room to talk to a counselor. The
counselor deals with this situation. Then they write up a contract showing the things that
can be done to handle the situation. This happens before a school suspension. This is an
intervention prior to getting a disciplinary action. This is a pro-active type of thing. The
Counselor of the Day will write this up and send it back to the student’s regular counselor
so there is intervention by a counselor and followed up by the student’s regular
counselor.

Eric asked how the students find out about this. This program is brand new in its pilot
year. The counselors will promote this more and more. It begins with the classroom
teacher who can refer a student either directly to the Counselor of the Day or to Kurt
Ogren. They then follow the above plan of action. Again, we are targeting grade 9 at this
time.

Involvement includes my office, the school resource officers, our social workers and the
counselor of the day, along with Rose McDonnell from the career center. This works out
well if they need a social worker they are there. Eric asked who the social workers
involved are. Kurt stated they have three: Christine Savva, Jackie Grady and Connie
Perkins along with two school psychologists Heather Maresca and Diane Keefe.

Eric asked how it is determined who a student goes to. This is determined through
alphabetic breakdown.

George Monahan stated that for years they talked about the importance of re-establishing
the conduct that is expected of students when they are in our buildings and on our
property as well as making sure the parent or guardian is aware of the Student Handbook
which defines these rules. He asked if there was any type of general assembly for each
grade planned where these rules are established. This is done on the first day of school
every year. George asked, “Are we confident this is effective or do we need to do a
refresher a couple of months into the school year”? After the arrests and incident on
September 25th and 26th the police came in and explained what a misdemeanor and
felony is and what type of punishment for each. George asked if there was anything new
they were doing trying to make sure parents and guardians are aware of this book and
have received it and looked at it. The students sign that they have received it. When
parents are notified they are again informed of the policies. So they are certainly
reminded of it.

Jerry Calabritto asked who signs for the book. The students sign. Did you ever consider
having a requirement that a parent must sign also? Ron stated that the parent is able to
sign when registering a new student. Jerry said so they student is the only one that signs for the book so hypothetically the student never advises his parent of the rules he needs to live by at the high school. Ron stated he would find it hard to believe that someone could actually say that they didn’t know there was a student handbook. There has to be some responsibility on the part of the parents.

Toni Paine said in that beautiful newsletter that went out in the beginning of the year we could probably say be on the lookout for the Student Handbook each student is getting one. Howie said this is perhaps something we want to revisit to feel more comfortable and be more proactive.

Lester Hawley, Director of the Alternate School, stated his students are required to bring the receipt home and have a parental signature. In regards to lowering student suspensions he feels the key is teacher training. Before we can see any significant changes teachers must be trained to deal with situations in the classroom in a very effective way before it becomes escalated. It doesn’t make sense to have a student sent to his office for a minor situation. In dealing with this type of situation he is presenting a series of power point presentations for teachers. They are looking at one presentation a week showing proper responses to situations that develop in the classroom before they can escalate and behavior modifications. They want to do this before a student finds his way to Les Hawley’s office and his back is up against the wall.

As a tool to alleviate suspensions they have a mentoring program. Each teacher in the building tries to spend some time with students hopefully every day. He has extended this program to have others become mentors. We have gotten positive results.

Paul DeFonzo, Assistant Principal at Carrigan, shared some data from August 31st through today. They had 48 verbal reprimands, 37 students in central detention, 12 students in ISS compared to 31 last year, and 27 out of school suspensions compared to 22 last year, one expulsion and two arrests. The one expulsion was for a student they received from New Haven who was expelled toward the end of last school year and the expulsion carries over. Of the two arrests one was for breach and one for the bomb threat. Our numbers on out of school suspension were somewhat inflated. Some were for fighting and insubordination and we want the students to realize right from the start that we have a zero tolerance for any kind of nonsense in the ISS room. We are getting the word out and developing a base line. We establish conduct almost on a daily basis. We talk to the kids, we have assemblies, we read them important things from the handbook that they need to be aware of, and we have announcements on the PA system. With the elimination of split lunches we have four waves and have time in between the waves to go into the lunch room and speak to the students about bus behavior. Bus behavior is probably one of the biggest problems so far. He has been in contact with Fred Winkle and has talked with the drivers on numerous occasions. He is working on this issue.

He stated he is very proud of the student’s behavior last week as well as that of the staff during the bomb scare. They conducted themselves accordingly. Pat Libero and he have
highlighted in the teacher’s handbook and revamped how to handle a disciplinary referral and have gone over this with the staff. They have set up the Pyramids of Intervention – strategies and procedures for handling a student, how to de-escalate a situation. They may have a Para take a student for a walk and talk to the student. Sometimes the student just needs to vent and then bring them back into the classroom setting. If this doesn’t work the teachers are told to make a phone call home. The student’s parent is called and informed. We set up a student conference to meet with the student after school. We assign after school detention. We also revamped our positive behavior program this year. This year for any given week if they have not received any type of referral they are awarded Cougar Cash. This can be used at the school store or at our monthly raffle. A number of businesses in the area have developed a partnership with us that feed into this idea. We highlight this program in our monthly newsletters that are sent home. This has met with good success thus far. This accounts for why some of the numbers are down.

Howie stated in previous years they wanted to apply a systematic approach. He noted how valuable it is to have this consistency at the high school. We thought how beneficial to do this school district wide. Give the financial situation it is not something we could do. He is leaving this out for contemplation to see if there is another way to come to some kind of district wide thinking or best practice for some of these issues that everyone in all the schools are facing. We will reflect on the minutes of this meeting. He stated that Eric has done a lot of research and thinking about different strategies and programs from outside the area so maybe we will bring another group together to come up with some ideas. Howie thanked all who participated and gave of their time and effort.

Howard Horvath made the motion to adjourn this AD-Hoc Committee Meeting. Gerald Calabritto seconded the motion.

Discussion: Eric Murillo read the following to the Board.

I want to thank Mr. Horvath for his initiative and concerns for the safety of all children in our school system, his concern is what brought us to this committee and in this room.

When we met a few months earlier with some administrators we had a dialogue and I understand that expulsions were down. What caught my attention was our in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions and in-school detentions and I started to understand we really do not have a good handle on this problem. As I started looking at the ED166 OFFENSE SUMMARY, this summary goes to the state, in the High School, Carrigan and Bailey there were something like 3000 suspensions.

I find that expulsions go hand in hand with suspensions when the students are suspended for a day, two, three or more they fall behind in school work. They will get discouraged and fail. This will place them on the expulsion list with a possible police record, or in jail.
We cannot afford to let any student fall behind. If this continues to happen in the numbers that are happening most of these students will get expulsions and that is not good.

I also understand that some of these students are repetitively suspended and that alone tells us they need help, they need our support, they need us to find ways for them to succeed in school and keep them safe.

As you know a lot of them are minorities, some come from single hard working parents or families that are trying to survive, these families need our help.

Some of this children need some nurturing and what I mean is not baby sitting. I mean one on one assistance we need to understand that Boys And Girls learn differently they need teachers that have passion, and persistence to reach a child in need, and follow through in their performance, guide them and listen to them. We need to find ways to teach the boys and the girls differently.

The Stiles Alternative Suspension Program that is in place at this time is helping but I also think we can use this school for middle school students.

At in-school suspension a classroom with a teacher teaching is needed, not a child in an office just sitting there with nothing to do; or at home or the streets.

Some students need counseling it is important to provide this too, they need to feel comfortable with a social worker or counselor so they can confide their problem to them.

In the elementary school offer a teacher who is retired the 30 days work program to teach these students, this will contribute to their health insurance.

Let’s do some research and find out what information is out there that would improve the education and safety to all the children not just a few.

Parents are failing to teach and model responsibility. Families are harried by daily life stresses and are either trying to survive or driven by materialism.

Children receive less nurturing and guidance as the quality of parenting declines. Children are psychologically and emotionally needier than in prior decades and are given excessive freedom to satisfy personal needs. Because of personal guilt or denial, children are uninformed about the importance of social etiquette toward others.

Parents must assume responsibility for teaching their children respect for authority, social accountability and ethical value. Parents have to be part of the equation. We need parents to be required to volunteer at least one hour a month at a school in their district.

Howie thanked Eric for his input and again thanked everyone in attendance.
There was no further discussion.

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marylou C. Amendola
Board Clerk