



LOCAL

Superintendent wants parents, kids to step up

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Samohi's Barnum Hall to hear school officials explain what happened on Friday and field questions from parents. Many parents were at a loss as to why the fighting took place and outraged that it occurred. They were hoping for some consensus on what might be done to prevent future unrest.

"The schools must be a safe place for learning," said John Deasy, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District superintendent, who facilitated the meeting with Samohi principal Ilene Straus. "When students don't comply with the rules, the school will take action."

According to school officials, Samohi has 3,500 students, 12 student advisors and six hired security officers. The campus has recently undergone redesign changes intended to improve the educational experience. Some people complained after the meeting that design alienates students.

Security cameras scheduled to go on line next month will be used to monitor after school vandalism — not to scan for troublemaking in students, a point with which some parents took issue. Although presented as an "informational" meeting to address what happened and how parents can expect the district to respond to similar events, reactions from those who attended were mixed.

"The meeting was effective in convincing parents the school is in control," said Oscar de la Torre, a school board member and executive director of the Pico Youth & Family Center, whose non-profit organization has been helping Samohi mediate the fighting between black and Latino students. "But the meeting did not discuss why the Latinos and blacks are fighting."

Some parents criticized the district administrators, saying the meeting was a public relations salvage operation that didn't address the underlying issues behind the fights.

Meanwhile, administrators contend efforts to secure the campus will only be guaranteed with more student accountability and parental involvement.

"Preventing these students from making these errors are all of our jobs," Deasy told the parents. "We need you to help in the hours we are not with students."

To the students, Deasy added: "Watching fights is not non-violence, it's egging the fights on."

Liesel Friedrich, a Samohi mother, said the fact that so many students were fighting was in itself inexcusable, regardless of the reasons, which she said the students should be able to settle without disrupting class.

"I am completely disgusted with students who behaved so badly," Friedrich said. "I don't want to finance police and security overtime because these clowns

want to fight, rumble and misbehave. We have bought them a first-class education and they don't want it."

"It is illegal what they have done and they have no business being at Samohi if they don't want to resolve their differences."

Friedrich also said she hopes the students who fought will be expelled.

Derek Lantzsch, a native of Santa Monica who doesn't have children attending Samohi, said he was surprised the students involved in the fighting were not being charged with hate crimes.

"I believe in equal justice for all people," Lantzsch said. "When I see this on the news, 'browns against blacks,' I get concerned when I see no one charging these students with hate crimes. If it were whites fighting against blacks or Asians — and I support charges against them, too — hate crimes would be brought against the whites."

De la Torre, however, argued that if the district took a hard stance on punishing without addressing the underlying problems, it might not be helpful in solving the violence issue at Samohi.

"These kids already have so many problems, they feel they have nothing to lose," de la Torre said. "Their parents are overwhelmed. You kick them out of school, they'll be on the streets, causing trouble. You think that's going to do any

one any good?"

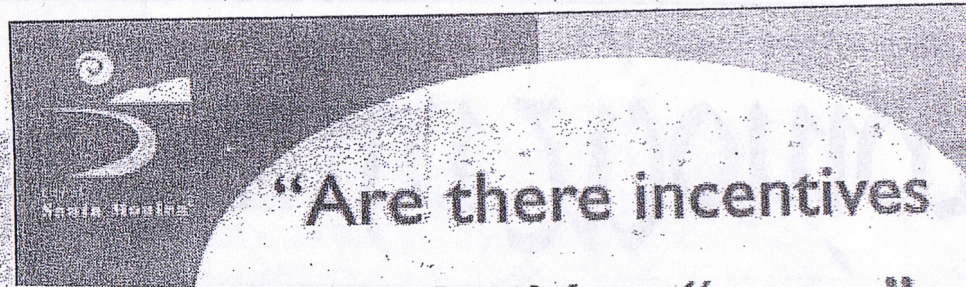
De la Torre said counselors from PYFC prefer a "restorative justice" approach to help stop fighting, force those with conflicts to confront each other in a mediated atmosphere. He said counselors at Samohi have had some success with that approach regarding fights, not in all cases. De la Torre also advocated a fighting code of conduct which although may not stop fights outright said would slowly diffuse tensions between groups and may help address the problem over time in the community.

De la Torre said that in the past method of challenging youth who were gang up on other groups to fight individually has deterred many confrontations.

"If we can get these groups to agree to fight one-on-one instead of ganging up on each other, it would be a step in the right direction," he said.

Eddie Bowie, a black man who said his son was attacked at Samohi, said there was too much emphasis on race being a factor in the fight.

"I don't want to make it out like it's nothing, but we need to keep in mind springtime. There are lots of students at Samohi and the testosterone is up," Bowie said. "It's a natural progression. They weren't hurt. They were in it for excitement. This isn't about race. It's one planet, one people."



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