

# **New Bedford Public Schools officials strengthen school building security**

The New Bedford School Committee and Superintendent Pia Durkin announced on Friday a series of measures to strengthen and monitor the security of all 28 buildings in the New Bedford Public Schools.

To help prevent school security breaches after hours, Superintendent Durkin recently called for an inspection of school alarm systems citywide. Principals reported that all elementary and middle schools have working alarm systems. Dr. Durkin, with the Business Department, has instituted monitoring and reporting requirements to ensure that the district can immediately identify and repair any faulty alarms. The district also will require all principals to meet with safety officers to conduct a thorough on-site review of all doors, windows, cameras, and security procedures.

The district's efforts to address building security focus heavily on New Bedford High School, which has never had a full school after-hours intrusion alarm system. A \$6.5 million facility improvement project is underway at the school, funded by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). The project includes numerous investments to improve both security and teaching and learning, particularly through upgrades to instructional technology.

When completed, the MSBA project will increase the number of security cameras at NBHS to more than 200, a substantial increase from the 60 currently in use. This will significantly expand the ability to monitor and record activity inside and outside of the building, both during and after the school day.

The MSBA project also will upgrade wireless Internet access

throughout the building, provide SMART Boards for instructional use, install classroom telephones, and make other investments to give teachers and students access to state-of-the-art technology. State funding for the project also included a recent third-party analysis, conducted by Kroll, of building security at the high school.

Mayor Jonathan Mitchell and Dr. Durkin will convene two work groups to review the report and present recommendations within the next two months. One work group will focus on a series of steps to be taken at the school level to strengthen security practices such as visitor protocols, student arrival and dismissal procedures, and clear communication for staff and students. New Bedford High School Headmaster Kathleen Dawson will chair the work group, which will include key members of the administrative team, teachers, safety officers, parents, and community partners. The second work group will include school department personnel as well as School Committee and city officials to recommend prioritizing security investments, including cost implications for upgrading security at New Bedford High School.

Mayor Mitchell, who is also chair of the School Committee, stated, "We are committed to ensuring that our school buildings are safe for the students and staff of the New Bedford Public Schools and that these public facilities are protected from harm after school hours."

Dr. Durkin wants to reassure parents that the security of the building during school hours has been and will continue to be the top priority, however, inquiry into the lack of an after-hours intrusion alarm at the high school revealed that the building was once staffed by custodians around the clock, minimizing the need for an alarm system after hours. The overnight custodial shift was discontinued but was not replaced by an intruder alarm. As a result, Dr. Durkin informed the School Committee that she will be meeting with the high school administrators to explore the intention of

providing security to the high school campus after hours. Also, Chief David Provencher has stated the New Bedford Police Department will increase overnight patrols in that area.

Dr. Durkin said, “The protocols and checkpoints we are putting in place to ensure the effective functioning of all our schools’ alarm systems, the new procedures that are being developed within New Bedford High School, the increase in security cameras and the added temporary staffing of overnight custodial personnel at the school – all reflect both immediate and long-term steps to address some longstanding security and facility issues in the district. These efforts assure our students and staff of a safe environment where teaching and learning goals can be the focus – front and center –without worry or distraction.”

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