

Zero Tolerance

School Board Eyes Tougher Weapons Policy; Wants Community's Support

BY SUSAN USHER

Brunswick County school board members are eyeing policy changes they hope will sharply discourage students from bringing weapons or their look-alikes on campus—and assure punishment if they do.

In a four-hour work session last Thursday, Feb. 11, members talked through policy options with Richard A. Schwartz, a Raleigh attorney specializing in public school law, reaching consensus on several elements of a new "pro-active" policy to be drafted by Schwartz and then discussed again.

Thursday's meeting came in response to increasing concern among parents about weapons and violence on campus. Those concerns aren't limited to Brunswick County. "This is nothing new," said Schwartz, noting parents and school systems across North Carolina and the United States are dealing with the same types of problems.

Chairman Donna Baxter said the public is demanding something more than the board's current weapons possession policy, which calls for suspension of a student for a minimum of 10 days.

For the new policy to work effectively as a deterrent will require cooperation from both parents and the local judicial system, Schwartz indicated, and will start with an effective public information effort.

"You need to feel out local court officials' opinions on these options (for sanctions)," said Schwartz. "If the court says they have more important things to do, then the policy you adopted as a deterrent may be less of a deterrent than you wanted."

"One of the key issues of dealing with this issue of weapons is educating the students and educating the parents," he continued. "You need to let them know your level of tolerance and what the consequences might be if that level is violated."

Policy options and the sanctions for violating them varied in severity from zero tolerance of any weapon on any campus for any reason, with automatic suspension for the balance of the school year, to consideration given to the type of weapon, age of the student and why the weapon or toy weapon was brought to campus.

Schwartz will draft a policy that includes these elements:

■Students are not to possess, handle or transmit any weapons or items that look like weapons (including toys), any item used as a weapon, and explosives. This includes pocket knives. The only exceptions would be school-approved uses such as JROTC and hunter safety courses, where applicable.

■Zero tolerance for any student in grades 6-12 possessing, transmitting or handling a firearm, explosive or knife on campus—including pocket knives, with suspension from school for the balance of the school year.

■Punishment may be tailored when dealing with students in grades K-5 for any weapons offense; and for students in grades 6-12 with a weapon other than a knife, firearm or explosive. The principal could take into account the age and intent of the student (to injure or kill an ex-girlfriend or for second grade "show and tell").

Punishment could range up to a long-term suspension for the remainder of the school year. The board may consider a presumptive punishment, with punishment reduced only if convinced that mitigating circumstances exist.

■All long-term (more than 10-day) suspensions related to weapons will be automatically reviewed by the superintendent, with the right to appeal to the school board. Sanctions would be overturned only if found to be arbitrary or lacking a rational basis. A student would have the opportunity to make up missed school work if found, on appeal, not to have violated the policy.

■Automatic criminal prosecution of students found in violation of policy who receive a long-term suspension.

While generally agreeing with Chairman Donna Baxter's view that parents should share responsibility for their child's behavior, most board members don't think it appropriate to seek prosecution of parents for encouraging or allowing a child to violate the weapons policy. "I think we need to stay away from it," said member Yvonne Bright.

The board said it would like the discretion to seek

criminal prosecution of other individuals, such as older students or outsiders.

■Prohibition of a student in any way encouraging another student to bring a weapon to school. However, there would be no "ratting rule" that requires students to tell on peers, said Schwartz, because of the "tremendous burden" that puts on students and the potential fear of retribution.

■Improved record-keeping to document weapons-related incidents and how they are handled.

Schwartz said that state law requires schools to provide students at all grade levels and their parents with a copy of the student discipline code, in effect putting students on notice before a violation occurs.

Task Force Wants Strong Anti-Weapons Stance

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fighting to require that a warrant for arrest be taken out against anyone caught fighting on school grounds.

"Generally this year you don't hear much about weapons at West Brunswick," said Benton. "Last year the rumors would start and students would be calling their parents to take them out of school."

"This year we've had only about two fights, and before we might have had 200."

While fighting is down, Benton noted that he could "probably get any drug you want" on West's campus, and officers agreed, adding the quantities would be small.

Citing tougher rules regarding both fighting and attendance, Benton said, "The stricter the policy the more respected it is, no matter what it is—if it's enforced."

Whatever policy or system of

dealing with weapons on campus is adopted needs to be consistently enforced, noted Joe Bryant of Leland, whose daughter is in the ninth grade at North Brunswick High School. "So often I see in Brunswick County someone put together a good package and because one parent might not be happy with it, it gets set aside," he said.

Whatever may have been the practice in the past, Superintendent Ralph Johnston told the group that his position is to "always do what is right, fair, equitable, honest, consistent and finally, what's best for the students."

Also, Johnston said he is also exploring the possibility of creating an alternative "setting, not school," for at-risk students and others who consistently break the rules but must still be served by the school system.

"But it's not going to be a fun place to be," he suggested. "We're

In addition to tougher laws relating to violence and weapons as they relate to schools, Schwartz said he expects to see more cases prosecuted under the federal Gun-Free School Zones Act. Under this federal law possession of firearms in a school zone (on campus or within 1,000 feet of school) is punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or up to five years in prison.

Schwartz expects to have the proposed policy drafted before the board meets again on March 8.

In a related move Superintendent Ralph Johnston appointed a 17-member group called the Brunswick County Task Force on Safety in Schools to look at safety-related issues concerning the schools. The group met Monday for the first time.

going to make it tough."

Both the sheriff's department and district attorney's office expressed a willingness to cooperate with the school system.

Gore said he believes anyone who has a weapon on campus in violation of state law should be automatically referred for prosecution. However, what happens once in the court system would depend in part on the nature of the offense and caseload being handled by his office, he acknowledged. Gore suggested the referral itself "may have served the purpose of getting their attention."

Arthur "Butch" LeClerc of Long Beach, congratulated Johnston and the school board for taking a strong stance regarding weapons on campus. "It's got to be enforced; it can't be swept under the rug. If these things are done, the problem will start to take care of itself."

Normal Weather Anticipated

Normal February weather is in the forecast for the South Brunswick Islands after a week of warmer than usual temperatures.

Shallotte Point weather watcher Jackson Canady said he expects temperatures to average in the mid-30s at night ranging into the upper 50s during the daytime.

For the period Feb. 9-15, he recorded a high of 72 degrees on Feb. 11 and a low of 34 degrees the nights of Feb. 9 and 15. A daily average high of 63 degrees and an average nightly low of 41 degrees combined for a daily average temperature of 52 degrees, about 5 degrees above average.

Canady recorded sixty-six hundredths of an inch of rain for the period.

Construction On The Rise In Area Towns, Beaches

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million, and for four mobile homes.

Activity on the island hasn't slackened, he indicated.

"The higher-end construction on the beach is going great guns," he said, "but so far we haven't issued any permits in the ETA."

The ETA is the extraterritorial area extending a mile beyond the town limits in which Ocean Isle exercises land use control.

"We have a lot of second home owners there and a lot of them are middle-class people," said Roberson.

If a typical spring spurt of building activity occurs in the ETA in March and April, he predicted 1993 "could be another big year" for Ocean Isle.

On a more cautious note, he suggested property owners may be waiting to see what happens to the economy and to President Bill Clinton's campaign promises.

In Shallotte, Building Inspector Albert Hughes issued permits for 21 single-family houses with an estimated value of \$2.46 million.

He also issued permits for amusement and recreational facilities totaling \$489,800, including a new

Shallotte Moose Lodge and a new Brierwood Golf Club. St. James Episcopal Church began a major renovation and expansion project with an estimated value of \$400,000, while permits for several new offices were issued, with an estimated valuation of \$169,600.

In a change from previous years, Hughes also issued 17 permits for mobile homes. All are located outside the town limits, within Shallotte's new extraterritorial area.

At Holden Beach, Building Inspector Dwight Carroll reported residential construction valued at just over \$5 million, with single-family building down slightly from the previous year, when 59 homes were permitted. In 1992 he issued permits for 48 single-family houses, valued at \$4.03 million, plus two duplexes valued at \$373,845.

One commercial structure was permitted, at a value of \$210,000.

Brunswick County's Building Inspection Department issued permits for two single-family homes in Varnamtown, the same as the year before, with a combined valuation of about \$99,552. Permits were issued for five mobile homes, up from two the previous year.

Sewer Expansion Is On Shallotte's Priority List

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1980 to 25 percent in 1990.

"This can be attributed to more retirement age people moving into developments like Briewood Estates with its golf course and other amenities which are attractive to this segment of the population," the plan states.

"In addition, two retirement homes have been built in Shallotte during the 1980s which have increased the number of older persons living in Shallotte."

Projections for the year 2000 would add anywhere from 42 to 127 additional housing units. Town officials also hope for more commercial development.

Despite the increased demands it would place on the sewer system, town officials indicate in the land use plan they want to encourage that type of growth.

"Shallotte citizens would like to see more job opportunities in the community to give the area's young people the opportunity to remain in Shallotte to work following their education," the plans says.

"Shallotte officials and citizens would like to see balanced growth in the industrial and service job sector as well as promotion of the area as an excellent retirement community."

To spur growth, town officials will support the South Brunswick Islands Committee of 100

and efforts to prepare a brochure promoting the community as a hub for industry and business.

The proposed land use plan update also says "the town will continue to foster the trade center concept of the town, both for permanent and seasonal residents."

Shallotte will encourage increased tourism by supporting both the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce and North Carolina Division of Travel and Tourism.

At a public information meeting last March, community residents ranked expansion of the sewer system as the highest priority over the next five to 10 years.

Eleven residents participated in the meeting, and six identified sewer expansion as an important issue. Other high priority items included the need for new business and landscaping of the downtown and river areas.

The N.C. Coastal Area Management Act requires that communities in the state's 20 coastal counties prepare land use plans to guide future growth. Plans must be updated every five years.

Shallotte officials must hold a public hearing on their latest land use plan update before it is approved. Final certification would then be needed from the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission.

According to other policy statements in the proposed plan, town officials also plan to:

■Discourage development in the floodplain

of the Shallotte River and development of estuarine system islands.

■Prohibit development of land uses that will degrade the quality of groundwater or lower the aquifer.

■Support state efforts to protect Outstanding Resource Waters.

■Work to maintain or improve water quality by developing better stormwater management practices and reducing future density in environmentally-sensitive areas through use of the zoning ordinance.

■Allow marinas as long as local, state and federal requirements are met.

■Support maintenance of the Shallotte River channel as a navigable stream for boating and fishing.

■Work to establish a waterfront access program.

■Support recreational opportunities by annually applying for state or federal grants to acquire and develop facilities and park sites.

■Upgrade the aesthetic quality of Shallotte by preparing and implementing a plan to landscape the downtown and river areas.

■Push for construction of an overpass at the U.S. 17 bypass intersection with N.C. 130 as soon as possible.

■Prepare and implement a recycling program in cooperation with Brunswick County to reduce solid waste being placed in the county landfill.

Nightclub Ordered Closed For A Year; Could Reopen

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building, but all personal property including fixtures, appliances, musical equipment and furniture must remain under padlock for the duration of the closure, the order states.

Any vendors who have leased pool tables, video games, drink machines or other equipment to the business will be allowed to remove them under the supervision of the sheriff's department.

The defendants are required to pay all court costs and other expenses associated with the action including the padlock and hasp installed on the front door.

Freeman's will be allowed to reopen after a year, but the order to abate a nuisance will remain in effect, said Assistant District Attorney Lee Bollinger. Any violation of law or activity deemed to constitute a

"The locks come down after a year and Mr. Hankins can do what he wants with it."

—Lee Bollinger

nuisance could result in the owners being found in contempt of court.

"The locks come down after a year and Mr. Hankins can do what he wants with it," Bollinger said. "If he wants to open a church, its fine with me. But if there is a new nu-

sance, he could be put in jail for civil contempt."

Bollinger said he is satisfied with the arrangement and hopes it will put an end to the problems at Freeman's.

"If and when he ever decides to open another club, I think he has learned enough to make sure order is kept and the community is not threatened by a nuisance," Bollinger said.

He credited Brunswick County Alcoholic Beverage Control Officer Mike Speck and state Alcohol Law Enforcement agent Mark Senter for assembling the court records and other documentation used as evidence to close the club.

"They went above and beyond the call of duty in adopting this cause

and making sure the establishment is accountable for its history," Bollinger said. "They put it together so that whoever looked at the evidence would see that it would be futile to defend."

The original complaint documents 14 alcoholic beverage control violations, five drug arrests and 17 incidents of violence, including six shooting incidents, at Freeman's since it opened in 1988. At least four people, including Freeman Hankins, have been hit by gunfire at the club.

Police have reported crowds of more than 1,000 people at Freeman's. On several occasions, officers say they have been confronted by angry throngs who pelted them with rocks and bottles.

Father Pleads Guilty In Daughters' Molestation

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Bollinger said. The children are now in foster care in western North Carolina, he said. Gail Burroff has been charged with being an accessory after the fact to a felony for her role in their

escape.

Dressed in a light blue shirt and jeans, Burroff sat quietly at the defense table and stroked his mustache as Brunswick County Detective Nancy Simpson briefly described her interviews with his two daughters.

One of the girls said her father took her into a bedroom while her mother was at work. He laid her on the bed and drew the blinds. Then he "stroked her in her private parts," Simpson testified.

The other daughter told Simpson that Burroff had been "touching her since she was three years old." She told about the time her father got into the bathtub with her and asked her to rub his private parts, Simpson testified.

Attorney Robert Floyd noted that Burroff has no prior history of sex offenses and no criminal record. He suggested that "some psychological evaluation might be needed" before sentencing.

Bollinger noted that Burroff has no money and would not be able to reimburse the county for the cost of a private psychiatric examination. Judge Johnson agreed to send Burroff to the state hospital in Raleigh for a pre-sentencing evaluation.

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