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[ETHSPTSA] Share your stories on crime at ETHS...

hatcheggs@ameritech.net <hatcheggs@ameritech.net>

Mon, Mar 15, 2010 at 8:22 PM

Reply-To: ETHSPTSA@yahoogroups.com

To: ETHSPTSA@yahoogroups.com

Dear Cassie,

This issue comes up every year and thanks to this message board, parents can finally exchange information.

Last year, after reading this message board, Betsy Waller and I decided to contact the superintendent about the issue of theft at ETHS. Our children all had things stolen and we were very frustrated with the manner in which some of the personnel at school dealt with us and our children. Since it is sometimes uncomfortable to rock the boat at ETHS when your kids are there, we felt that we were in a good position to advocate for parents. Monica Garcia, a current parent, joined us as did Maryjo Boyer as a PTA representative.

We posted our stories and the minutes of the meeting we had with Dr. Witherspoon on this message board. I am doing this again, if you have not read these, please take the time to do it. We contacted several board members as well.

You can share all of your stories with Dr. Hawthorne, just as we did with Dr. Witherspoon, but from our perspective, you will get more accomplished by posting your information here for other parents to read and encouraging other families to file police reports. Until parents file a police report every time something is stolen at ETHS, there won't be any reliable statistics, period. Using this outside source is the only tool that parents have to hold the school accountable.

Polly Hawkins

Summary of meeting on June 17, 2009

In attendance;

Dr. Eric Witherspoon, Superintendent

Mr. Frank Kaminski, Director of Safety

Dr. Richard Bowers, Principal

Mr. Terrance Doby, Assistant Director of Safety

Mr. Vernon Clark, Lead Dean

MaryJo Boyer and Pat Alfredson, Vice Presidents PTSA

Monica Garcia, parent

Betsy Waller, former parent

Polly Hawkins, former parent

We, Betsy Waller and Polly Hawkins, presented our past experiences with theft at ETHS going back 8 years to 1 year ago. We included a statement from Monica Garcia. First, please let us be clear that we all are aware that theft happens and that we understand that if someone leaves items out, they will be stolen. That is not the kind of theft we are speaking about in our concerns. There will always be a certain amount of theft at

ETHS or any other school.

After reading the posts from the PTSA list serve this year, we as former parents felt that many of the issues that we struggled with were still a problem for both students and their families. We contacted some of the parents that posted and asked if they would be interested in bringing these concerns to Dr. Witherspoon. As current parents, they were reluctant to do this but encouraged us to pursue this for them.

From our past experiences and others that we know of, these are the key issues we addressed:

1. The lack of procedure for students and parents that would guide them through the process of reporting a stolen item. This includes any written information and includes the confusion that results from the contradictory information that is given out by different staff members.
2. The apparent tolerance of theft and burglary.
3. The inconsistent application of the code of conduct and consequences as it relates to theft/burglary.

One of the major complaints about theft from parents is the lack of procedural information. We asked staff what the current procedure is.

Mr. Kaminsky said that upon theft/burglary a student should contact security and complete a report. His department will try and recover the item. The Safety Department uses these reports to find patterns in theft at the school. Additionally, Mr. Kaminsky told us that theft is a crime of opportunity. Much of the work his department does is working with students to protect their property: Safety personnel spin the locks on student lockers, identify trouble spots, post signs, encourage students to not bring valuables to school, to not leave their backpacks unzipped, and to not leave their property out and unsecured. During his tenure, Mr. Kaminsky has instituted many initiatives that have reduced the amount of theft/burglary every year. These initiatives include things such as: heavy duty locks on gym lockers, more and better quality cameras, signage, and student education on security and working with team coaches on security. Mr. Doby said that they have a new program coming up that will allow anyone, parent or student, to text an anonymous tip to security. The school has an ID program that helps students mark their valuable with a code that will register the item on the student's file at school to help to identify the item if it is found. ETHS hopes to expand this program which will allow students to register the serial numbers of personal items to be kept in the student's file. Additionally, the Safety Department collects crime data to find patterns and then deploys resources accordingly. Gym locker rooms seem to be a major target of theft and burglary at ETHS. Of note is that they are putting an extra person in the boys' locker rooms next year.

If a student is suspected of theft or burglary at the high school, Dr. Witherspoon said that he or she will be disciplined internally by the school. Because most students at ETHS are minors, however, this information is private and cannot be shared with the victim and his or her family.

ETHS cannot press charges against a person who has committed a theft/burglary at ETHS nor can Safety file a police report. This can only be done by the victim and his or her family.

Before our meeting, Polly spoke with Officer Amanda Wilson, the Evanston Police ETHS liaison, about theft/burglary at the school. Polly specifically asked for details in filing a police report and related that most parents that we know or have talked with were unaware that they could file a police report and/ or that ETHS did not do this for them. Officer Wilson's response was that ETHS does not file a theft report for students, whether the amount stolen is \$1 or \$1,000,000. Officer Wilson stated that if your child has anything of value stolen at ETHS, you should of course file a police report. She went on to say that if any of us were to have something stolen at a restaurant, a store or at someone else's home, we would file a report. Why wouldn't parents do the same at ETHS? Filing a police report is simple, you call the EPD non-emergency number, 847- 866-5000, give them your report and they will give you a case number- all over the phone.

Betsy Waller brought up the issue that during her tenure it was clear that the school did not want to involve the police (see her story). Staff assured us that this is not the case now. Mr. Doby said that ETHS has a strong relationship with the police department and they want to have a partnership with the EPD. Mr. Kaminsky asked that if students and their families file a police report, to please make sure they file a school report as well.

We asked the staff in attendance if a clearly outlined procedure for reporting theft/burglary for both students and parents could be put in the Pilot and that this needed to include that if anything of value has been stolen that parents should file a police report as well. As a convenience and guidance for parents, the EPD telephone number should also be provided in the Pilot. The staff agreed.

We asked the PTSA to find a venue to include this information as well in their packets to parents. This will go a long way in helping parents advocate for their students and clear up many of the misunderstandings that have been voiced.

Our second concern was the apparent tolerance for theft/burglary as exhibited in our stories. Every staff member at the table said that this is not the case now. One staff member pointed out that almost every staff member at our meeting was new to ETHS and that there has been a changing of the guard. Theft/burglary is not tolerated now.

Our third concern was the inconsistent application of the code of conduct and consequences exhibited in our stories. Again, the staff present said that things have changed and that there are fair and equitable consequences across all offenses, as outline in the Pilot. Again, discipline information is confidential because most students are minors. On both the issue of inconsistent application of the code of conduct and the appearance that the school tolerates theft/burglary, the staff reiterated that things have changed. We made the point that changing the culture of a large institution does not happen overnight; it takes years and a determined effort.

We discussed the issue of under reporting of theft/burglary whether it is because student/families feel there is a lack of response or they don't know the procedure. Mr. Kaminsky stated that he can't do his job if a crime is not reported. Pat Alfredson offered up a current story of watching a student tell a support staff person about a theft and the support staff barely responding. Dr. Bowers told us that there has been recent training for support staff to correct this.

It is clear to us that there have been significant efforts from the school towards reducing theft/burglary. However, the posts on the parent list serve (one of the greatest tools parents have) illustrates that there are still issues. The guarantee from the administration that written policy on theft will be included in the Pilot will solve some of these issues. The list serve postings were discussed and Mr. Kaminsky reminded us that there are times when students file a report and then go home and give different story to their parents and this causes problems. We agreed that this can happen but conversely the same is true. We strongly stated that there are many times when students bring home accurate information.

The issues of staff mishandling/ or being unresponsive are more difficult. Mr. Kaminsky and Mr. Clark both said that if parents have complaints that they can call them. The number of parents who are reluctant to attend this meeting is troubling and speaks to the issues that we have outlined. This is why we organized this meeting. As former parents, we can say things and say them in a way that current parents are not comfortable doing. It is our hope that a venue can be found for current parents to register their complaints on this issue and that this information can be collected and reviewed independently.

Dr. Witherspoon scheduled this meeting promptly after we contacted him. Every staff member at the meeting was polite and respectful. We were given all the time we needed to discuss this issue. We thank all staff that attended for their time and consideration and for their efforts in reducing theft and burglary at ETHS.

Respectfully submitted,

Polly Hawkins and Betsy Waller

To whom it may concern:

When my now senior, was an incoming freshman, she was on a training run with the cross country team. I was picking her up from practice and she was very late coming to the car. Once my daughter, Mariah got in the car it was clear she was very distressed. It seems that most of the team had things stolen. My daughter had her new I. D., keys and phone stolen. She went on to explain that some of juniors on the team, one in particular I remember as we are friend with the family, actually had everything including her clothes (all of them) stolen from the locker room.. Yes, they all had locks, they were not instructed on how to proceed in recouping their items of at least filing a complaint, and received NO reassurance that there would be an attempt to consequence whoever was responsible for such a humiliating theft. As we were new to the school, not sure how to proceed, and hesitate to "bug "the school as newcomers, we just purchased a new phone and

let it go. This is an awful welcome, and thus we began our relationship with ETHS just figuring that my daughter should NEVER leave anything important locked in a locker and went on from there. I am writing this letter to day to encourage some process of ensuring parents and students are aware of protocol for helping students to feel empowered instead of helpless victims of being a large school where they just can't pursue thefts. Please be aware that we have gone on to be very happy with the school , but this is a issue that needs to be addressed more fully .

Thank you,

Monica Garcia

When my son, Chris, was a sophomore or a junior, he bought one of the first iPods on the market. Soon iPods became very popular, however, and they became very desirable items to high schoolers.

One day at school, my son stored his iPod in his locked gym locker while he attended gym class. When he returned to the locker after class, his locker, and a few lockers around his, had been broken into. Some sort of tool had been used to pry the lockers open. His iPod had been stolen.

Chris talked to the gym manager and security was called in. Chris reported the stolen property to security and showed them the break-ins. Security took his information, but offered no recovery plan, so my 16 year old son asked them, "Should we call the Police?" The Security told him, "No, we don't call the Police, we handle this."

My son came home, very upset, and told me about the stolen iPod.

Since this was a very valuable item to my son, I began the process of calling the high school to follow up. We were hoping to recover the iPod. And I was very upset that a student was experienced enough and sophisticated enough to enter the gym locker room and use a burglary tool to break into a few lockers, all while a gym manager was on duty!

Eventually I spoke with the gym manager who had originally helped my son after he discovered his locker had been broken into. The gym manager said that although no cameras were allowed in the gym locker room, there was a camera right outside in the hall. A boy had been seen on the tape leaving the locker room during the gym period in which the theft had taken place. The tape showed that this male individual had left the locker room mid-period and had gone immediately to the closest boys' bathroom.

We were, of course, suspicious of this person, but had no real evidence that he had stolen anything.

After making more inquiries about how this situation was being handled I was told by one ETHS employee to whom I spoke, "Don't say I told you, but CALL THE POLICE."

Which we did. We filed a report with the Evanston Police Department and were assigned a case number.

A few days later, a senior administrator called me. They had found an iPod they believed to be Chris's. A student had turned it in to the gym manager "for safe keeping" while he was going to his gym class! It was the same person that had been on the tape mentioned above. Since the gym manager was aware of the stolen iPod, he was alert to the situation and the iPod ended up in the administrator's office.

It was then clearly established that the iPod belonged to my son, Chris.

Since we knew exactly who had turned Chris's stolen iPod in to the gym manager, and it was the same person that had been seen on the tape leaving the locker room during the time the iPod had been stolen, it seemed to us that we had an obvious suspect that needed to be investigated regarding this theft. I asked the administrator what the next step was in this process. I was told, "Nothing." I asked if there wasn't enough

evidence to question this student and I was again told that ETHS was not going to pursue the matter.

Nothing further was ever done regarding this sophisticated locker break-in and theft.

My child got his iPod back.

The likely thief was never questioned by the high school administration, and suffered no repercussions.

Betsy Cagney Waller

6/6/09

Dear Dr. Witherspoon,

Our oldest child had his watch and wallet stolen the summer after his freshman year (2001). He was on the swim team and swam for the club team that summer. He did not have a lock for his locker but was under the impression that because the "cage" was locked during practice that no one would have access to the lockers. He learned this was not the case and always used a lock from then on even if the cage was locked. His senior year, 2002, he had his gym locker broken into twice the first month of school, losing his wallet with IDs, cash and lock. The third time we had to buy a lock, I called security. I was told that because the locker room is so noisy, it is easy for people to break the locks without being noticed as it makes noise when the locks are opened with force. Security said that for obvious reasons there are no cameras in the locker rooms but that security was trying to work on this issue. The last time his wallet was stolen, it was found in a toilet in a hall bathroom.

Another child had her cell phone stolen from her locker her junior year, 2004. A good friend of hers had hers stolen the same day as well from her locker. They both went to their dean and he sent them to security. Security told them the cameras were not working so they went back to the dean. He told them —"That isn't a good enough answer, go back to security". They went back to security and were told the same thing. At this point our child told us that it was very difficult to run back and forth from office to office between classes, before school and after, trying to track staff down. I called the dean and he told me that if a student has ever given their locker combination out or let anyone ever use their locker, then the student has put themselves at risk and there is nothing the school can do. That is when our child and her friend gave up trying to get the phone back via the school route. They had been told how to buy it back from the right person at school. This was an eye opening experience, to say the least, and in retelling the story, I learned from a friend that her daughter had the same experience and had bought her phone back that year as well.

Our other child was in a classroom his freshman year (2004) and was excused to use the restroom. He left his graphing calculator on his desk and when he came back it was gone. He told the adult in charge and she asked security to come in- the two adults left the room and said that when they returned, the calculator should be on her desk or they would search everyone before they left the room. When the adults left, the student sitting next to our child pulled out the calculator and put it on the desk. The adults came back into the room, gave the calculator to our child and that was the end of it.

Lastly, his junior year he had his lacrosse stick stolen from the cage and the next year his lacrosse helmet stolen from the cage. Lacrosse equipment doesn't fit into lockers and the "cage" is used to secure equipment.

Polly Hawkins

--- In ETHSPTSA@yahoogroups.com, Cassie and Sumit <cassieshoe@...> wrote:

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> Another phone stolen from my child and an interesting exchange with other parents (detailed below) has spurred me into action! I made some phone calls and Dr. Hawthorne has agreed to meet with me to discuss crime at ETHS. Though I was told that he has the statistics on crime at the school, I am betting that there is a lot more going on that he is unaware of.

>

> I would like to collect stories and incidents to share with Dr. Hawthorne to add to my own. Please be specific as possible so the administration will take the information seriously. Email me your story, including what, when (at least generally) and where (locker, classroom, etc.) the item was stolen. I am also interested if you reported your incident to ETHS and/or the police and if your item was recovered. Names would be helpful, but I will withhold that information if you wish.

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> After dealing with security several times, I have not always reported stolen items because I doubted anything would be done... I wonder how much unreported crime occurs at ETHS?

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> Send your story to: cassieb3@...

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> My story: Thursday, I was at conferences with my son. My husband arrived late, so I asked my son to share the bad news of the day with his dad, that his phone had been stolen. I also have an older child at the high school, and over the last four years, we have lost several cell phones, jackets, an iPod and now this.

>

> As my son told his most recent story, another mom we know stopped to share her more detailed story. Then another woman we know was walking past, must have overheard us, and turned around to shared her son's recent loss of a cell phone. After that, the dad sitting next to us, a stranger, said we might as well add him to our list. So I started thinking, if I heard these random stories in a quiet corner of the school without even asking, how many stories are actually out there?

>

> If you have ANY information to share that might help me with my quest to learn what, if anything, ETHS really does to prevent crime, recover stolen property, punish perpetrators and stop or at least slow these events from happening, please send it along. And please forward this email to other parents who might have other stories.

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> If you send me your email, I will reply to all with what transpired during my meeting.

>

> Thanks for listening, Cassie Brooks

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