

Forum targets Ford High violence

DPS looks to develop plan to raise safety

Jennifer Mrozowski / The Detroit News

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Detroit Public Schools officials called on experts, parents, City Council members and others in a town hall meeting Monday night to find solutions to violence at Henry Ford High, following a recent shooting near the school.

The goal of the forum: to develop a comprehensive plan for the school to enhance safety and eliminate or reduce some factors that lead to violence.

Board member Tyrone Winfrey, who had been planning a forum at the troubled school before the shooting, said it needs more extra-curricular activities, mentoring, and other opportunities.

"Let's take back Henry Ford High School," Winfrey said. "Let's take back our Detroit Public Schools."

Detroit Public Schools released a new security plan for Henry Ford following the shooting that doubled security and incorporated other measures. The shooting death of Christopher Walker, 16, followed a troubled week at the school. Students reportedly have been beaten up in front of teachers and several fires were set in the building. A football game against Renaissance High School had to be moved for fear of violence.

Officials have attributed the problems in the 1,300-student school to gang activity, in part resulting from the influx of Redford High students into Henry Ford after Redford's building was closed. Last week, about 100 students walked out of Henry Ford, with some saying they still felt unsafe, while others said security has been overly harsh for minor misbehavior.

Carl Taylor, a professor in the Department of Sociology at Michigan State University and an expert on gang behavior and violence, said students have to change their behavior and self-police, and parents have to be responsible for their children.

"The problem is not the school. The problem is not guns," he said. "The problem is the mind-set. It's an evil mind-set."

But Taylor echoed concerns of Winfrey and others who said students lack resources to be productive. Winfrey said students need more extra-curricular activities, such as a school band, so they are more invested in school and have positive outlets.

Wayne County Commissioner Keith Williams, a panelist, said the problems in schools stem from the community, necessitating a coordinated effort by law enforcement agencies and others.

"Let's go into the neighborhoods and talk to these thugs, because the thugs are bringing the problems into our schools," he said.

Council President Monica Conyers said parents have to demand a better education for their children from state and U.S. lawmakers, including her husband, U.S. Rep. John Conyers.

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