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FEATURED

Sex Assaults, Weapon Seizures Rise De Blasio: Stats Show Schools Safer Than Ever; Union Leader Has Doubts

By CRYSTALLEWIS Aug 7, 2017 Updated 19 hrs ago



WHO YOU GONNA BELIEVE?: Mayor de Blasio, flanked by Police Commissioner James O'Neill and Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña, announced that schools had their safest year on record at M.S. 88 in Brooklyn. But Gregory Floyd, presid

Teamsters 237, which represents School Safety Agents, said that the declaration contradicts data that shows an increase sexual assaults and the number of weapons found in schools.

The Chief-Leader/Rebecca White

Mayor de Blasio, Police Commissioner James O'Neill and Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña announced Aug. 1 that city public schools had their safest year on record, even as the union leader representing School Safety Agents questioned that claim and the fact that no city high schools made the list of most-violent institutions.

Further questions were raised by a state finding of a significant increase in sexual assaults in the schools.

City officials celebrated a decrease in summonses and arrests, as well as a drop in the number of dangerous schools. The press conference was held at M.S. 88 in Brooklyn, a school that has championed the idea of restorative justice, which involves teaching educators and students how to de-escalate conflict.

Mayor: Safe and Supportive

"All students need a safe and supportive learning environment to succeed in the classroom and make a positive impact in the community. Thanks to the hard work of the NYPD and the Department of Education, families can rest assured that our school buildings are safe places," the Mayor said.

Just two schools made the list of the most-dangerous ones in the city, down from 27 during the previous school year: I.S. 49 in Staten Island and P.S. 183 in Queens.

NYPD data shows that there were 1,240 arrests in public schools this past school year, an eight-percent decrease from a year earlier.

The number of summonses students received for low-level offenses—such as possession of marijuana—dropped 11 percent from the previous year to 833.

Those numbers declined in part due to the city's Warning Card program, which the de Blasio administration began in 2015. It allows SSAs to give warning cards to students whose misbehavior would have normally resulted in a summons.

In the past school year, 71 of the city's 1,700 public schools participated in the program.

Union Head Skeptical

But Gregory Floyd, president of Teamsters Local 237, which represents School Safety Agents, took issue with the notion that schools are safer. He raised concerns about how the warning cards changed how illegal behavior in schools was recorded, particularly because he was told the DOE would not keep records of the warning cards.



“How many incidents were handled by warning cards that would have been handled criminally? I don’t think the city will answer that question,” he said. “It doesn’t mean the violence is down, it means it’s being categorized differently.”

Mr. Floyd questioned how no high schools made the list of the worst schools, and wondered how John Bowne High School in Queens, where violent incidents increased from 14 in 2013 to 53 in 2016, did not make it.

Not mentioned at the press conference was the fact that the number of sexual assaults in schools has risen 18 percent, according to the State Education Department’s Violent and Disruptive Incident Reporting system.

The administration defended the fact that the city used different measurements to assess assaults than the State Education Department: while the city categorized a violent incident at a school as an event that required an NYPD response, the state included incidents such as a first-grader throwing an empty milk carton.

The city did disclose that the number of weapons and “dangerous instruments” found in schools rose from 1,073 incidents in the 2015-2016 school year to 1,429.

The Mayor said that his administration took those numbers “very seriously,” but he added that

better communication and training may have led to more weapons being found.

The fact that there has been an increase in weapons and sexual assaults in schools goes against the rhetoric the administration is presenting that schools have gotten safer, Mr. Floyd said.

