

# Local 237 Wary of City School-Discipline Shifts

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, November 9, 2015 5:15 pm

Citing less crime and fewer suspensions in schools, the de Blasio administration Nov. 2 released more details on its plans to reshape disciplinary policies, including strategies to retrain School Safety Agents and potentially remove some metal detectors.

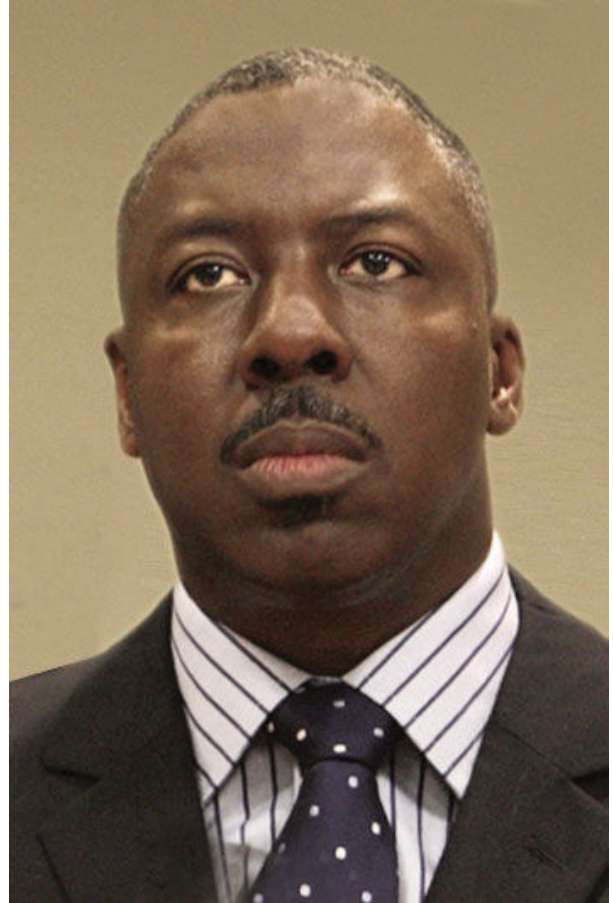
The yearlong “roadmap,” developed by the Department of Education, the NYPD and a 150-member mayoral School Climate Leadership Team, garnered praise from the Principals’ union and civil-liberties advocates. But Teamsters Local 237 President Greg Floyd, who has opposed the policy shift, said the plans were based on faulty data and could encourage more crime in schools.

## No More ‘Zero Tolerance’

Mayor de Blasio has emphasized “restorative” techniques that focus on “dialogue, self-reflection and teaching impulse control.” City officials said that zero-tolerance policies implemented in the 2000s led to a spike in suspensions, arrests and tickets, while advocates say that punitive policies disproportionately affect minority and disabled students and can increase their chances of dropping out of school or entering the criminal-justice system.

“We are providing more training to Teachers, working closely with school safety officers, and giving social emotional support to students to ensure they are in the classroom where they can learn,” said Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña.

The de Blasio administration detailed the policies as the DOE released statistics indicating that schools were safer. Major crime has dropped by one-quarter since the 2011-12 academic year and crime overall is down by 29 percent since then, according to the Mayor’s Office. In the first six months of this calendar year, suspensions dropped by 6,592—20.3 percent—over the past year. Since the 2011-12 school year, they have fallen by 25,000, to fewer than 45,000 last year. The



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GREG FLOYD: ‘Take heads out of the sand.’

School Safety Division reported 27-percent fewer arrests and 15-percent fewer summonses in the first half of 2015 school year, compared to the previous year.

### **Verbal De-Escalation**

SSAs, who are employed by the NYPD, are being trained to verbally de-escalate situations before arresting, removing or ticketing students. The department is designing a “Collaborative Problem Solving” training for high-level officers who may be called into a school during a crisis. Agents at schools that serve students with more-intensive special needs will also get more training, and all schools will be required to draft plans to define staffers’ roles when responding to extreme misbehavior.

Mr. Floyd, whose union represents 8,000 agents, said that SSAs already prefer to deter physical skirmishes rather than risk being hurt by breaking up a fight. “We didn’t sign up for the WWF,” he said, referring to the World Wrestling Federation. “We’re peacemakers.”

The Police Department and DOE will release a guide for Principals on how to better integrate the officers into the school and determine whether a situation is better handled by law enforcement or by school disciplinary procedures.

There are 80 campuses that have metal detectors at entrances. The DOE is developing a policy to remove or redeploy many of them, as some students, parents and educators complain of the stigma they add and as crime rates in schools have been reduced to half of what they were a decade ago.

### **Local 237’s Concerns**

As part of the policy revision, the NYPD will step up detector training for SSAs in schools where they remain and will distribute a guide for school employees who will take on more of a role during scanning.

“The NYPD welcomes these training opportunities for its members, and the department looks forward to improving its relationships with school faculty and students to ensure that New York City schools remain safe environments where students can learn and excel,” Police Commissioner William J. Bratton said in a statement.

But Mr. Floyd said removing metal detectors and relying on verbal commands would foster more crime in schools, particularly ones located near public-housing developments where violent crime increased amid citywide reductions. “There’s a direct relationship between the shootings in the Housing Authority and the guns being brought into schools and the knives being brought into schools,” he said. “We need to take our heads out of the sand before something serious happens.”

### **Numbers Bear Him Out**

He said the scanners were placed at some schools for a reason, and they've been effective tools in keeping weapons outside. From July 1 to Nov. 1, SSAs recovered 11 BB guns, 185 knives, 52 box-cutters and 64 other weapons from students, he said, citing NYPD statistics. Seventy other weapons were found on school premises. He said there were 30 arrests and 74 summonses in the same period.

Mr. Floyd said some crimes were being underreported or reclassified, pointing to a brawl three weeks ago at Evander Childs High School in The Bronx that wasn't publicly disclosed until two weeks later, when a video circulated in the media. "I can guarantee you the incidents are being covered up and the public is not getting the full story here," he said.

The DOE now requires Principals to get authorization from the Office of Safety and Youth Development before suspending students and has hired Kenyatta Reid, the former Principal of Eagle Academy for Young Men in Queens, to serve as Senior Director of School Culture and Climate.

"The Council of School Supervisors & Administrators supports professional development for all members of the city schools community as it relates to improving student department and school climate," said the union's executive vice president, Mark Cannizzaro. "We also maintain that school Principals are best positioned to make decisions regarding an effective response to student behavior."

### **Other Steps Planned**

City schools will also expand access to behavioral-health treatments in some campuses and will provide more resources for learning that emphasize self-reflection and impulse control. The NYPD will also deploy a "warning card" program at five campuses as an alternative to referring some students to the criminal-justice system.

In a statement, New York Civil Liberties Union Executive Director Donna Lieberman said, "Police street tactics have no place in school discipline, and can escalate a minor incident into a terrifying ordeal." She said the latest policies "represent concrete progress toward making city schools safe, nurturing and thriving."