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For Safety's Sake: A Case Study of School Security Efforts and Their Impact on Education Reform

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Introduction

The rise of zero-tolerance policies in many states and school districts has had the effect of stiffening the penalties mandated for students who violate school rules and, in some cases, of imposing criminal penalties on offenses that were previously treated as school disciplinary matters.[1,2] Additionally, the advent of zero-tolerance policies has coincided with many schools and districts adopting strict security measures, including the installation of metal detectors and surveillance cameras and the deployment of armed security personnel, all for the purpose of enhancing security.[3-5]

Critics of zero-tolerance policies have pointed out that by narrowly focusing on security many schools have ignored some of the services and school conditions that are essential to academic achievement, student well-being, and school safety.[1-3,5,6] For example, in many districts, as funding for security measures has increased, funding for guidance counselors, social workers, and school psychologists has decreased.[3,4] In many cases, school security efforts have been launched in isolation of broader measures that have been shown to have a positive impact on the academic performance of students and the overall effectiveness of schools.

In this paper, we utilize the case of Seacrest High School, a large urban school that experienced violent conflicts between Asian and black students during the 2009-2010 academic year. We use the case to demonstrate how a preoccupation with school safety led to other dimensions of school success being ignored. Under the glare of considerable media scrutiny as a result of the incident and a subsequent court order that required the school district to take actions to ensure the safety of students, the district adopted a singular focus on safety and security that resulted in the neglect of academic engagement and school culture. As we show through our analysis of the case, the narrow focus on security undermined the effectiveness of the costly measures that were adopted and prevented educators from taking actions to address the overall quality of the educational environment.

We use this case study analysis to make the point that any attempt to narrow the measure of school success to a singular outcome (in this case safety) will result in a fragmented approach to school improvement and lead to other important dimensions of education (e.g., content knowledge, critical thinking skills, social-emotional support for students, moral reasoning, civic engagement, and creating equity among students of different races/classes) being ignored. The data from this case will also reveal what the constituents of Seacrest felt was neglected as a result of

the school's focus on security. The central question we explore is: What were the educational and social consequences of an expanded and intensified regime of policies aimed at improving school safety?

Background

Seacrest High School is located in a large city in the United States. Although overseen by one administrative team, the school is divided into academies: a 9th grade academy, three themed 10th through 12th grade academies, and a program geared toward recent immigrants, most of whom are English language learners (ELLs). Each academy is located within a section of the building to allow for some degree of programmatic autonomy and separation, although there are no official markers or barriers between the academies. All of the academies share the gymnasium, auditorium, library, and cafeteria, as well as Seacrest's support staff of counselors, after-school program providers, and security officers.

According to school data reports, the student body of Seacrest High School is quite diverse. Of the total school population, 51% self-identify as black or African American, 28% self-identify as Asian (this includes students from several different countries within Asia), 10% identify as Hispanic/Latino, and the remainder come from a variety of backgrounds and nationalities. There are more than 12 languages represented among the student body, and only 47.7% of the student body's first home language is English. After English, Chinese is the most widely spoken home language, followed by Vietnamese, Spanish, Khmer, and Nepali. Only 9% of the ELL students are black, and most of these students are recent African immigrants. Seventy-three percent of the ELL students self-identify as Asian. Throughout this paper, when we refer to ELL and black students, we largely mean Asian ELL students and non-ELL, US-born black students respectively, since these are the two largest groups in the school.

Because of the large number of immigrant and ELL students, Seacrest High School offers a variety of services and programs to meet the language and social needs of this student population. In keeping with the academy structure of the school, these services and the entire academic program for ELL students have been housed on one floor of the school. In practical terms, this means that most of the Asian students in the school are physically separated from the black students. While the students do share common spaces within the school—the cafeteria, gym, auditorium, etc.—they are isolated from each other during most of their time at Seacrest.

The Incident

Although Seacrest High School had been classified since 2007 as "persistently dangerous" under No Child Left Behind (NCLB)[i], a conflict erupted between Asian and black students at the end of 2009 that brought heightened attention to the school's level of safety. Though accounts of the incident vary, an independent investigation found that there were actually a series of incidents on and outside school grounds over 2 days. On the first day, small groups of mostly Vietnamese and black students fought during and after school. The next day, the conflict escalated with several black students attacking about thirty Asian students in the hallways of Seacrest. Several Asian students were again targeted as they walked home. Many of the Asian students who were attacked on the second day had not been involved in the initial conflict. Some Asian students were injured quite severely during these attacks and required medical attention. According to police reports, the black students involved were primarily 9th and 10th graders, and most of the Asian students who were targeted had been in the US for less than one year. Despite these patterns, some victims and witnesses reported that there were white and Cambodian students among the assailants. Nonetheless, the media portrayed the incident as an interracial conflict between Asian and black students.

Following the incident, the students identified as assailants were removed from the school; however, many Asian students reported they still felt unsafe at Seacrest and began an official boycott of the school with the support of parents and community groups. The principal and superintendent attempted to downplay the significance of the incident and reported to the media that the school was safe. Finally, after 3 weeks of the boycott by dozens of Asian students, the superintendent reported that the principal would be replaced and several security measures would be enacted to ensure that there would be no recurrence of violence.

Subsequently, the school took measures to increase surveillance and policing. Additional security cameras were added to the hallways and stairwells. The number of security officers was increased from 2 to 15, and some officers were transferred if their response on the days of the attacks was perceived as inadequate or inappropriate. Efforts were made to

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[i]Although the federal NCLB legislation requires states to designate schools as "persistently dangerous," it is up to each state to develop a definition of this label and to give it to schools as it sees necessary. NCLB requires that parents at a "persistently dangerous" school are informed that they can enroll their children at a different school.

clearly inform the student body about procedures for reporting incidents and the consequences of bullying and fighting.

In response to requests by community groups, the incident was investigated by the State Board of Human Relations and the US Department of Justice. These investigations resulted in the enactment of a consent decree between the school district, the state, and the US Department of Justice. The consent decree required the district to appoint an outside monitor who would be responsible for overseeing the variety of measures that would be taken to ensure student safety.

Literature Review

Interracial Conflict

Research on inter-group student conflict can be traced back to the influx of Eastern and Southern European immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century. Education scholars felt that inter-ethnic conflict and competition between immigrant groups distinguished by linguistic, religious, and/or cultural differences posed a threat to social cohesion at the local and national levels. Schools were regarded as the primary institution charged with socializing new immigrants and forging a common culture through assimilation. Over time, scholars believed that assimilation would lead to a reduction in conflict between ethnic groups.[7]

Concerns with intergroup student conflict emerged again with the advent of desegregation in the 1960s and 1970s, as black students began enrolling in white-majority schools. Scholars, such as sociologist Gordon W. Allport,[8] developed the contact hypothesis to explain the patterns of interracial conflict within schools and communities. According to this theory, following an initial period of intense conflict, there would be a gradual reduction of tension as groups improved their ability to communicate. For Allport, this was most likely to occur under conditions of equal status, as groups pursued common goals and as opportunities to develop informal relationships increased through everyday interactions and other forms of cooperation.[8] Interracial conflict in schools was understood as stemming from a lack of exposure, awareness, and understanding.[9] In response, researchers and practitioners developed multicultural curricula, facilitated interracial dialogue, and implemented programs to bring youth together within the structure of planned activities.[9] Although later research nuanced the contact hypothesis by delineating the particular demographic or institutional factors that explain why intergroup interaction is more or less successful in different cases,[10] the contact hypothesis is still a powerful and pervasive paradigm employed in responses to interracial conflict.

Since the 1980s, research concerned with interracial conflict in schools has waned. This may be due in part to the decrease in efforts to promote racial integration since the late 1970s.[11] It may also be because integration and interracial conflict have been largely explored along the black-white binary, and white students have become increasingly isolated in majority-white schools. This focus has left the relationships between communities of color within schools devoid of white students largely underexplored. In one of the few studies that makes a particular effort to broaden the study of interracial conflict to minority groups other than blacks, Kiang and Kaplan[12] illuminate the voices of Vietnamese students in the context of a black-white interracial conflict in a Boston high school. They demonstrate that while the Vietnamese students were not directly involved in the conflict at their school, its effects greatly influenced the Vietnamese students' schooling experiences. Additional research that explores the roots of interracial/ethnic conflict and effective interventions for minority-minority conflict is needed, especially as schools with few white students continue to become more numerous, increasingly isolated, and internally diverse.

Although research on interracial conflict at school is limited, education literature has often drawn distinctions between immigrant and black American students that may serve as a useful foundation for exploring minority-minority conflict. Most notably, anthropologist John Ogbu[13] distinguished between voluntary immigrants, such as Chinese and Indian immigrants, and non-voluntary immigrants, such as American Indians, Puerto Ricans, and blacks, in the United States. Ogbu posited that non-voluntary immigrants perform worse in public US schools and are more likely to exhibit oppositional behavior because they equate schooling with a form of cultural oppression. In contrast, he suggested that voluntary immigrants are more likely to be motivated to embrace schooling and to exhibit a high tolerance for discrimination because they regard assimilation as the necessary requirement for social mobility. Unfamiliar with the dominant US culture, they are often oblivious to manifestations of racism, xenophobia, and classism, or they excuse them as matters of cultural difference. Although this historical-cultural approach to explaining the academic differences between immigrant and black students fails to account for variation within groups, it is somewhat helpful for drawing attention to the often disparate academic experiences of black and immigrant students in school settings.

Zero-Tolerance Policies and Responses to Interracial Conflict
In the late 1980s and early 1990s, schools began to adopt and expand the "zero-tolerance" disciplinary and policing practices that were becoming common in the adult criminal justice system.[1,3-5,14,15] This shift not only mirrored paradigm changes in governance and the criminal justice system,[16,17] but it also reflected a trend toward narrowing the responsibility of teachers to curricular concerns, leaving behavior and discipline to out-of-classroom specialists and security agents.[1,2] In 1994, President Clinton signed into law the Gun-Free Schools Act, which mandated a 1-year suspension for any student who brought a gun to school. This policy served as the basis for a broader regime of zero-tolerance policies in which a range of subjective and objective disciplinary infractions were to be addressed by harsh and exclusionary sanctions.[4,5] These changes were accelerated by highly publicized violent school incidents, such as the Columbine shootings.[4] The media created the impression that schools were in a state of crisis and suffering from an unprecedented epidemic of violence—an image that incited fear and lent support to the expansion of zero-tolerance policies.[18,19]

Zero-tolerance policies are characterized by the frequent use of exclusionary sanctions, such as suspension and expulsion, as well as a discipline code that provides administrators and teachers little discretion in individualizing responses to particular incidents.[1,3,15,20,21] Under a regime of zero tolerance, even low-level infractions are often met with harsh punishment. Research shows that such policies often have the effect of punishing those students who are most in need of academic or mental health supports because it is typically the most disadvantaged students who engage in rule-breaking behavior or are pushed out by schools.[6,14]

Kafka[1] and Devine[2] explain the historical rise of zero-tolerance discipline policies in the context of a growing separation of the school's roles as educator and as moral advisor. With zero-tolerance policies, the number of police in schools has grown, and the utilization of law enforcement officials to ensure school safety has become increasingly common. Policing in schools has become commonplace, particularly in urban schools, where metal detectors and surveillance cameras have become ubiquitous. In fact, the utilization of punitive approaches to school security has become so pervasive and widely accepted that other paradigms for creating a safe environment are rarely considered.[2,5]

Even though the school shootings that helped legitimize zero tolerance took place in white suburban communities, the policies' most punitive effects have been in urban, minority, and low-income schools such as Seacrest.[18] While zero tolerance is ostensibly a "colorblind"

policy,[22] research suggests that it has often been implemented in a manner that results in racial disparities.[6] In practice, zero tolerance has been used as a mechanism to disproportionately punish the least successful students, who in many cases have the least motivation to obey school rules. In this way, zero-tolerance policies have been found to perpetuate a form of racial discrimination, with minority students bearing the brunt of increasingly higher stakes and more severe consequences.[6,23] Accordingly, schools with a lower percentage of white students have been found to have higher suspension rates.[24,25] Even though zero-tolerance policies and practices disproportionately affect students of color, they have become pervasive characteristics of a broad cross-section of American schools.[3]

With the rise of zero-tolerance policies, interracial conflict in schools has been redefined as the result of criminal-like behavior of individual students. Within the climate created by zero-tolerance policies, the understanding of interracial conflict as rooted in cultural misunderstanding and structures that promote racial segregation has been overshadowed by a framework that casts offending students as deviant and criminal. Increasingly, students who engage in intergroup conflict are no longer seen as being in need of sensitivity training or more exposure but instead are more likely to be treated as criminals who need to be punished. This transition from one paradigm to the other reflects the move away from a structural critique of segregation. In the forthcoming analysis of the case, it will become clear that a punitive paradigm that treats individual students directly involved in interracial conflict as criminal offenders came at the expense of a structural critique that treats the roots of conflict as a byproduct of the segregation of student groups.[ii]

School Climate and Responses to Student Conflict
Several studies have documented the negative impact of zero-tolerance policies on school climate.[3,5] Strict and inflexible regulations undermine the close student-teacher relationships that keep schools safe.[2,5] Strong, positive relationships between adults and students have been found to create safety by building a climate of trust, respect, responsibility, and academic engagement[26-29] and by deterring misbehavior.[30]

Several studies have shown that students who attend schools with a positive school culture have higher levels of academic engagement. In contrast, zero-tolerance policies have been found to undermine efforts to

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[ii]At Seacrest, the punishment and removal of the 'assailants' was emphasized over a critical analysis of the structures of the school that physically and socially segregated black and Asian immigrant students.

create a school environment that fosters academic engagement. At the school level, Noguera[14] found that schools with low levels of academic engagement are more likely to employ exclusionary discipline. Similarly, in an ethnographic study of a school in New York City, Nolan[5] found that exclusionary discipline practices and academic disengagement are mutually reinforcing. She draws particular attention to how high stakes testing often contributes to creating "alienating classroom experience[s] that play a central role in the creation of a flow of students out of classrooms and into the hallways, giving local educational policy makers cause to argue that students were 'out of control' and in need of being policed."[5(p37)] Nolan demonstrates that schools under pressure to raise test scores are more likely to punish students who do not respond to their instructional practices.

Other research has shown that conflict resolution, peer mediation, mentoring, increased recreational programs, positive behavioral interventions and supports, social and emotional supports, and restorative justice practices are all promising alternatives to harsh and exclusionary discipline.[22,31] Additionally, researchers have found that encouraging students to voice their concerns about learning conditions at school can yield promising ideas for change.[32,33] In this paper, we have incorporated student voices through interviews and focus groups to better understand how students were affected by Seacrest's responses to the incident.

Methodology

As part of a larger research team, we conducted a school climate study of Seacrest High School in the 2010-2011 school year. Data collected were both quantitative and qualitative. We conducted interviews, focus groups, and observations, gathered administrative data, and administered a student survey. Participation in interviews, focus groups, and the student survey was voluntary. The diversity of data sources and the ability to compare perceptual data with observational data allowed us to triangulate findings.

Because we were conducting a case study of one school, we sought to capture the perceptions of safety of all members of the Seacrest community in our data collection. The on-site research team consisted of 3 people, and the research was carried out over a few weeks. The complete data set encompassed a large and representative segment of the Seacrest community.

In order to include as many constituents as possible, we relied upon focus groups over interviews. Focus group and interview protocols sought to understand participants' typical daily experiences and their

perceptions of safety and the learning environment at Seacrest. All staff were asked to participate in a focus group during a common planning period, and student focus groups were organized to capture students' experiences in each grade level and academy. We targeted school leaders, specifically the principal, the security director, the deans, and academy leaders, for individual interviews because of their unique responsibility and influence within the school. Focus groups for parents were also organized and were conducted in participants' native languages (English, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Spanish). The 24 focus groups and 10 individual interviews lasted approximately 1 hour each and were held in a location convenient for the interviewee, usually their office or a classroom.

During the 3-week period of on-site data collection, 26 classroom and 31 school-space (e.g., cafeteria, hallway) observations were carried out. Classroom and school-space observations lasted approximately 1 hour each and followed a semi-structured protocol designed to capture the nature of staff-student and student-student interactions in various settings. In order to observe in as many classrooms as possible, we observed in each classroom once, capturing a total of 26 instructional spaces.

Through interviews and focus groups alone, we captured 53 teachers, 6 administrators, 15 staff members (e.g., counselors, safety agents), 4 service providers (e.g., after-school program directors), 35 students, and 9 parents.

All students were asked to complete the school climate survey during 1 class period. The survey included previously field-tested and newly designed research-based measures concerning safety, belonging, academic engagement, discrimination, fairness, and future aspirations. The student survey was translated from English into Spanish, Khmer, Vietnamese, and Chinese to accommodate the diversity within the student body. We received 428 student surveys from the approximately 700 students enrolled at Seacrest. Through a comparison with school demographic data reported by the district, student survey data were representative of the student body in terms of race and ethnicity within a few percentage points.

Table 1. Summary of participants

Participant Group	Number of Formal Focus Groups	Number of Formal Interviews	Total Number of Participants
Teachers	6	1	53
Administrators	1	1	6
Staff (e.g., counselors, deans, police, etc.)	3	6	15
Providers (after-school, supplementary, etc.)	1	1	4
Students	9	1	35
Student Questionnaire			428
Parents	4	0	9

The administrative and survey data were analyzed with statistical software to explore patterns within the student body. Data were disaggregated by several demographic factors, including race, gender, immigration status, special education status, primary language, and country of birth. We conducted a descriptive analysis of the data, tracking survey responses by student demographics. With the administrative data, we explored changes between the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years in terms of infractions, sanctions, and attendance.

We initially coded the qualitative data deductively, isolating excerpts relevant to the school's response to the 2009 incident. These sections were then inductively coded. Two of the themes which emerged in this process—1) the expansion of school policies and accountability systems and 2) the negligence of other school priorities—are explored at length in this paper. Coding was conducted with the assistance of Atlas.ti.

Data Analysis
Expansion of Policies and Accountability Systems
In response to the incident between Asian and black students in the 2009-2010 academic year, Seacrest's administration focused on establishing a range of new routines and structures. These included developing new protocols, such as setting up a clear process to address student complaints, and enforcing the dress code with renewed vigor. According to one school administrator, the first 3 months of the year were wholly dedicated to such efforts:

In September, there was a huge focus on getting the systems in place, making sure we had them….We had to install metal detectors, hire security guards, and put a security plan in place. So getting those things into place took time….We had to see how things would go for the first couple of months and make sure that the issues of last year didn't become an obstacle for us as we were getting started.

The first step toward preventing a similar incident from occurring, according to school administrators, was to set up clear procedures and policies for security and to reinforce old policies with consistency.

Following the incident, the school and district administration had come under considerable criticism for the way in which it had responded. As a result of this scrutiny, a new administrative team had been installed to manage the school. As the administrative team put its security measures in place, local media continued to closely scrutinize what was occurring at the school, even going so far as to place a reporter on site for an extended period during the fall. Additionally, the district was under legal and political pressure from the US Department of Justice and the state's Human Relations Council to adopt formal policies and procedures that would make it less likely for incidents of interracial violence to occur again. Community organizations also monitored the school closely in the aftermath of the conflict, with one group regularly issuing complaints and criticisms to the local media about the superintendent's handling of the issue. For all of these reasons, the school administration was under considerable pressure to ensure that there was concrete evidence of change and improvement at Seacrest.

By almost any estimation, the security measures adopted by Seacrest were costly and extensive. Fifteen sworn police officers were assigned to the school under the leadership of a police sergeant. A command and control room was established with state-of-the-art surveillance cameras, which allowed security personnel to monitor hallways and the perimeter of the school grounds. An updated metal detector system was installed at the school's front door, through which every person entering the building was required to pass. Additionally, when school ended at 3:00 PM, police officers and school administrators were deployed to neighboring streets to ensure that students had safe passage to public transportation. The total cost of these measures was well over 2 million dollars, and the funds were expended despite the fact that the district was making severe cuts in other areas of its budget.

It was impossible for the support staff, students, and teachers not to notice the new focus on security, considering the way it affected their routines at school. One staff member noted approvingly that the increase

in procedures and follow-through at Seacrest had substantially changed the atmosphere at the school:

> There's a uniform discipline policy this year….I think that that sort of streamlining…has helped…you know, it provides some clarity….There's a dramatic difference this year, even in terms of uniform enforcement of rules and stuff like that….I know it isn't fun for the students, but it is best for the school….The school feels a lot more organized and orderly now.

According to the staff members who were given some of the responsibility of enforcing policies, consistent enforcement and accountability throughout the school helped to create a work environment that many found supportive. Several teachers and school personnel told us that the new routines created a sense of order that had previously been lacking at the school. Many acknowledged that students may not be happy with all of the changes, but the perception of order lent a much-needed sense of legitimacy to the school after it had gained a reputation for violence following the incident. A staff member explained: "Now there is follow through and people are more comfortable to go and talk to somebody, and there's a lot of people to talk to, at times, maybe too many."
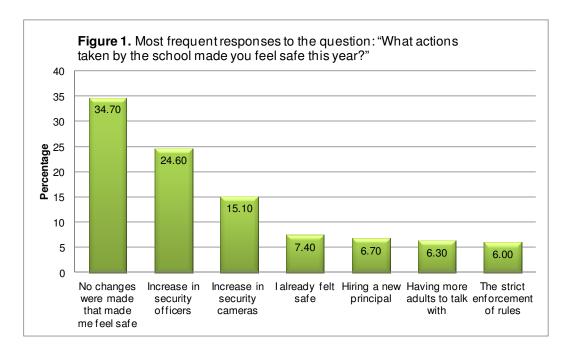
Staff members attributed the increase in control and order not only to the expansion of rules and new accountability structures but also to the introduction of surveillance cameras throughout the building. When asked what she felt was the biggest change since the previous school year, a staff member explained, "there is no yelling in the hallway, there is not a lot of traffic in the hallway," and then she suggested that the change was due to "the cameras." The installation of surveillance cameras was frequently cited as a primary reason for increased feelings of safety at Seacrest. One staff member explained: "I think the climate has changed tremendously. Our hallways are quiet now. You don't see any students walking around, cutting in the hallways. The cameras are excellent because there's nowhere for the students to hide when they are cutting." Another staff member noted: "The hard fact is that there are so many cameras in the school now. I think that does something. You know? Because there aren't groups of students hiding in the hallway and in the stairwells." The fact that the incident in 2009 had occurred in the hallways may explain why the decrease in hallway roaming took on such symbolic importance.

Parents also voiced positive opinions about the measures taken by Seacrest in response to the incident. In a focus group, an Asian American parent expressed gratitude for the expansion of policies and systems at the school: "I want to say thank you to the school and the administrator

taking care of my child education, making me less worry. I like to acknowledge the fact that I am appreciative of the non-discrimination policy in the school." Interestingly, to this parent, the security measures were in effect a non-discrimination policy at Seacrest. Other parents in this focus group also expressed approval with the increased regulations and security at the school. Some requested that the school be even more stringent in its follow-through with the students, especially when it came to attendance and tardiness: "I want the principal to be much stricter." One grandparent, who escorted his child to and from the front door of Seacrest each day, felt assured of the child's safety in school because "the police is guarding the area." Another parent similarly attributed the reduction in incidents to the increased security: "I haven't heard of any type of fights I heard before because all the school guards are out front."

Students' perceptions of the school environment also seemed to reflect positively upon the measures taken at the school. In the 2010-2011 academic year, 70% of the students surveyed reported feeling safe at Seacrest. The student body's assessment of particular interventions is summarized in Figure 1 below.[iii] Students were asked in a free-response format "What actions taken by the school made you feel safe this year?" Twenty-five percent of students named the increase in security officers and 15% the installation of additional security cameras.

[iii]Students were able to list multiple ideas such that individual students may be counted within more than one category. Figure 1 depicts the most frequent responses—categories with more than 15 respondents.

Figure 1. Most frequent responses to the question: "What actions taken by the school made you feel safe this year?"

One student expressed her approval of the cameras in a focus group: "I think the cameras do keep us safe because they want to know what are you doing." Another student noted that the school felt calmer in comparison to the previous year:

Student 1: It's more stable. You don't see as many students cut school or in the hallway.

Interviewer: There used to be a lot of kids in the hallway?

Student 2: [The administration is] making new rules….Yeah, it's good….I think there's enough rules.

This student drew a direct connection between the new policies and his feelings of safety. Similar to the school staff, students' perceptions that fewer students were wandering the hallways was commonly cited as evidence that the level of control at Seacrest had increased.

Not only did students report feeling safer, but the administrative data also reveal that the number of school-based incidents significantly decreased from the 2009 to the 2010 school year. While we cannot directly tie the new policies to this drop in the number of infractions, the magnitude of change suggests that the procedural and formal measures adopted played a salient role.

The administrative data presented in Table 2 demonstrate the decrease in incidents from the 2009-2010 to the 2010-2011 school year.

When comparing all infractions except dress code violations in the Fall of 2009 with the Fall of 2010, the number of reported infractions significantly decreased by 37%. The number of infractions related to incidents against persons decreased by 50%. These incidents against persons, such as "fighting," "assault," and "threats," dropped more than other categories. Infractions that did not pose a threat to safety, such as "truancy," also decreased but to a lesser degree. Interestingly, infractions that have no direct bearing on academics or feelings of safety, such as "dress code violation," increased significantly. From the Fall of 2009 to the Fall of 2010, citations for uniform violations increased over 9000%. This increase was due to renewed attention to uniform violations on the part of the administration. Students violating the uniform policy were stopped when entering the building in the morning and were sent to in-school suspension where they often spent the entire day, unless the student was brought a change of clothes and then he or she could go to class after first or second period. Although we were told that students were given work to complete during in-school suspension so as not to fall behind, for the time we carried out our research at Seacrest, we never observed students doing academic work during in-house suspension (see more about the neglect of learning below).

Table 2. Highest incident infraction types, comparison Fall 2009 to Fall 2010[iv]

Infraction Type	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Difference	% Difference
Failure to follow classroom rules/ disruption	106	34	72	-67.9
Fighting	45	13	32	-71.1
Simple assault	33	2	31	-93.9
Threats	15	4	11	-73.3
Reckless endangerment	25	19	6	-24.0
Dress code violation	2	194	192	9600.0
Truancy/excessive tardiness/ cutting class	25	22	3	-12.0
Possession of beepers/pagers/ cell phones/other devices	6	7	1	16.7
Profane/obscene language or gestures	22	16	6	-27.3
Harassment/bullying/cyber-bullying/intimidation	13	12	1	-7.7
Instigation of or participation in group assaults	2	3	1	50.0

Additionally, our observations revealed that by using security to enforce dress code violations, there was a substantial increase in the number of conflicts between students and security personnel over relatively minor incidents. Using the school police in this way affected the students' experiences at Seacrest and significantly contributed to an overall climate of strained relations between staff and students at the school. During our time at Seacrest, we observed one student handcuffed when he refused to report to a dean for a dress code violation. We also saw students in the hallways repeatedly reproached by school safety agents for using cell phones or failing to remove their hats. Seacrest's use of a zero-tolerance approach to discipline allowed small infractions to be treated with harsh consequences.

Overall, the expansion and tightening of security policies at the school seemed to be effective in deterring incidents and making members of the school community feel safer. It should be noted that these data are self-reported and only include reported incidents. There is the possibility that school staff may have underreported incidents after the previous

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[iv]The comparison between Fall 2009 and Fall 2010 reflects the first 12 weeks of the school year, including the weeks in Fall 2010 when the research team was at the school conducting data collection.

year's conflict in response to heightened public scrutiny. (Indeed, survey responses concerning the number of unsafe situations students are exposed to each week suggests that administrative data provided a low estimate of actual incidents.) Yet several administrators, support-staff members, students, parents, and teachers did identify the adoption of new policies and procedures as a primary reason they felt safer at Seacrest.

The approach to school discipline and security taken at Seacrest is indicative of the "broken windows" approach to discipline that has been used to reduce crime in neighborhoods. The "broken windows" approach was developed by James Q. Wilson[34] and called for law enforcement to respond quickly to relatively minor infractions as a strategy to deter major criminal offenses. In interviews and focus groups with school staff and some students, we found considerable support for this approach. At Seacrest, much energy and attention was spent citing and punishing dress code violations (194 within the first 3 months of the school year). The logic behind this approach was that if students understood they could not get away with minor offenses like dress code violations more serious infractions would be avoided at the school.

Even though the "broken windows" strategy as applied at Seacrest seemed to result in greater numbers of students and staff feeling safe, it is also clear that it contributed to tensions between students and security personnel and took away from a focus on academics and other school functions. Not all constituents felt that the new routines were positively effecting substantive changes at the school or getting at the causes of the previous year's conflicts. One student noted an increase in security but went on to observe that "there's still tension." Another student estimated that there were 1 to 2 fights in the cafeteria each week. One teacher recounted that his classroom equipment had been stolen on multiple occasions, and because he had no secure place to lock it, he carried all his equipment to and from school each day in order to provide a classroom resourced with the necessary tools to study his content area. He dismissed the idea that the surveillance cameras were deterring students from misbehavior and complained that the administration was not responsive to offenses. Toward the end of 2010, one teacher worried that she was seeing an increased number of students roaming the hallway. She expressed concern that this might be an indicator of another incident to come:

One of the things I worry about it that there are a lot of kids wandering the halls, and we do have a lot of security and help like that, but there still are a lot of kids who, I don't know what they're doing in the hall during every period….We don't have enough security people maybe to keep them in place, and as the day wears on there are more and more

kids in the hallway, so I think that that's what precipitated the problem last year was, you know, too many kids out of class roaming in the hallway....I mean, there were lots of problems, but you know, this issue of kids not being in the classroom, I worry about that.

Interestingly, this teacher suggests that the school may need even more security officers to maintain order in the hallways, despite the fact that the large number of security officers already on staff did not seem to be an effective deterrent. Another teacher pointed to student initiative, instead of administrative or staff efforts, as the reason why the school has become safer after the incident. He suggested that the students were tired of the negative attention the school was receiving in the wake of the incident and that they came together to change the school culture. Similarly, 35% of students reported that no actions taken by the school had made them feel safe, and only 6% cited the strict enforcement of rules (see Figure 1 above). These results reflect the ambivalence that was evident in the qualitative data: some school community members favored the increase of policing and surveillance, while others saw it as ineffective or irrelevant to their daily experience at Seacrest.

The development of new policies at Seacrest was intended to reduce intergroup tensions and to make physical conflict less likely. The policies were created in part to meet the demands of the consent decree and to avoid legal culpability in the face of community groups that were threatening to file law suits against the school district. Under these pressures and intense scrutiny from the local media, it is understandable why the school and district adopted a strategy that narrowly focused on security. However, as we show in the following sections, not only did such a focus have a limited impact on perceptions of safety, it also completely overlooked other important aspects of school culture that are critical to school success.

The data we collected suggest that the effectiveness of the new policies was largely related to their symbolic power. As Edelman explains, organizations often "elaborate their formal structures to create visible symbols of their attention to law."[35(p1567)] The structures, and the appearance of stability they communicated to the staff, students, and parents at Seacrest, were intended to reestablish the school's legitimacy after the incident. "Symbolic compliance"[35] provides protection and legitimacy, 2 important and necessary conditions but, by definition, falls short of providing substantive change. The symbolic yet ineffective role of the cameras was not lost upon the students. One 12th grade student explained:

People still do what they want to do. Those cameras are nothing but black balls on the ceiling. All they do is give you a heads up if there's a problem, but most likely the problem has already escalated before you get to where it's at. So the cameras really don't do nothing.

However, in the aftermath of the violent incidents, "symbolic compliance" may be all Seacrest was capable of providing.

The overreliance on structures, routines, and systems may have been due to a feeling of helplessness on the part of administrators who work in an under-resourced and "high needs" school. One teacher expressed doubt that the root of misunderstandings and conflicts between student groups can be addressed by Seacrest: "For the school to treat these conflicts as something that can be dealt with through discipline, or through more surveillance, is kind of naïve." Elaborating further, an administrator explained that the establishment of procedures for students to report an incident, clarifying who to go to and who is responsible for follow-up, was an attainable move that took little effort on his end but, he believed, was nonetheless significant. He explained: "That was the easy part to fix." This is a clear example of symbolic compliance to legal requirements without substantively addressing the root of student conflict. Accordingly, our study suggests that symbolic compliance may be more likely in settings that are under-resourced and overworked, such as Seacrest. Further research is needed to explore the relationship between school demographics, resources, and symbolic compliance.

Learning Neglected
It is important to note that prior to the incident in 2009, Seacrest was widely regarded as an academically troubled school. According to a 2009 school report card based on state exams, less than 20% of students had tested proficient in reading, and less than 10% of students had reached proficiency in math. In addition, almost 20% of the student body dropped out prior to graduation, and only 46% of students were on track to graduate within 4 years. Because of Seacrest's dismal academic record, it was particularly noteworthy that we consistently found the effort expended toward creating and implementing new security and disciplinary policies consumed so much staff energy that strategies to promote learning and a positive school climate were neglected. Several of the administrators we interviewed openly admitted that their attention was consumed with deterring or quelling student incidents. As a result, they had paid little attention to classrooms and instruction. In an interview, one administrator explained:

The security and discipline systems were dysfunctional. We were trying to come in and fix those things and get those up and running. So that's where I've put most of my focus into since the beginning of the year. I know you got to focus on classrooms and making sure students are learning, but my thing was how can I make it as quiet as possible.

In a focus group, several administrators explained their absence from the classroom by the need to address what they describe as the "constant triage of incidents":

Interviewer: Have you been able to really get into classrooms much this year?

Administrator 1: Not like we should. We've had so much going on….You know we've had meetings like this one….We've had meetings at—

Administrator 2: —4-hour meetings

Administrator 1: and then you know….issues that have to be dealt with so, no, we are not getting in like we'd really like to…

. . .

Administrator 1: Well, one thing I want to add is that we spend a lot of time making sure things are better, you know.

Interviewer: Right.

Administrator 1: To make sure to be proactive, take a lot of proactive measures to, so that we don't have anything happen after what happened last year. So that's another thing that takes a lot of our time.

. . .

Administrator 2: And also just the day-to-day triage. I mean things just come up, and safety is always key. Many days you come in here with a list of where you want to go for the day, but something else just jumps on top of the page. So every day.

These administrators viewed the creation of security and discipline systems as the first priority and instruction as the second: "Now I would like to pick up more of the instructional leadership role because those climate pieces and the security of the facility, I don't have to worry about that as much. They're up and running now." This administrator's comment reflects a perspective that we heard articulated often: the goal of pursuing security and stability is separate and distinct from the goal of improving teaching and learning. Despite the fact that several studies have shown that school safety and student learning are inextricably linked[5] and that academic engagement is a central part of developing a positive and safe

school culture,[26,36] the 2 efforts were treated as though they were unrelated. Past research has shown that, if students are not engaged in academics, incidents are more likely to occur as a result of distractions and boredom.[6] The danger created by the situation at Seacrest is that by focusing on policies aimed at controlling behavior without improving the rigor and quality of instruction, a recurring negative cycle can emerge: a focus on policies leads to the negligence of academic engagement; student disinterest in academics leads to an increase in incidents; and an increase in incidents leads to a change or expansion of security policy. In this way, security systems and structures continue to grow, while academic engagement and improving the quality of education students receive—ostensibly the primary goals of all schools—are diminished in importance.

The de-emphasis on teaching and learning was expressed by teachers and was observable in classrooms. Teaching was often hindered by the burden of paperwork that accompanied the newly expanded regime of security policies. This was on top of the constraints of the mandated curricula that the district imposed upon the school. Many teachers told us that the pressure put on the school to improve safety was detracting from their ability to focus on instruction:

Teacher 1: We're so under the microscope. We have to document so many things.

Interviewer: You don't have as much time to teach now?

Teacher 2: No, I don't. I have a feeling we're becoming the jack of all trades and the master of none. There's so many things that get put on you, requiring your attention that you can't do any of them. Nothing is getting right around here.

The administrators' neglect of instructional leadership and the teachers' stress from the increased mandates likely contributed to the lack of academic engagement among students. In a focus group, one student described the monotony of instruction in some classes: "You go to the classroom, and you do the same thing every day, and they don't help you. They put the stuff on the board and say, 'you do this.' That's not helping the students to learn nothing." Some students perceived their teachers' focus on discipline as evidence of a lack of commitment to students. One student advised new students at Seacrest: "You gotta learn on your own…some teachers don't teach you," and another student in the focus group added, "some teachers don't put in a lot of effort." When asked if teachers help if he has a problem with course work, one student explained, "Sometimes they…give advice, but then you go back to the

problem and it's the same again….When I have a problem, I just shrug it off." Such inattention to students' academic needs was parallel to a careful attention to student behavior and disciplining.

In one classroom, a teacher referred 2 students to a dean for discipline because they were caught looking at the National Football League (NFL) website. However, the teacher had not given the students an assignment. One dean reported that she receives about 20 referrals a day from teachers concerning behavioral issues. This dean estimated that about 17 of the 20 referrals were the result of poor teaching and a lack of classroom management skills and that only 3 were "serious" incidents that warranted her involvement.

While the focus on discipline and safety policies may indirectly affect instruction and learning by leaving little time and energy for the classroom, the "culture of control"[16] at Seacrest also had more direct effects on classroom life. One teacher recounted an instance in which the arrest of a student interfered with her teaching:

I have police come in arrest one of my students in the middle of class, in the middle of class. They could've done it at the end of the period. They decided to do it in the middle of class so the rest of the class was shot. All the kids wanted to do was talk about the fight that that student has been in that ended him up getting arrested.

On the other hand, some security officers suggested that teachers were too quick to call on safety officers for issues that they should be able to deal with in the classroom: "It should be a sense of classroom management. A lot of teachers sometimes tend to just want to call school police every time a child decides to be disruptive in class." The involvement of security officers in addressing minor infractions (e.g., a student who refuses to do work in class) was initiated by several teachers. Once security officers are involved in responding to an incident, it is more likely that a student will be removed from the classroom or even arrested, since these are the primary and most practiced responses in the security officers' toolkit.

Students seemed to be aware of the trade-offs between security and academics. In a focus group, one 12th grade student asked: "Y'all paid…for those cameras and we don't have books. We still don't even have all our books for statistics class, like some of the books ripped up, we gotta share the books, like it don't make no sense….How about you get us books first?....I think it was a waste of money." The prioritization of safety and discipline policies was communicated clearly in the school leadership's efforts, through the large sums of money expended on security, and by the way attention to student learning was allowed to fall to

the wayside. Although these policies may have provided Seacrest the ability to establish a reputation for control under considerable external pressure and scrutiny, the goal was pursued at the expense of learning.

School Culture Neglected

To a large degree, the move toward increased surveillance and control was rationalized as an effort to create more equitable experiences across the student body. It was believed that such efforts would lead to a more positive school culture. One administrator stated: "We have been strict across the board with everybody. We've been very, very strict across the board." A staff member referred to this new emphasis as "common law" and explained that adults were held accountable to dole out consequences to students according to policy: "This is our school policy. You have to do it to students." One administrator's comments directly suggested that having all students experience the same consequences was a way of creating unity among the student body—as if 'under one policy and punishment, we are all equal.' He elaborated: "It doesn't matter whether they are this or that, when you're walking down the hallway with a phone, we're going to catch you…so other children do not feel a sense of favoritism." The logic behind this strategy was that the Asian-black student conflict could be addressed by submitting all students to the same strict surveillance and discipline. Through strict enforcement of the discipline code and security policies, it was believed that the school would become safer and that a sense of community would develop.

Our data suggest that such a tactic contributed to a shared sense of grievance based on negative experiences among students. We found that the attention paid to discipline and safety policies came at the expense of a positive school culture. One student reflected on the way the surveillance cameras affected the school climate: "Well lately I haven't seen conflicts between Asians and blacks, but there's still an unsure feeling because some people feel like their privacy is getting invaded because of all the cameras and the more security and all that." This student suggested that new problems had emerged with the interventions put in place intended to deter interracial conflict.

Complaints about security officers' interactions with students were common. One student reflected: "The police officers are always being rude to the kids….They're always disrespectful and yelling in their ears." When asked whether he felt safe in school, one black male student responded: "I'm kind of scared of police….I'm afraid like they think I'm doing something, that I look suspicious to them. I really, I just don't like security. I really don't." Students recounted several instances of observing

other students arrested in the school building. One student spoke about a time the police patted down a group of boys in the gym and then handcuffed one. During the entrance procedure in the mornings, female and male students entered in separate lines and went through a metal detector. According to one security officer, students are also randomly subjected to "invasive search" in order to catch illegal drugs on the bodies of students, even if the metal detector does not go off.

In an interview, one officer explained the new approach to security: "It was basically setting it up to run like a police department in the school, treating the building as a city….The hallways are the streets, the classrooms are the communities….The main thing first was to get some sense of order in here and accountability." Accordingly, this officer seemed to embrace the picture of policing described by the students, a perspective that reinforced the idea that policing inside and outside the school doors had become indistinguishable. One security officer explained his negotiation of being placed in a school and upholding the law as a police officer:

There's a common respect there, I told them I will lock you up if it leads to that. That's not what I want to do, and that's usually my last resort. I'm not in the business of giving kids police records, but if I'm forced in a situation where I can't, I have no leeway. I have to do what I have to do but for my job. It's a very fine line.

While the survey suggested that many students perceived the school to be safe as a result of the new security measures and discipline procedures, it also revealed that students did not feel Seacrest had a positive learning environment. Rather, for many students, the school was perceived as an extension or even a paradigmatic example of the "culture of control."[16]

Survey data further demonstrate students' negative assessments of Seacrest's environment. According to students' ratings, Seacrest fell short on measures of fairness, belonging, and multicultural cohesion, and it only met minimally necessary levels of school-based supportive relationships. The highest ratings went to school-based supportive relationships, which was given 3.1 on a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 is very negative and 4 is very positive. The mean of ratings for fairness was 2.8, and it was 2.6 for belonging. Multicultural cohesion was rated significantly lower than the other scales regardless of demographic characteristics, with a mean rating of only 2.4.

Aside from the new security policies' negative effects on academic engagement and school climate, the intensive focus on the incident and Seacrest's response to it led to other educational concerns and community needs being overlooked and de-prioritized. Seacrest once had

a well-regarded culinary arts program, but during the year when security became the school's top priority, the program lost resources and its director left the school. One administrator lamented that 2 students had been murdered in the previous year but that these traumatic experiences had been overshadowed by the efforts put toward responding to the more publicized Asian-black incident.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the violent incidents between Asian and black students at Seacrest High School in the 2009-2010 school year, it is understandable that school and district administrators would have placed great emphasis on addressing matters related to safety, order, and security. Moreover, after signing a consent decree with the US Department of Justice and the state Department of Human Relations, which required the district to enact a variety of safety measures, and under pressure and scrutiny from local media and community groups, it makes sense that the district would have taken every step available to ensure that there would be no recurrence of violence at the school.

A vast body of research on schooling has shown that safety is an essential requisite for a positive educational environment. In fact, education philosopher John Dewey[37] and psychologist Abraham Maslow[38] have argued that violence, disorder, and threats to physical safety are antithetical to an environment where students can learn and develop and where teachers can instruct effectively.

However, several studies have also shown that school safety is largely a by-product of strong positive relationships between students and staff[29,36] and not the adoption of advanced security measures.[4] In fact, as this study of Seacrest has shown, by placing a disproportionate amount of energy and attention on security issues, the school neglected other important elements of its larger educational goals, namely teaching and learning and a positive school culture.

It is important to understand that the fragmented focus on school safety is not unique to Seacrest and the unusual circumstances that were confronting the school. Schools as complex organizations are driven by multiple and often competing goals. Since the advent of zero-tolerance policies, schools across the country have adopted a number of costly security measures and highly punitive discipline policies in an attempt to ensure safety (or the perception of safety) at the expense of other concerns.[18] Positive perceptions of safety are not insignificant, as they are vital to upholding the school's moral authority to maintain order,[39] as well as to students' and teachers' abilities to focus on academics. However,

the effort to create safe and orderly schools increasingly has come to resemble the fight against crime in the larger society, and like the larger effort, underlying issues related to poverty, inequality, and institutional bias have largely been ignored.[3,6]

The fact that some students and staff at Seacrest looked favorably upon the increase in surveillance, policing, and zero-tolerance approaches to discipline despite their negative effects on school culture and learning draws attention to how school policy not only materially affects students' and staff members' everyday lives (e.g., creating paperwork, bringing new and harsher punishments) but also limits the range of solutions they perceive as possible or effective in addressing problems at school and likely beyond the school doors as well. School policies have socializing powers and contribute to shaping the thinking of how societal problems should and could be addressed (e.g., through supportive versus punitive interventions). Certainly, the school's tactics were first informed by the larger US "culture of control,"[16] but the school's role in reinforcing and influencing society in return must also be recognized.

As the case of Seacrest shows, narrowing the focus of school improvement efforts to a singular goal can result in schools neglecting important aspects of the educational mission that are essential to school success and youth development. The alternative to a narrow focus on safety and security is a broad focus on the environmental conditions within schools that promote strong, positive relationships between educators and students that are essential to learning and child development. American education philosopher John Dewey, in writing about the conditions for growth, explains why a broad focus on the learning environment and school culture is essential. He writes:

Development when it is interpreted in comparative terms, that is, with respect to the special traits of child and adult life, means the direction of power into special channels: the formation of habits involving executive skill, definiteness of interest, and specific objects of observation and thought….The adult must use his powers to transform the environment thereby occasioning new stimuli which redirect student powers and keep them developing. Ignoring this fact leads to arrested development…[37(p40)]

In narrowly pursuing safety or higher test scores in isolation from other goals that Dewey describes as essential to child development, schools like Seacrest invariably remain mired in failure. Cases like this one are reminders that safety cannot be disassociated from the broader mission of schools, and to the degree that they are, genuine and sustainable school improvement will continue to be out of reach.

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