

Accurate Queens HS Stats Reflect More Crime

By CRAIG McGUIRE

When it comes to reporting crime and violence in New York City public schools, Queens educators join their counterparts in the other four boroughs as consistent underachievers.

That's why New York City Schools Chancellor Ramon Cortines has insisted on a vigorous collection of data, reflecting actual higher levels of violence and crime in Queens high schools.

"In general, there has not been a significant increase of reported incidents inside the schools," noted Margaret Harrington, superintendent of Queens high schools. "The increases are happening outside the school in the streets, ranging from car-rip-offs to fights on the buses both to and from school."

"Incidents outside the school building are growing at a faster rate than those inside the building," agreed Cortines. "School safety is not just a schools problem, it is a community problem."

According to board officials, the increases in the number of reported incidents do not necessarily reflect an increase in crime.

On June 9th, Cortines issued the mid-year School Safety Comparison Report for the first half of the 1993-94 school year, but promptly withdrew it amidst speculation over the accuracy of the data. A revised report was issued on July 6.

"We are now cross-checking the incidents reported by school principals with reports made by school security, and the UFT (United Federation of Teachers)," explained Board of Education spokesman Robert Terte. "This provides us with a clearer picture of the problems."

"I am not interested in producing numbers that make the school system look bad or good for convenience sake," stated Cortines. "I am not interested in glossing over the problems that have been ignored in the past."

While the revised statistics may not reflect an increase, they do expound a slew of problems.

"Whether or not we were more aggressive in collecting incident reports than we have been in the past, it is all too clear that our children confront too many threats to their safety," said Cortines. "And things are getting worse."

According to the Division of School Safety, reported incidents inside of high school buildings citywide jumped by

38.2 percent, while incidents outside jumped by 42.1 percent, and there was an overall increase of 39.3 percent.

As the fall term draws nearer, local and citywide educators, parents and community members are mobilizing to address the problems of crime and violence in public schools.

A Safe Schools Coordinating Council has been established in Queens to organize Safe School Groups. These groups of neighborhood schools will work to develop safety plans throughout the borough.

Also, in each Queens school, principals will reconvene School Safety Committees, and for the first time each committee will include a local police official.

"Students will receive crime awareness education and mediation training," added Harrington, "where they will

learn to speak to each other and to us."

It may be some time before the effectiveness of these programs can be measured.

"To compare the reports from previous years with the upcoming report will not give you an accurate picture," explained Christopher Brocchini, special assistant to the executive director at School Safety. "Compare these statistics to next year and the following years and you will get a clearer picture."

The next report on school incidents, which will cover the period from January 1, 1994 to July 1, 1994, is expected to be released after the beginning of the school year.

Subsequent reports will be issued on a twice yearly basis in March and August.

"School safety is not just a schools problem, it is a community problem."

**-Schools Chancellor
Ramon Cortines**

**We're making
subways and
buses more
accessible**