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## How one Phila. school diffused a recent conflict

By Susan Snyder  
Inquirer Staff Writer

It started over a simple candy bar, but quickly grew into a conflict between students of different races at Kensington International Business High School a couple of weeks ago - something that could have escalated into a headline-grabbing event.

But principal Eileen Maicon Weissman reached out to a representative of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations for help, and through meetings with parents, students, and community officials, the tension was diffused.

"We felt it was getting out of hand, and we wanted to be proactive," Maicon Weissman testified yesterday before the commission.

Held in North Philadelphia, it was the commission's seventh of 11 hearings into school violence in Philadelphia's public schools. The meetings were prompted by racial violence at South Philadelphia High. In December, 30 Asian students were attacked by groups of mostly African American students, spurring a boycott by Asian students, and state and federal investigations.

The commission also heard from Rufus J. Faison, an adult-literacy teacher, who said some of his clients were afraid to send their children to school because of violence. He said that the clients could not attend the hearing, but that he surveyed them and presented the surveys to the commission.

Some of his clients have been called out of his class to respond to school incidents involving violence and their children, he said.

But much of Tuesday's testimony came from principals and other workers at several schools, including three small high schools in Kensington that Human Relations Commission officials acknowledged have been doing a good job.

The incident at the Kensington business school occurred a couple of weeks ago in the lunchroom, Maicon Weissman said. A boy and a girl were arguing over a candy bar and to whom it belonged, and others joined in, she said.

"It evolved into an issue between our Dominican students and African American students, and then it got to be the Dominican and Puerto Rican students and the African American students," she said.

Human Relations Commission officials and other community-group representatives helped by first talking to students and parents in their homes. Then a meeting attended by students and 30 to 35 parents was held in the school. Parents were in one room, students in another.

"We talked about what occurred," Maicon Weissman explained, and when people understood, it helped to lessen the tension.

"I'm not saying everything is resolved, but what I am saying is, everyone cooperated," she said. "We kept something down that could have exploded, and it didn't explode, because we care too much about each other."

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