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Violence has students attending in fear

By DAFNEY TALES Philadelphia Daily News talesd@phillynews.com 215-854-5084

Karen Rose blasted school officials yesterday for not disciplining a bully before he ended up breaking one of her son's

Brynn Keller, a teacher at Audenried High School, said she watched helplessly as a group of students attacked another student during her class.

And Bernadette Peoples said her daughter is terrified to attend classes at Audenreid, on Tasker and 33rd streets, after several fights broke out inside recently, and gunfire erupted nearby.

The three women were among several parents, teachers and activists who testified during a public hearing in South Philadelphia last night, the first of many addressing school violence, and sponsored by the city's Human Relations

"If my daughter doesn't feel safe going to school, then what's the point in going?" Peoples asked before making her presentation before the commission.

couple of recently publicized cases have put violence in and around Philadelphia public schools in the spotlight. Last Friday, 18-year-old South Philly High football star Tyree Parks was fatally shot near Audenried, and a number of Asian students were attacked at South Philadelphia High in December.

That's why, said commission chairwoman Kay Kyungsun Yu, "the commission wants to hear from perents."

At the end of the hearings, the commission will make recommendations to the district.

Last night, many complained that school officials were negligent in dealing with violence.

"My son was attacked and they didn't even tell me." said one mother. Zorita Brown, as she choked back tears thinking about the attack on her 10th-grade son yesterday at Audenried.

One Vietnamese student whose jaw was broken after being jumped at Fels High said the school simply called his mother and said he could transfer.

The meeting was held inside the Guerin Recreation Center, 16th and Wolf streets.

PHRC chairwoman Kyungsun Yu, who said she found the testimonies "frankly shocking," asked what the district planned to do.

John Frangipani, the district's chief of school operations, said the district was doing what it can to address the violence that is deeply rooted in the city.

"Our schools [are] a microcosm of our city and our streets, and we need to deal with this," he said. "And we are doing our part in fighting school violence as best we can." He said that the district has added school police at Audenried and that he has asked city police to increase patrols around the area.

The district has reported that violent incidents in the 2008-09 school year decreased by 11 percent from the year

Not everyone was entirely critical of district personnel.

Despite the recent violence at Audenried, Peoples said that much of the blame rests with students.

"it's not the principal, it's not the teachers, it's the kids," she said. "It's the background of where some of them come from. They're doing the same thing their parents did."

Others offered the district suggestions. "Cultural awareness for students must go beyond food, festivals and fun," said Debra Weiner, who works with the district's after-school program.

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