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Ronnie Polaneczky: Yet another round of hearings on school violence

September 30, 2010 | By Ronnie Polaneczky, Daily News Columnist

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The office of the Safe Schools Advocate, after doing heroic work on about 400 cases per year, was unceremoniously shut down last year, its earnest staff given the boot without notice.

The stated reason was budget cuts, but don't believe it. Stollsteimer was a thorn in the side of the district, publicly pointing out the continued underreporting of crimes and the lack of expulsion of violent students from schools they had no business attending.

As he notes, the district, run in partnership with Harrisburg, is essentially a state agency, overseen by the Department of Education. Bad press about either might prompt legislators to cut district funding, since it would appear that no one was doing the right things with that \$3 billion budget anyway.

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"Our office never should've answered to the Department of Education in the first place," said Stollsteimer yesterday, who now works for the state Treasury. "Any bad news we reported only led back to them. There was an inherent conflict."

Rep. John Taylor, who helped lead the hearings 10 years ago, concurred.

"The problem," he said, "has always been that district administration is too cozy with Harrisburg."

As for the current public hearings? We're right back where we were in 2001.

This time, the hearings aren't being conducted by legislators alarmed by constituents' reports of smackdowns and bullying.

Instead, the good people of the Commission on Human Relations are overseeing the community meetings - there have been eight since January - prompted by race-related attacks on Asian students at South Philly High School.

At this week's get-together at the Samuel Rec Center, chairwoman Kay Kyungsun Yu said the commission's goal is to create a report with recommendations to be submitted to the school district.

Given the effort of the commission - 100 participants have testified at the hearings so far - I imagine the report will be pretty thoughtful.

I also imagine that, without a Safe Schools Advocate to hold the district accountable for taking the recommendations seriously, it will end up in a drawer somewhere, gathering dust. Until the next child is attacked, simply for looking like an easy mark.

And the hearings will begin again.

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