

Travis Henry,
Assistant City Editor
(303) 776-2244 Ext. 326

DAILY TIMES-CALL
REGION

Page
B3

The Front Range & The West

State to focus on danger at school

By Kevin Darst
The Daily Times-Call

DENVER — State legislators plan to introduce a bill next year that would redefine the definition of an assault on school grounds and tighten thresholds for a “dangerous school” label.

During a field hearing Monday at the state Capitol, Republican U.S. Reps. Tom Osborne and Marilyn Musgrave said dangerous incidents at the nation’s schools are not accurately being reported. This year, 52 public schools in six states — 27 in Philadelphia — were designated persistently dangerous. There are about 91,000 public schools in the nation.

No school in Colorado has received the label, which in this state requires that a school exceed the acceptable number dangerous incidents two years in a row.

In the 2001-2002 school year, 20 schools were labeled “dangerous.” However, reported incidents

Legislators want to redefine assault and improve reporting accuracy for parents

at those 20 schools declined during the 2002-2003 school year, leaving the group within the limit for dangerous violations.

Musgrave, a former substitute teacher and school board member in Fort Morgan and full-timer in Genoa, said sarcastically it was “magical” that all 20 managed to escape the persistently dangerous label after the second year. She also criticized the state committee that established reporting guidelines for not gathering enough parental input.

“I would like to err on side of giving parents honest reporting, even if it is, at times, alarmist,” Musgrave said.

A state education leader, however, pinned the nationwide reporting discrepancy on federal legislators for not enacting a national, uniform definition for school assaults. Current guidelines allow state to determine what constitutes an assault at school and how many of those violations are required to designate a school as “persistently dangerous.” In Colorado, incidents that count toward the label include fights, drug and alcohol offenses, robberies and bringing a firearm to school.

In Colorado, schools would be deemed persistently dangerous if they exceeded the standards in two consecutive years. Much of the discussion

Monday centered on Colorado’s definition of assault in schools. The state’s current standards require an assault on campus to be a first- or second-degree felony assault to be reported.

“The easy resolution for this would have been a national standard,” said William Moloney, the Colorado Department of Education’s commissioner of education, who testified Monday. “There was the decision to give flexibility, but you’re at risk for 50 dif-

Danger levels

Allowable incidents per school enrollment before schools are considered dangerous:

45/fewer than 299
90/300-599
135/600-899
180/900-1199
225/1200-1499
270/1500-1799
315/1800-2099
360/2100+

■ See DANGER / B5

From B-5 9/30/03

DANGER: Will include third-degree assault

Continued from B3

ferent definitions.”

Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, schools that exceed the state-designated limit on dangerous incidents must notify parents, who can choose to send their children to another “safe” school in the district, including a charter school.

Musgrave and Osborne said the intent of No Child Left Behind was being overlooked by school administrators who feared losing their jobs or having their school blackballed by the “persistently dangerous” label.

“We would like to give each state as much autonomy as possible,” Osborne said. “But common sense and logic says (the statistics) are somewhat incredulous.”

But David Smith, state Department of Education director of prevention initiatives, said the numbers reflected an over-reporting of incidents in 2001-02.

“Schools were not reading the definition close enough,” Smith said.

State Senate Pres. John Andrews, R-Centennial, said after the hearing that legislation would be introduced in the state’s next legislative session that could change the definition of assault at school and the limits for landing on the persistently dangerous list. Andrews said he would like to include third-degree assault to reportable offenses.

“It’s too much about a feel-good or face-saving approach,” Andrews said. “We owe it to the kids to be honest with the adults.”

Statistics don’t necessarily tell the story, Moloney said. Schools with strict discipline that suspend or expel troublemakers might show high incident rates but be safer than schools with low incident rates but lax discipline.

“Sometimes the ones that look the safest on paper are the most dangerous,” Moloney said, “and sometimes the ones that look the most dangerous on paper are the safest.”

Kevin Darst can be reached at 303-776-2244, Ext. 405 or by e-mail at kdarst@times-call.com.

Dangerous incidents at St. Vrain schools

Minimum number of incidents required to be a “Dangerous School” based on enrollment**

Elementary schools	USCO incidents*	
Burlington	0	90
Central	0	90
Columbine	0	90
Eagle Crest	0	90
Erie	0	90
Fall River	0	135
Frederick	0	90
Hygiene	0	90
Indian Peaks	0	90
Loma Linda	0	90
Longmont Estates	0	90
Lyons	0	45
Mead	0	90
Mountain View	2	90
Niwot	0	90
Northridge	0	90
Prairie Ridge	3	135
Rocky Mountain	1	90
Sanborn	3	90
Spangler	0	90
Twin Peaks Charter	0	90
Secondary schools		
Adult Ed.	0	45
Erie Middle/Senior	0	90
Frederick Middle	0	90
Frederick Senior	0	135
Heritage Middle	0	135
Longmont Senior	0	225
Longs Peak Middle	0	135
Lyons Middle/Senior	0	90
Mead Middle	0	90
Niwot Senior	0	225
Olde Columbine Senior	0	45
Silver Creek Middle/Senior	0	180
Skyline Senior	0	225
Sunset Middle	0	135
Ute Creek Sec. Acad.	0	45
Westview Middle	0	135

* Unsafe School Choice Option incidents include: Alcohol violations, drug violations, assaults/fights, robberies, other felonies and expulsions for firearms based on Gun-Free School Act.

**Minimum number by enrollment to qualify as a Dangerous School:
 45 for fewer than 299 students
 90 for 300 to 599 students
 135 for 600 to 899 students
 180 for 900 to 1,199 students
 225 for 1,200 to 1,499 students
 270 for 1,500 to 1,799 students
 315 for 1,800 to 2,099 students
 360 for 2,100 or more students