

Principle Dawn Montgomery
Interviewed by Kevin Cao
May 27, 2005

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The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of Century High School. The interviewee is Dawn Montgomery, and the interviewer is Kevin Cao. The interview took place at Century High School on Friday, May 27, 2005 at 9 A.M.

Kevin Cao: My first question is how long have you been working the school and what did you do?

Dawn Montgomery: I've been at Century High School since we opened, and in 1997-1998 school years. I started as an Assistant Principle for two year, and I've principle for since then, so the last six year.

KC: So what kind of crime or violence have you seen or dealt with in those years?

DM: Goggly, Umm, just a little bit of everything to be honest with you. We had a very rough opening, at Century; it was the first time that the high school had 9th graders, so the 9th graders had moved up from the junior highs. With the opening with the high school and we had students coming from Glencoe and also from Hillhigh and 9th graders, and the combination of those three things made for a hard beginning. And it included some racial problem, some gang related problem, some vandalism. It was a very difficult time, and in fact we ended up hiring an extra, umm, vice principle. So it was Ted Zhere, who the principle is coming from Saint Helen, he was here when we first moved from a math teacher, into an assistant principle position, because of the crime. There was so many problems.

KC: So before when we had less security, no camera, did you find it very difficult to solve these problems?

DM: It took so much time. The difference that it's made, that we had extra personnel, had security. No, we had security since we opened, and Hillsboro hadn't always had security on their campus. We had one security person on line, and added another after that, so we had always had some security support since I've been principle. Actually also as assistance principle, and I've been in this district 11 years, but we've umm, the cameras had made a huge different. Now we didn't have camera when I was assistance principle unfortunately, so all of that investigation took a quite bit of time to secure the building.

KC: With the camera, have you seen a decrease of violence and vandalism?

DM: I think we've definitely see a decrease, because it's much easier to catch who's responsible for theft. Theft is a crime that's reduced as well. We had one order of camera that came 3 years ago, and another order that came in a year ago. Those extra camera made huge difference to let us see into spots we weren't able to cover when student get into locker rooms, we have them outside the door. The locker room is a place where we

III.C.7

Montgomery 2

have a lot of incidents of theft, in the library, who leave their backpack and now someone gets into a backpack, were able to see them.

KC: After you said that theft was a big one, what do you think is the big one now? That kids are doing?

DM: Drug and alcohol.

KC: At school, or generally?

DM: Well generally and at school. At the beginning it's usually more prevalent at school. The students start testing out the system to see what they can get away with. So we didn't see alcohol in coke bottle etcetera into the classroom then into the school. But umm, I believe that use of drugs and alcohol continues to be an issue for kids that keep them from being successful and that continues to be a problem. The other piece is probably vandalism; we still have some problem with graffiti in lockers, and inside the restroom, that's decreased with cameras as well.

III.C3

KC: How do you think that Century compares to other school as violence or vandalism?

DM: I don't think there is more of any of those in our building, we have had a lot of suspension this year, attendance, attendance is not quite as a crime, but attendance is a huge issue for Century and I think we've seen an increase in discipline issue to attendance this year. I think it's related to our schedule and for juniors and seniors have all day schedule they tend to come less and less and less engaged in school and that's a problem. Our Jag Read program, while it believes is helpful for students to get reading time and that's important, because it's not a graded class it becomes an area where we have attendance issue.

KC: If you can divide violence within our school into racial categories, where would you see, or is it pretty much even across the board.

DM: No there is no question, in fact we see percentage wise, we see more of our Hispanic students, the percentage of, actually I have data that I will give you the actual of suspension related to the population. It's larger to our Hispanic population than it is to any other comparative racial group in our school, and that is the same across the district it's not just at Century. And that is an issue we need to work on it as a district, we need to work it as a building, we need some preventative programs and measure to help us to work with our Hispanic kids in terms of attendance, in term of gang related involvement and issues at school, and those two is probably the main factors.

II

KC: Do you think that because of the huge increase of Hispanic population has done that? In Hillsboro since our data shows that it has increased by a lot.

DM: Its, the increase has definitely occurred in Hillsboro for the last 10-15 years, and across the state were seeing the same issue. The percentage of discipline related to

III

Montgomery ③
Montgomery 3

Hispanic students in many districts around the state, not just in Hillsboro. It point to the fact that were not meeting the needs of those families and students like we need to be able to.

KC: During your past few years of being principle and vice-principle, how have you seen school violence change?

DM: It's interesting you mention that, it reminds me that I've been in this building and an administrator during Columbine and Springfield, and those two incidents have effected and changed school and changed school security. Our cameras came after that, and we had a bond measure that lets us put the camera, and put preventative measures in term of safety and security across the district. Those were quite frightening incident that has effect all of us around the country. To be honest I think its reduced, I think we see that we see a lot less violence and a lot less crime on school campuses. Partially because were taking more measures when we do see issue, our school research officers, we work so closely with them and the Hillsboro police department. That relationship helps us put some teeth into issues that we've seen in school, so I think it's reduced.

III.C.7

KC: Well, umm, you said before that drugs had been a problem, is it to that extent to be on the top of the list? Because some of the police report says drug has been one of the leading problems for many years, but just hadn't came out into the public to know about. What do you think?

DM: I agree, drug has been a problem in our culture and in our school, since I was in high school, not too many years ago. The problem today is that it's our affecting our families and our students in a more serious way, because of many things. One of the ways is the strength of the drug of the kids and the family has access to, and the other is the "meth" problem. I think, in fact that there is a lot of information from our police department. < talks about the police putting out a movie about "meth" and giving flier>. And the seriousness of family and family use, and how parents are not able to care for kids and the lack of supervision, and it provides for not just high school kids and also younger kids is a real problem. We have also seen some our own students become addictive and serious, and they disappear from our school if they start to become user, because it's so sever in terms of its impact on the students.

III.C.3

KC: I heard from the interview that they train teachers to detect kids that are on drugs when they come to school. They teach you what marijuana smells like, and their facial reaction would be if they use them. Is it true, and is it effective?

DM: I think it's really important that all the adult in the school has an awareness of drug and alcohol use, and as well as gang information. This year we have kind of focused on gang relation information and have some training on drug and alcohol, and we need to do more. So the staff can detect when a student is coming intoxicated to school and under the influence when they come to their classes. I think it's an important piece, and we need to do more of it.

III.C.3

KC: How has school and police relation changed in the past 25 years?

DM: Well I can't say for the last 25 years, but the past 11 years that I've been in this district, it's improved. It used to be, except in the last 5 years, schools sort of dealt with crimes that happened separately from the police department, and only on the serious issues would we get the police involve. I think that's changed in the last 5 years, because were now taking a much more serious consequences for students that any crime in the schools. An example would be any weapon that comes to school, we have federal laws now that effects what we do when a student bring an arm into schools. We also in term of drug in alcohol try to charge students if they are involve as minors in the schools. That use totally outside of the law, we would have only schools consequences we wouldn't necessary have charges. We really have taken a different look at that, and felt like the best way for families and students to get some help is to press charges and get police involvement in those situations, so those relations has improved and has actually helped us a lot.

KC: Since did police stayed at school and kind of worked at one school each?

DM: They still don't work at one school each unfortunately; we share our school resources officer with Liberty and Brown and with elementary school too to do DARE training. Ideally it would be great to have one officer, but we had never had that much time with our research officer, but it's increased. Like I said, that relation has improved and more conducive to prevention over the last 5 years, and that's improve. We see more research officers in Hillsboro working with schools.

KC: Back to the DARE program, do you think that what officers back at elementary schools is really helpful to delay the temptation of actually using drugs and alcohol?

DM: I think it works for a lot of students, I think that in education case is really important. They need to get it from where ever they can. They need to get it from school, police officers and so they can get perspective and a relationship with officers at a young age, so they know that our officers are there and can keep them safe. The other piece I think is important for a place for use to grow and improve is education with our family. For example we're going to meet with the freshman parent's right at the beginning of the school year to have a drug and alcohol prevention meeting, before they start high school. So then we can educate them what to look for with drugs and alcohol, when their using, or how to deal with teenagers and some of the issue that they go through as they go through high schools and how they can recognize when they need help. I think that will really help, and I think we need to do more of that.

III-C7

KC: Is there any place, students outside of freshman, can turn to if they use drug and alcohol and they need help inside the school?

DM: That's a good question, yes. We have a couple of resources, our 4 counselors for our student body population, certainly not enough but it's a start. On top of that we have contract as a district with youth contact. When you contact provides us Carol Sheilburger

III-C3

who is our drug alcohol expert, she helps with our student individual. For example, if a student has been on drugs and alcohol in school or in school related activity, we strongly recommend and require that before they come back, they have an evaluation. Were working on a program that would be more of a long term relationship, if some group work with a counselor to help with screening to work with students. There are places, and they also do outside reference for resources.

KC: Have you yourself in your personal life, outside of school, have experienced or seen domestic crime or violence.

DM: My personal life, umm, no I'm aware of it. It hasn't necessarily affected me personally, but I've certainly seen the result of it not only at school in society and in my family etcetera where certainly an issue. There is a need to educate women and men to protect themselves, and to stand up for them and to not tolerate abusive relationships of any kind.

KC: Is there anything you would like to add to? Any stories?

DM: That's a really great question. I think our student population is very knowledgeable, I think the education is really helping at the younger grades about drugs and alcohol and safety, because I think students are very aware of what goes on. One of the improvement I would like to see as a district and as a school is to use those information. To have a form of students to work with the adults, to help us with prevention idea and support to students that need it. I think that the eyes and ears of our youth is so important, to work together as a community as adult and students to see some of the problems we have in our schools and our society. If we can all be working together to make it a better place in terms of safety, and substance abuse, and we can use the students knowledge and what they see going on in our school and in our community as a way to help us to do more work in prevention. And that's a place where were lacking is working together with teenagers to help us.

KC: Working with teenagers, has there been teenagers that has helped you guys maybe solves some violence issues or seen students doing drugs in the lockers or what not?

DM: Absolutely, we strongly rely on students who know when something goes on that isn't safe, maybe to the student or to the school, and they will come and report it. That's so important that everybody knows, it's not a place where you say well "I'm not going to get involved" it's important that we all get involve. Another area where we see a lot of support is our Jag Crew. And the peers get trained to be the eyes and ears of the schools and help with drugs and alcohol programs and diversity programs. A way to work on racial issue, we have a understanding of racism foundation which we train students and staff to help us with issue with racism we need to acknowledge and get on top of, because I think it ends up causing a lot of the problem as a community when we don't understand each other and we don't work each other. We don't recognize issue of racism, and ends up causing other crimes, and this foundation I think works with really work with adult and students be aware.

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Montgomery ⑥

KC: I just have one question on the top of my head that I just thought of, about the recent incident of about gangs has that been changed? Like in the cafeteria there was a beat up; people are thinking it's a gang involvement.

DM: Well I can't speak a specific issue at school, because student's rights are protected, but I do acknowledge that there was some gang related, some gang related problems, and the cause of it. We got on that right away. Since then, nothing has happened related to that, that happened inside of our school. I believe that there have been outside incidents in the community that may be related the same gangs but we haven't seen them come back to our school but we got our eyes and ears open because it's important.

III.C.2

KC: Well do you think the gang and violence is a big issue inside our school, do we have a problem or no?

DM: I think we do, I think the issues as they stir outside the community come back inside the school. We stay into regular contact with the gang resource and the police department, its sort of more like a gang wannabee issue it's not a true gang infestation that's cooking up issues. It's more of affiliation and wannabee, acting out some of the things they see and hear about. So the issue may not be as big as downtown Portland or Los Angeles but I think we need to be on top of it.

III.C.2

KC: Okay, well I think that's it. You've been a great help.