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# The Philadelphia Inquirer

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PART  
1 OF 7

## ASSAULT ON LEARNING

Inquirer  
INVESTIGATION

Minutes after the Audenried High assault on Teshada Herring, surveillance video captured this attack on a second student in a little-used wing. During the 2009-10 school year, 4,541 violent incidents were reported in the district.

# Climate of Violence Stifles City Schools

Efforts by Phila. administrators to stem the complex problem have fallen short.

By John Sullivan, Susan Snyder, Kristen A. Graham, and Dylan Purcell  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

For Teshada Herring, the action was unmistakable: The girls smearing Vaseline on their faces and fitting scarves to their heads were preparing for a fight.

The ritual — well-known in Philadelphia schools — is intended to keep skin from scarring and hair from getting ripped out.

As Teshada passed the group on her way to class at Audenried High that morning, the events of the previous week flashed through her mind — a fight she had witnessed, Facebook posts warning that someone from her neighborhood would be attacked, a text blast to her phone that all but named her as the intended victim.

She wondered: Would they come for her?

Minutes later, while taking an algebra test, Teshada was unable to stop thinking about the pack of girls. She glanced up from the test, looking at the classroom door.

The girls in scarves passed by. Teshada was terrified; now she was sure they were coming for her.

Suddenly, a band of more than a dozen girls and boys — captured on video roaming the halls and looking into classrooms — barged through the door.

The group converged on Teshada and began to beat her.

In less than a minute, they vanished. "It was like a tornado," her teacher would later say. "They went one way, then they went the other way."

In Philadelphia, schools are no sanctuary.

The Jan. 22, 2010, assault on Teshada, which left her bleeding and dazed, was the 2,095th violent incident the School District recorded in the 2009-10 year.

Within a few minutes, a video at the three-story school recorded violent incident No. 2,096, another attack in a hallway in a largely unused part of the



DAVID SWANSON / Staff Photographer

**Teshada Herring** was an Audenried freshman last year when a gang of students raided a class to beat her. "It was like a tornado," her teacher said.

building that teachers had complained about for months. Students rushed past a security guard as the fight erupted. Then, he waded into the fray, reaching down to help a girl who had been knocked to the ground and kicked and punched by her assailants.

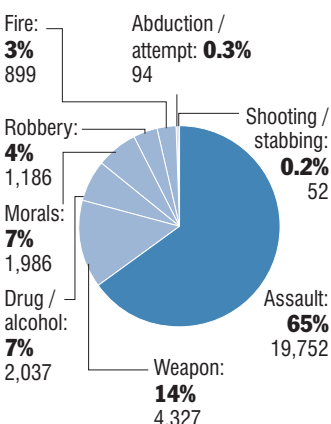
By June, the district's total of violent incidents had grown to 4,541. That means on an average day 25 students, teachers, or other staff members were beaten, robbed, sexu-

See **SCHOOLS** on A22

## Five Years of School Crime

There were 30,333 serious incidents reported by the district from 2005-06 through 2009-10.

### Types of Crime



SOURCES: School District of Philadelphia; Inquirer analysis

MIKE PLACENTRA / Staff Artist

## INSIDE

Philadelphia's 45 most violent schools. **Graphic, A24.**

A serious beating amid day-to-day violence. **A25.**

## EXCLUSIVE ONLINE EXTRAS

**philly.com/schoolviolence**

**Videos:** See the Audenried assaults from school cameras.

**Database of school incidents:** How violent is your school?

**Speaking out:** Hear from teachers and students.

**Share:** Your comments on Philadelphia school violence.

**Chat:** Monday at noon with schools reporter Kristen Graham on her new blog, "Philly School Files," [www.philly.com/SchoolFiles](http://www.philly.com/SchoolFiles).

On Facebook, search **Assault on Learning**

# Rebels retake Libyan city

Gadhafi's forces retreated from a key hub. "We are succeeding in our mission," Obama said.

By Kareem Fahim  
and David D. Kirkpatrick  
NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

AJDABIYA, Libya — Moamar Gadhafi's forces retreated from this strategic city Saturday, running for dozens of miles back along the coast in the first significant advance for Libyan rebels since U.S. and European air strikes began a week ago.

The rebel victory was the first sign that the allied at-

tacks, directed not only against Gadhafi's aircraft and defenses but also against his ground troops, were changing the dynamics of the battle for control of the country. As night fell, rebel forces had not only recaptured Ajdabiya, a crucial hub city in eastern Libya, but had also driven almost uncontested to the town of Brega, erasing weeks of loss as the air

See **LIBYA** on A20Phil  
Sheridan

## Phillies' fortunes turning?

Your breath isn't quite as bated. Anticipation has yielded ground to trepidation.

The week the Phillies are scheduled to come north, their fortunes seem to be headed due south. The summer of the aches has been preceded, maybe preempted, by the spring of the aches.

Chase Utley's knee, Brad Lidge's shoulder, Placido Polanco's elbow. When that line drive dropped Roy Oswalt last week, it knocked all of Philadelphia down. What a pain in the neck.

The red pinstriped angel See **SHERIDAN** on A4

■ There's no need to panic, except ... **Bill Lyon, C1.**  
■ Around The Horn: Phillies preview. **Sports, Section D.**

## Corbett's vision for Pa. schools

His plan includes voter approval of budgets.

By Dan Hardy  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

When it comes to changing public education in Pennsylvania, Gov. Corbett's proposed billion-dollar funding cut to school districts this year could be just the beginning.

The governor also is pushing a legislative agenda that could significantly affect the way children are taught, the teachers who instruct them, and how schools craft their budgets.

One proposal that many suburban school boards fear and many taxpayers relish calls for voter approval of proposed district budgets when tax increases exceed inflation. If this See **EDUCATION** on A5

### WEATHER

High 43, Low 29

Light snow to the south. Full report and NBC10 forecast, **B15.**



## Trailblazer Ferraro dies

By Douglas Martin  
NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Geraldine A. Ferraro, 75, the former Queens congresswoman who in 1984 strode onto a podium to accept the Democratic nomination for vice president and to take her place in U.S. history as the first woman nominated for national office by a major party, died Saturday

See **FERRARO** on A16

Geraldine Ferraro

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### THE SERIES

► **SUNDAY** City schools no sanctuary  
**MONDAY** Violence unreported, uncoun-  
**TUESDAY** The young and violent

**WEDNESDAY** Teachers under assault  
**THURSDAY** Flawed intervention  
**FRIDAY** Solutions but no simple remedy  
**NEXT SUNDAY** Rebuilding South Philly High



# ASSAULT ON LEARNING

## The First Attack

Jan. 22, 2010: After tying hair ... and searching classroom to classroom, attackers swarm in ... and Audenried school police arrive at the room.



8:58:07 A.M.



8:59:33 A.M.



9:00:40 A.M.

# A pervasive climate of violence ...

**SCHOOLS** from A1  
ally assaulted, or victims of other violent crimes.

That doesn't even include thousands more who are extorted, threatened, or bullied in a school year.

And those are just the incidents that are reported; teachers, students, and administrators interviewed by The Inquirer during a yearlong investigation say many are not. During the 2009-10 school year alone, 183 cases came to the district's attention only after the city police made arrests.

Violence in Philadelphia schools is more than the sheer numbers. The specter of violence traumatizes students and teachers, and stifles learning.

Audenried, housed in a gleaming, new \$60 million building in Grays Ferry, is equipped with a sophisticated camera-surveillance system. But that was no deterrent to the band of youngsters bent on attack who roamed the corridors.

In the attack's aftermath, Teshada — then a 15-year-old freshman — had to confront the elemental question of whether she could stay in her neighborhood school and learn.

And her teacher, Brynn Keller, after witnessing the assault, grappled with her total inability to protect a student in her classroom.

Incidents of violence like this raise the question of whether Superintendent Arlene C. Ackerman, in the midst of her third year, is fulfilling her pledge to make Philadelphia schools safe places to learn.

Ackerman contends that on her watch the district has taken strong steps to curb school violence — such as enforcing a zero-tolerance policy on discipline and expelling students. She cites a drop in reported incidents as proof the efforts are working.

Moreover, she said, school violence is a national "public health problem" that will require an entire community to resolve: "We're going to have to fix it as a collective effort and not expect the school to take on the responsibility for trying to do everything."

Ackerman conceded that the School District must do a better job developing responses to violence, but that getting hundreds of "schools to implement these programs with fidelity is where we still have a long way to go."

And she placed much of the responsibility on teachers and principals.

"When young people rush into a classroom, when they roam the halls, that's an adult problem — of the educators in that school," Ackerman said, referring to Teshada's assault at Audenried. "Having been a teacher, having been a principal, I never had that happen in my classroom, and I sure didn't have it happen in my school, because we were clear about what we would tolerate, what was acceptable and what wasn't."

Good discipline occurs in classrooms with good teaching, she said.

But many teachers and other school staff have said that even good teaching can fail in the face of violence, and that the district has done little to help. They, as well as students and parents interviewed by The Inquirer, are openly skeptical of the district's antiviolence efforts and its assertion that it enforces zero tolerance for violence.

"Really? Because you can pretty much punch a teacher and still go to school," said teacher Hope Moffett, who was in an adjacent classroom when Teshada was attacked. In a January interview, she compared the assault to "a prison riot."

Since then, Moffett has become openly critical about violence and Ackerman's plan to turn Audenried into a charter school run by a nonprofit company. Despite receiving positive evaluations, Moffett faced firing for giving students bus tokens to travel to a demonstration opposing Audenried's conversion and then talking to the press about being disciplined. The district backed off after the union sued.

### The Inquirer's investigation

The Inquirer spent a year looking into violence in Philadelphia public schools, interviewing hundreds of teachers, parents, students, and education experts about the district's



DAVID SWANSON / Staff Photographer

**Bridgette Bennett and her daughter Teshada Herring.** When Bennett got the call from Audenried, she said, "I was scared that my kid was really, really hurt."

problems.

It also commissioned an extensive, independently administered survey by Temple University that sampled the opinions of more than 750 teachers and aides — 6 percent of the 13,000 the district employs.

More than two-thirds of those who responded to the survey reported that the violence and disruption in their building hindered their students' ability to learn. And more than half said violence had worsened during the last three years.

Educators in schools throughout the district spoke out about high levels of violence and disruption in their schools.

"There are far more disruptive and violent students than our system can handle," said one middle school teacher, who spoke of students who "hop from classroom to classroom ... causing chaos."

The Inquirer also obtained thou-

— from assaults to robberies to rapes — reported in the district during the last five years.

Even taking the district's numbers at face value, the results are stunning:

- Violence worsened in 111 of the district's 268 schools in 2009-10. (Because some schools were closed or converted to charter schools, the district counts 257 schools this year.)
- In the district's 32 neighborhood high schools such as Audenried, the violence rate increased 17 percent over five years — to 51.1 reported incidents of violence per 1,000 students in 2009-10.
- Assaults accounted for two-thirds (66 percent) of all serious incidents, up from 61 percent five years earlier.
- Nine out of every 10 schools — from elementary schools on up — reported a serious assault last year.
- Nearly three-quarters of the

port and handle violence and whether they call city police — a problem that Deputy Mayor Everett Gillison conceded. Some principals would rather handle matters themselves, he said.

"Different schools have different cultures and different ways of handling matters," said Gillison, who oversees police matters for the city. "What we have to do is try to change the culture, and that takes time."

In many cases, the district's main intervention system has evolved into an exercise in paper shuffling, rather than a way to get troubled students the help they need. So many students were enrolled in the program last year — 51,166, or one-third of all students in the system — that teachers and counselors are overwhelmed.

When antiviolence programs do work — and creative, effective initiatives have flourished in some district schools — they aren't implemented on a wider basis.

None of these findings surprise Jack Stollsteimer, the independent safe-schools advocate between 2006 and 2009, who was charged with monitoring violence in the district until state officials eliminated his job.

"The district is just a disaster when it comes to school safety," Stollsteimer said. "No administration I've seen has adequately addressed the problem."

### Long-standing problems

In Philadelphia — the most violent large city in America for the last two years, according to FBI crime statistics — many of the problems afflicting the district are long-standing and predate Ackerman's tenure, which began in June 2008.

Dozens of Philadelphia schools, including Audenried, sit in neighborhoods plagued by poverty, hunger, drug abuse, parental neglect, and crime. Making these schools havens where the district's 155,000 students can learn is a vexing problem that resists an easy solution.

Deputy Superintendent Leroy Nunery said the district was in the early stages of developing a comprehensive approach to violence, but was facing a shortage of funding. The district's \$3.2 billion budget allows it to spend more than \$13,000 per pupil, far less than wealthy suburban districts spend. It also faces a budget shortfall for the coming school year that could exceed \$600 million.

"In this constrained budget environment, we're not going to have the luxury of throwing a lot more dollars at the problem. We're going to have to fix this in the classroom," Nunery said.

Against this gloomy background, the School District has found some

points of light, frequently citing test scores moving up during the last eight years as evidence of success — achievements that have won Ackerman national accolades, including one from a group she formerly led that lauded her as the nation's top urban school leader.

And some district schools — even those in tough neighborhoods with many impoverished children — rarely see violence. But some of the safest schools, such as Central High and Masterman, are magnets, with selective enrollments.

Even with these undeniable successes, the problem of violence persists in the schools.

In late February, the city's Human Relations Commission issued a report that concluded that conflicts among racial and ethnic groups were widespread in schools.

And a mid-March report by Jack Wagner, the state auditor general, called violence in the schools "a chronic problem" and said an outside watchdog was needed to monitor school violence.

In the weeks before those reports, a brawl at Simon Gratz High in Nicetown, possibly gang-related, landed one combatant in a hospital with a broken eye socket; a sixth grader was arrested for taking a gun to Heston Elementary in West Philadelphia; and one fifth grader grabbed another by the head and began "grinding on her" at Bregy Elementary in South Philadelphia, according to the school police report. Police were not called in the latter incident until the complainant's mother went to the school and was upset that they hadn't been called.

### New steps to fight violence

As The Inquirer began questioning district officials and seeking documents for this series, the Ackerman administration was recalibrating its approach to violence in the schools.

It was already under national scrutiny for its failure to stem violent attacks on Asian students by African Americans at South Philadelphia High School.

One dramatic move was the removal in August of James B. Golden, the district's safety chief for five years and a former Philadelphia police captain. He later told reporters that the district's problems stemmed in part from a lack of focus and direction.

"It's an environment where academics are in charge. Educators are in charge," said Golden. "However, there are nonacademic challenges and issues for which you need other professionals to be involved in addressing."

Despite his role as the district's top security officer, he said, the ad-

See **SCHOOLS** on A23

**"IT FELT LIKE A PRISON RIOT. MY WHOLE ROOM WAS SHAKING. DESKS WERE RATTLING."**

**Hope Moffett**, an Audenried teacher who was in an adjoining room



STEVEN M. FALK / Staff Photographer

sands of internal School District police reports of violent incidents dating back to 2007. They show that during the last four years serious crimes occurred dozens of times a day, in every corner of the city, at every level of school.

Case histories of assaults that landed in Common Pleas Court were reviewed, including that of the two girls and a boy who joined several others in the assault on Teshada at Audenried.

And a database was created with information provided by the School District and analyzed, detailing more than 30,000 serious incidents

schools reporting violent incidents had at least one teacher assaulted. There were 690 teacher assaults in the district that year.

Although the numbers are alarming, considerable evidence shows they may not even be accurate. Documented cases of underreporting suggest the problem of violence may be even greater.

Teachers and other school staff said they faced constant pressure from administrators to not report violent incidents, which renders the district's statistics suspect.

Depending on the principal, schools vary widely on how they re-



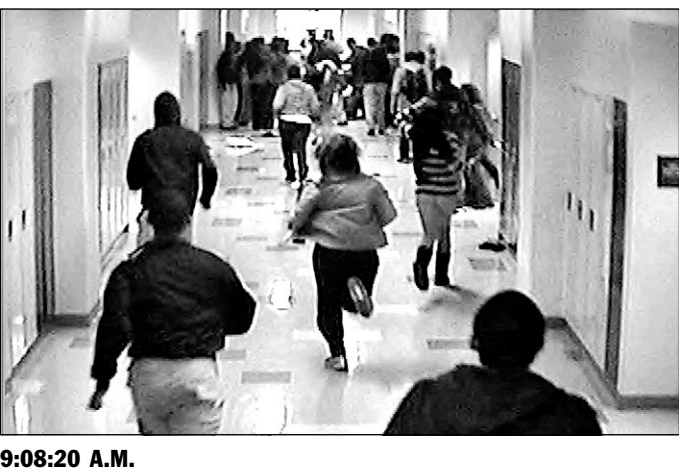
# ASSAULT ON LEARNING

More at [philly.com/schoolviolence](http://philly.com/schoolviolence)

**Inquirer**  
INVESTIGATION

## The Second Attack

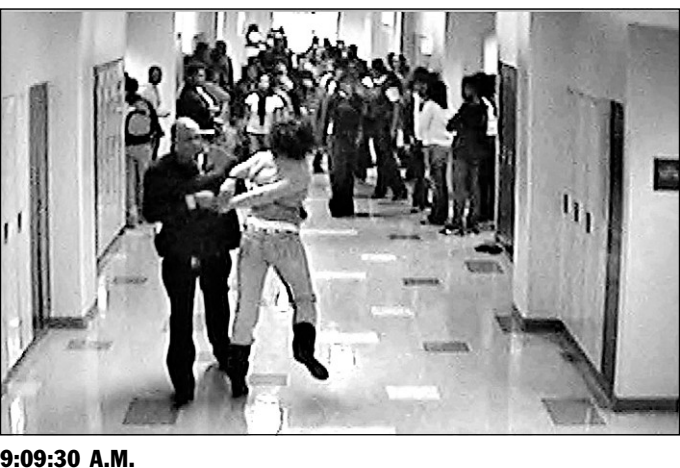
Minutes later that morning, Audenried students surround a 10th grader and start to beat her ... then a police officer restrains one student.



9:08:20 A.M.



9:08:22 A.M.

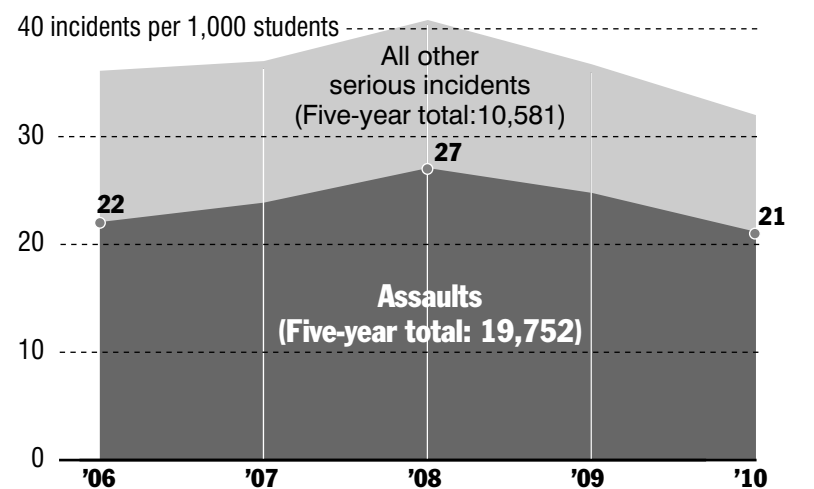


9:09:30 A.M.

# ... stifles learning in city's schools

## Assaults Remain the Major Problem

While serious incidents rose and fell from the 2005-06 to the 2009-10 school year, assaults persisted. Some other major offenses — fire, weapon, and drug crimes — fell sharply, driving an overall decline. Assault remained the largest crime category with 3,330 assaults out of 5,027 serious incidents in 2009-10.



## A crime-by-crime breakdown

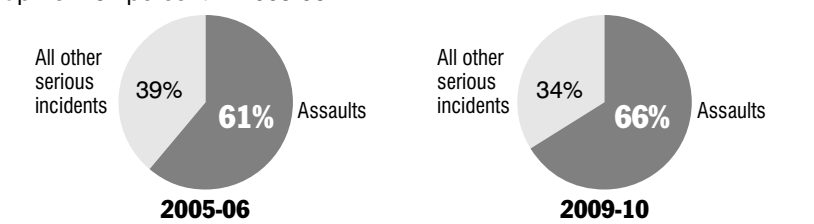
Over the last five years, the district had the most success cutting crime rates for weapon, fire, and drug and alcohol incidents. The rate is based on crime frequency per 1,000 students. Assault and robbery rates fell slightly while morals offenses edged up.

Year	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	Five-year % change
Major change						
Weapon	6.2	5.9	5.3	4.1	4.0	-35.5%
Fire	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.0	0.7	-32.4%
Drug and alcohol	2.9	2.4	2.2	2.0	2.2	-23.7%
Modest change						
Assault	21.8	23.8	27.0	24.0	20.6	-5.8%
Robbery	1.2	1.3	1.7	1.5	1.2	-2.0%
Morals	2.1	2.1	2.8	2.7	2.2	+4.0%

NOTE: About 1% of incidents occurred at non-School District locations and were not calculated.

## Assaults: A growing share of serious crime

Assaults made up 66 percent of all serious incidents reported in 2009-10, up from 61 percent in 2005-06.



SOURCES: School District of Philadelphia; Inquirer analysis

MIKE PLACENTRA and DYLAN PURCELL / Inquirer Staff

**SCHOOLS** from A22  
Administration failed to consult him on key decisions. In one, at South Philadelphia High, Ackerman approved the installation of high-tech security cameras.  
Later, in September, Ackerman authorized a no-bid, emergency contract to spend \$7.5 million putting security cameras in 19 schools deemed by state and federal guidelines to be “persistently dangerous.”  
About the same time, the district launched a plan to address safety at what it identified as the 46 most troublesome schools, Audenried among them.  
Plagued by low attendance, chronic

truancy, and high suspensions, these 46 schools account for nearly half the district’s violent incidents, though only 24 percent of enrollment.  
The district also created a commission that includes top city officials to study violence and launched a campaign against bullying. It also increased expulsions for violent behavior.  
Many of those who have faced school violence say these are familiar responses to problems that have gone unchecked for years.  
But new cameras won’t deter an attack as brazen as the one on Teshada at Audenried.  
An attack that happened at 8:59

a.m. in the presence of a teacher and a classroom of more than 20 ninth graders.

An attack that left Teshada bleeding and sprawled on the floor, with her hair yanked out from the front half of her head, welts on her face, and a lump under one eye.

“Our hallways are well-equipped with cameras,” said Keller, the Audenried teacher whose classroom was invaded by the mob of students looking for Teshada. “These students roamed not just my floor but the second floor as well, for a period of five or 10 minutes before they entered my classroom. Nobody said anything.”

## ‘The prison on the hill’

Bordered by housing projects and I-76, Charles Y. Audenried High for years has been one of the district’s most troubled schools. In its former building, at 33d and Tasker Streets, dubbed “the prison on the hill,” academic failure and chaos reigned.

In 2003, a large melee inside the school resulted in 16-year-old Jamillah Robinson’s receiving more than 50 stitches to her face and chest after she was attacked with a razor blade. She filed a civil rights case against the School District and eventually settled.

The attack came after the girl and her mother — as Teshada and her mother would — repeatedly called the school, expressing fear and asking for help.

In sentencing five girls for her attack, Kevin Dougherty, administrative judge of Family Court, excoriated Audenried for its lack of control and discipline: “Audenried should hang its window down with absolute shame.”

The district shut the dilapidated building in 2005. Three years later, Audenried High reopened on the same site in a renovated building with a red-slate and purple-brick exterior supported by yellow pillars.

Upon reopening, it enrolled only ninth graders, with plans to add another grade each year. When Teshada was attacked, it included about 350 ninth and 10th graders.

Officials were hopeful that past problems would not resurface.

It was a vain hope.  
“I don’t think they should have put that school out there,” said Britany Lecount, a student who said she watched Teshada’s attack.

“Different streets going to war with different streets, kids fighting each other for no reason.”

The only reason Audenried didn’t join the 19 schools with the “persistently dangerous” tag was that it was new and needed at least two years of recorded statistics to qualify.

The Inquirer’s analysis found that the school was among 55 in the district that had a violent-crime rate the same as or higher than those schools tagged as “persistently dangerous.” But these schools were not labeled as such because

**“THE DISTRICT IS JUST A DISASTER WHEN IT COMES TO SCHOOL SAFETY. NO ADMINISTRATION I’VE SEEN HAS ADEQUATELY ADDRESSED THE PROBLEM.”**

**Jack Stollsteimer,** former safe-schools advocate for the Philadelphia School District



DAVID SWANSON / Staff Photographer

**“WE’RE GOING TO HAVE TO FIX IT AS A COLLECTIVE EFFORT AND NOT EXPECT THE SCHOOL TO TAKE ON THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRYING TO DO EVERYTHING.”**

**Arlene C. Ackerman,** Philadelphia School District superintendent

they didn’t meet all of the narrowly tailored state and federal conditions.

Added to the 19 “persistently dangerous” schools, that’s a total of 74 — far more than the list of 46 that the School District has singled out for a safety review, and evidence of a far broader problem.

## Gang bursts in, starts beating

The morning Teshada Herring was attacked started on a high note in Brynn Keller’s classroom. She was praising her students for their high scores on a district reading exam.

Halfway through first period, she got a call from algebra teacher Michelle Davis, whose classroom was across the hall. Davis wanted to know if Keller could take one of her students.

Teshada had arrived at Davis’ first-period class late. She was agitated and refusing to take her test. Davis didn’t know what was wrong with Teshada, and Teshada wouldn’t tell her.

Keller, also one of Teshada’s teachers that semester, agreed. Teachers often trade off students to keep them in class rather than a discipline office.

Teshada took a seat in a cluster of four desks in the center of Keller’s room. Her seat faced the door. At her back was a window looking out on rows and rows of new public housing, Greater Grays Ferry Estates — the old Tasker Homes.

It’s in these neighborhoods that rivalries spark and later flare in school hallways. Children, many of whom weren’t even born when the feuding began, see classrooms as fair battlegrounds to carry out attacks.

At Audenried, teachers say they learn about gangs from their students, and they’re well-aware of the three rival neighborhood groups named for streets near the school — 27th Street, 31st Street, and 18th Street. The district was supposed to give teachers “gang awareness” training, but never did.

In the face of simmering neighborhood violence, it wasn’t just teachers who were unprepared. It was the building, too. Students had learned to evade hallway cameras by ducking into the alcoves outside classrooms or by getting into the bathrooms. Security officers tightly controlled keys to the washrooms, but students broke in by punching holes in the walls, then reaching in and unlocking the doors.

The hallway where the second fight occurred was in an isolated wing of the building that had just three classes. That meant the small security force was spread thin.

At the time of Teshada’s attack, classes had been in session for 30 minutes, but a security video showed dozens of students milling in the hallway.

Teshada heard them outside. She tried to concentrate on her test — until the door burst open. The band of students streamed in and zeroed in on Teshada.

The rest of Keller’s students darted to the edges of the room.

Keller moved toward her phone and called security. “I knew there was nothing else I could do,” she said.

Students began swinging at Teshada, surrounding her like a “swarm of bees,” Keller said. They knocked her to the ground and continued to beat her.

“It felt like a prison riot. My whole room was shaking. Desks were rattling,” said Moffett, who See **SCHOOLS** on A24

# Taking a closer look at the numbers behind school violence

By **Dylan Purcell**  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Philadelphia School District officials have touted a 29 percent decline in serious incidents over the last two years.

They promote it in news releases. They promote it on their website. When callers to the district are put on hold, they hear it in a recording.

But this figure deserves a closer look.

The district’s assertion is based on a comparison of incidents between the 2007-08 school year and 2009-10. But its math compares raw numbers without accounting for a significant drop in enrollment during that period and an unusual spike in incidents after a highly publicized assault.

The widely accepted standard for measuring crime used for the FBI’s Uniform Crime Statistics di-

vides total crime by population to yield a crime rate. Under that method, the district’s serious-incident rate dropped 22 percent, from 4.1 incidents per 100 students to 3.2, The Inquirer found.

Perhaps more important, the 2007-08 school year had a significant spike in incidents unmatched in the last decade. The spike came after the principal at a South Philadelphia elementary school failed to report an assault on a student, prompting a district crackdown on reporting.

Incident reports rose about 50 percent daily for several months, said James B. Golden, former district safety chief.

“The principals said: ‘You want reporting? We’ll give you reporting,’” Golden said.

There were 14,743 incidents — violent and nonviolent — reported that school year, more than

any year in the last decade and up 14 percent from the previous year, according to state reports.

The next year, 2008-09, the year Superintendent Arlene C. Ackerman arrived, incident numbers dropped a nearly commensurate 11 percent.

In addition, the district has been shedding students and schools, which automatically drives down its incident numbers.

The district’s enrollment has changed dramatically during the last decade. Since 2000, enrollment has dropped by 57,000, to 155,000. Most recently, the district decided to cast off more of its low-performing schools to charter operators. The list includes several troubled neighborhood high schools such as Audenried, Simon Gratz, Olney East, and Olney West. These schools rank among the district’s most violent.

who told The Inquirer that schools were not reporting serious incidents, which raises questions about the 11 percent improvement.

But school officials continue to boast of improvement. At a City Council hearing last month, Associate Superintendent Tomás Hanna said serious incidents were down 11 percent over 2009-10 in a year-to-date comparison.

The district declined to provide The Inquirer with numbers to calculate a crime rate for the period.

Numbers aside, the district’s violence picture is largely what it was five years ago. Then and now, three out of every 100 students are the victim or perpetrator of violent school crime.

Inquirer staff writers Susan Snyder and John Sullivan contributed to this article.



# Teachers feel vulnerable, helpless

**SCHOOLS** from A23 was teaching in an adjoining room. Two of Keller's students tried to pull the attackers off Teshada. In the end, one boy covered Teshada with his body to shield her. The attack left the 24-year-old Keller, a graduate of Neshaminy High School in Bucks County and Temple, feeling helpless. "I'm supposed to be able to protect them," said Keller, whose youthful face belies her toughness. "On that day, that's not something I could do."

**Growing Audenried violence** The attack on Teshada was part of growing violence at Audenried during the last school year. By the end of January 2010, there were 17 assaults, one weapons incident, and nine cases of disorderly conduct and fighting, according to School District data. The district had failed to send in more security despite repeated pleas from administrators and teachers, horrified by the hall-walkings that routinely disrupted their lessons and endangered their pupils.

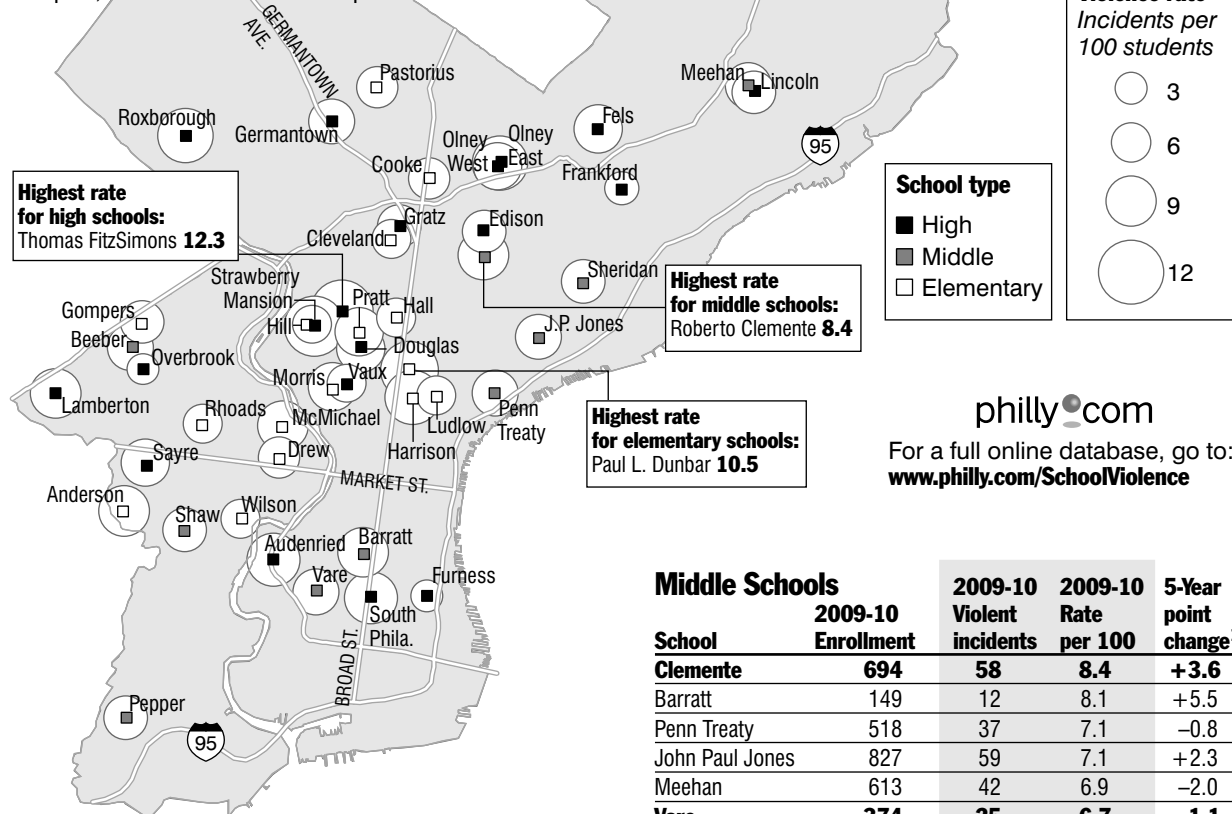
"It was just wildly out of control," recalled art teacher Peter Coyle, who said staff routinely had to lock doors to keep out troublemakers. At 9:08 a.m. — just a few minutes after Teshada's assault — security tapes show the second assault unfolding in the school. A group of more than a dozen students surrounded a 10th-grade girl, wearing a red sweater vest. Some of them began punching and kicking the girl, and the attack continued as she lay helpless on the floor. In a matter of seconds, a security guard waded into the crowd and began pulling off attackers.

The back-to-back incidents happened so fast that the school's small security staff couldn't react quickly enough. Two of the school's five security officers were on another floor dealing with the aftermath of the attack on Teshada. The crowd began dispersing after custodians ran to aid the lone security guard. The victim, who staggered to her feet, suffered an eye injury. One of the students charged in the second attack said her finger had been broken and she had to have surgery. She blamed the victim, saying the girl had "bumped" her first. The day would get worse. Teachers would learn later that a South Philadelphia High athlete, Tyree Parks, was inside Audenried after school to coach a youth basketball game, probably with a gun. After the game, he was shot to death while walking home. Police searching his body found he had been carrying a .32-caliber semiautomatic handgun.

He did not have to pass through the school's metal detectors, Coyle said, because the youth game was after hours. **Teachers often targets** The young Audenried staff — about 60 percent of whom had three years or less of teaching experience — was gravely shaken. "I don't think people have any idea about the level of violence we deal with," Keller said. The plight of Audenried teachers is repeated in many schools throughout the city. Many times, teachers are the victims. Nearly a quarter of Philadelphia school teachers and staff said they had been physically assaulted in the previous school year — 2008-09 — in a survey conducted by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC last spring surveyed 1,350 School District staffers, nearly half of whom responded.

## Most Violent Public Schools In Philadelphia

Listed below are the schools\* with at least **five violent incidents per 100 students**, in the 2009-10 school year, or shown in **bold** are the schools identified by the state as being "persistently dangerous." The Inquirer selected the following crime categories to calculate each school's violence rate: assault, robbery, morals, shooting, stabbing, weapon, and abduction or attempt.



Persistently dangerous schools in bold.

High Schools		2009-10	2009-10	2009-10	5-year
School	Enrollment	Violent incidents	Rate per 100	point change <sup>1</sup>	
<b>FitzSimons</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>+1.6</b>	
<b>Strawberry Mansion</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>+8.0</b>	
<b>Roxborough</b>	<b>846</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>+6.5</b>	
<b>Olney East</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>+5.4</b>	
<b>Douglas</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>+4.2</b>	
Audenried	352	32	9.1	N.A. <sup>2</sup>	
<b>South Philadelphia</b>	<b>965</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>+5</b>	
Robert Lambertson	267	22	8.2	+1.9	
<b>Olney West</b>	<b>893</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>-0.9</b>	
<b>Sayre</b>	<b>692</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>+2.3</b>	
<b>Fels</b>	<b>1,653</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>+0.6</b>	
Germantown	1,043	72	6.9	+2.1	
<b>Grazt</b>	<b>1,302</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>+3.8</b>	
<b>Edison</b>	<b>1,925</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>+2.8</b>	
<b>Lincoln</b>	<b>1,762</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>+1.6</b>	
<b>Vaux</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>-2.4</b>	
<b>Frankford</b>	<b>1,795</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>+0.8</b>	
<b>Overbrook</b>	<b>1,640</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>+0.6</b>	
<b>Furness</b>	<b>674</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>+0.3</b>	

\*List excludes schools with fewer than 100 students in 2009-10; not shown are three former district schools, Stetson Middle, Frederick Douglass Elementary, and Franklin Smedley Elementary.

SOURCES: School District of Philadelphia; Inquirer analysis 1 2005-06 to 2009-10. 2 Reopened in 2008-09.

DYLAN PURCELL and MIKE PLACENTRA / Inquirer Staff

The proportion was highest at high schools, where nearly a third said they had been attacked, according to the survey.

More than half the workers also reported they had been victims of verbal threats and assaults during that year.

Jerry Jordan, president of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, called results of the Temple and CDC surveys "alarming" and "a clear call that more has to be done."

This school year didn't start out much better.

In November, Jordan met with Ackerman after two teachers in one week suffered concussions when they were assaulted by students — one of them at Audenried High. Ackerman and Jordan followed with a joint memo to staff, reminding them to take a hard line on bullying and assaults.

### Hints an attack is coming

For parents who have little choice but to rely on the School District to protect their children during the day, the violence is maddening.

Three days before her daughter was attacked, Teshada's mother, Bridgette Bennett, called out of work and went to Audenried to speak with school police officers. Her daughter had told her that trouble was brewing, and she had seen the Facebook posts and text blast warning that someone was going to be beaten.

"Somebody's going to get it," Bennett told them, "and I don't want it to be my child."

The officers said they would handle it. But that Friday, Teshada was attacked.

Bennett got the call from the school.

"I was scared that my kid was really, really hurt," Bennett said. "How could this have happened? How did you allow these children to walk around in the halls as long as you did and not say anything?"

A single parent of six, Bennett works long hours in housekeeping at Albert Einstein Medical Center to support her family.

"I come home and tell them stories every day so they can be thankful," she said. "Live today like it's

your last."

She also emphasizes the importance of school: "Without education, there's nothing."

But Bennett and many other parents throughout the city every day must entrust their children to the public schools. They can't afford safer private or Catholic schools. They can't all find spaces in charter schools. They can't just pick up and move.

In a poll of 802 city parents with school-age children, conducted in June by the Pew Charitable Trusts, fewer than a third gave their children's schools high marks for handling safety. One-third rated their schools "only fair" or "poor."

After the assault, Bennett took her daughter to the police station and filed a report. But she said what was really needed were more counselors and support in the schools.

"You're talking about our inner-city children. These children are fighting. They're dodging bullets every day. Their parents are on drugs. They're fighting for their lives. They're being molested.

## Violence Glossary

**Persistently dangerous.** The Pennsylvania Department of Education labels a school "persistently dangerous" if it has a certain number of student arrests for dangerous incidents in the most recent school year and in one year of the two prior years.

The number of incidents is based on enrollment. Schools with more than 1,000 students must have 20 or more dangerous incidents.

Dangerous incidents include weapons possession and violence such as homicide, kidnapping, robbery, sexual offenses, and aggravated assaults.

**Serious incidents.** The School District of Philadelphia labels incidents serious or nonserious. Crimes considered serious include assault, robbery, morals offenses, shooting, stabbing, weapons offenses, abduction or attempted abduction, setting fire, and drug or alcohol offenses. Crimes considered nonserious include disorderly conduct, threats, bullying, and extortion.

**Violent incidents.** To study school violence, The Inquirer included all serious incidents except setting fires and drug or alcohol offenses.

**Crime rate.** As is typically done to study crime uniformly, The Inquirer calculated the rate of crimes to control for differences in enrollment. For schools, the rate is per 100 students. For the district, the rate is per 1,000.

**Public school.** The series focuses on 268 public schools operated by the district in 2009-10. Not included are charters or schools run by private operators.

**Focus 46.** In fall 2010, the district identified 46 troubled schools: the 19 persistently dangerous schools plus 27 with similar characteristics. The program tracks violence, daily attendance, chronic truancy, out-of-school suspensions, and the number of students facing expulsion, transfer, or referral to hearing officers. These schools receive safety audits, training, and additional scrutiny.

"They need to help these parents," Bennett said of the School District officials.

Teneka Campbell, 34, whose daughter was one of the students disciplined in the attack on Teshada, said the school was out of control:

"The video clearly shows there's nobody monitoring the hallways. It's a shame."

### 'Really hitting me'

Teshada remembers a girl hitting her first, but soon there were lots of blows.

"I seen a boy hitting me, like really hitting me, like I was a boy," she recalled.

All she could think about was protecting her face.

"That's my main focus," Teshada said. "You can cut all my hair off. I'm going to still be me with no hair."

Teshada lay crumpled on the floor, the buttons and hood ripped off her coat and scattered.

But she got up after her attackers fled and tried to go after them. She wanted to call her older sister for help, too, but adults in the room See **SCHOOLS** on A25

## Audenried faces uncertain future as a controversial charter school

By Kristen A. Graham  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Come September, Audenried High will become a charter school, one of 18 to be dramatically overhauled under Superintendent Arlene C. Ackerman's Renaissance schools plan.

Audenried and nearby Vare Middle School will go to Universal Cos. Inc., the nonprofit run by music impresario Kenny Gamble. Though six other schools will also be handed over to three charter providers, their neighborhood communities got a say in who runs them.

Universal won Vare and Audenried — with its new, \$60 million building — by virtue of a \$500,000 U.S. Department of Education plan-

ning grant awarded to supply "cradle to college services" to young people living in Grays Ferry and Point Breeze, officials said.

Universal, with the School District's blessing, applied for the grant just months after Audenried opened for the 2008-09 school year. The nonprofit hopes to win an additional implementation grant worth millions of dollars, but that isn't guaranteed. Nor has the School District disclosed what sort of rent it will charge Universal for the state-of-the-art building.

The district made an exception for Universal because "we see this as an opportunity to leverage those dollars from the federal government," Associate Superintendent Penny Nixon said.



RON TARVER / Staff Photographer

**Students protest at a hearing** at Audenried High as district administrator Michael Silverman discusses plans to make it a Renaissance school.

The announcement drew immediate criticism from many community members, teachers, and students, who said that Audenried had improved, and that it was not fair for the district to judge it on data from the old building, which closed in 2005. No state test results are even available for the current Audenried, whose first crop of jun-

iors is about to take exams.

Students left school and protested outside district headquarters. Teachers and community members spoke out at School Reform Commission meetings. District officials shot back, calling Audenried's academic performance "absolutely unacceptable."

There has also been friction

over Universal's past performance running schools.

Under the district's old education-management organization model, Universal ran Vare, which performed so poorly that the district took back control.

Universal now runs Bluford and Daroff, two former district schools, as charters; provides services at another district school, E.M. Stanton; and runs another charter, Universal Institute. District officials defended Universal's performance and blamed the failures at Vare on the old management model, calling it flawed.

Universal's charter to run Audenried still requires formal SRC approval. Chairman Robert L. Archie Jr. has said he will recuse himself from the vote because he previously sat on Universal's board.

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# ASSAULT ON LEARNING

More at [philly.com/schoolviolence](http://philly.com/schoolviolence)

**Inquirer**  
INVESTIGATION

## A serious beating amid Gratz's day-to-day violence

By Susan Snyder and Dylan Purcell  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

Keenan Williams was beaten so badly inside Simon Gratz High School on Feb. 4 that he spent the night in the hospital and had surgery for a broken eye socket.

But when the Philadelphia School District police wrote a report on the melee, they described it as “disorderly conduct” — not an aggravated assault. As things stand, that means it won’t be counted among the district’s serious incidents when results are tabulated for the year.

It also won’t be counted against Gratz when figuring out which schools are “persistently dangerous” under federal law and state guidelines. Aggravated assaults in which there is a confirmed arrest meet the criteria. Disorderly conduct does not.

School District spokeswoman Shana Kemp said Williams, 18, had not cooperated with police when questioned. If the victim doesn’t cooperate, charges typically aren’t filed, police officials said.

Michael Lodise, president of the school police officers union, said an incident such as this one that resulted in serious injury should not have been “downgraded.”

“All those types of cases are aggravated assaults,” he said.

Williams said he had answered questions at the police district and wanted his case to be considered an assault. Police said they had no record of his visit.

The day of the assault, Williams said, he was late for music class when he saw about a dozen males coming toward him on the fourth floor of Gratz. He stopped. They jumped him and started punching him in the face, he said. The attack, which occurred while classes were in session, continued until a security guard came to his aid, he said.

“I was feeling dizzy, and I started throwing up,” Williams said.

Gratz called an ambulance, and he was taken to St. Christopher’s Hospital. He had a concussion and broken bones near his eye. Even now, nearly two months later, Williams’ eye is a bit swollen.

He said he didn’t know any of his attackers by name, but had seen a few at Gratz.

He may have not known them, but the school police flash report, obtained by The Inquirer, listed two alleged attackers — a 10th grader and a 12th grader — by name. It described the brawl as possibly “gang-related” and said



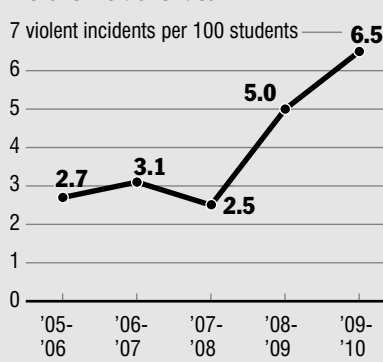
6ABC

**Keenan Williams was attacked** Feb. 4 at Gratz High. He spent the night in a hospital and had surgery for a broken eye socket. But his case is not included among the School District’s incidents of serious violence.

### Violence at Simon Gratz High

Driven largely by assaults, the violence rate rose in the last two years at Gratz.

#### Violent incident rate



SOURCES: School District of Philadelphia;

“there is talk of retaliation.”

Williams and his aunt, Venice Gopaul, said he was not involved with a gang and did not know gang members.

Williams hasn’t been in school since the attack. Gopaul asked that he be transferred to another school for his safety.

His beating was not an isolated incident at Gratz, on West Hunting Park Avenue in the Nicetown section. The Inquirer obtained internal school police incident reports for the preceding days and found a school struggling almost daily with crime; the rate has risen dramatically in recent years:

#### Monday, Jan. 24

**9 a.m., indecent assault:** A ninth-grade girl was sexually assaulted

outside a classroom by a male student in her grade. According to the report, he “grabbed her and started grinding on her buttocks with the front of his body.” Philadelphia police took the 14-year-old girl to the Special Victims Unit, and her parents were notified. The male student was suspended.

**10:40 a.m., assault on student:** A student told officials that several unidentified students had jumped and beaten him in a hallway. The senior was treated for a facial injury, and police were notified.

**1:15 p.m., assault on student:** The second student assault of the day occurred when a female student reported that three unidentified females had “approached her and punched her in the face and head.” She was treated for swelling beneath an eye while the attackers fled the building. Police were contacted.

#### Tuesday, Jan. 25

**12:38 p.m., disorderly conduct (fighting):** A fight broke out between two students in the lunchroom. One was treated for a cut over his eyebrow. Both were suspended.

**1:56 p.m., robbery of student:** A female student was robbed in a fourth-floor hallway by a fellow student who fled with her wallet and identification. He also tried to take her cell phone. A police report was filed.

#### Monday, Jan. 31

**11:45 a.m., assault on school police:** Three school police officers were assaulted by a male student who didn’t belong in a second-floor classroom and refused to

leave. Two of the officers reported hand injuries. The student was arrested.

#### Tuesday, Feb. 1

**9:20 a.m., theft of school tokens/TransPass:** A student reported that six SEPTA TransPasses worth \$90 had been stolen from her school bag.

**11:26 a.m., disorderly conduct (fighting):** A fight between students in a stairwell left an 11th grader with a cut finger. His mother took him to a hospital.

**11:30 a.m., threats:** An officer breaking up a disturbance in a third-floor hallway was cursed and threatened by a young, unknown individual who said he would “get my father to f— you up.” The individual was arrested for the threats.

#### Wednesday, Feb. 2

**12:07 p.m., trespassing:** School police apprehended three students found trespassing in a third-floor hallway. One of them fled. The others were handed over to Philadelphia police.

#### Thursday, Feb. 3

**11:40 a.m., disorderly conduct (fighting):** A “large fight” erupted among six female students in the third-floor hallway. The clash left them with minor injuries. Police were not involved. The students were suspended.

**1:15 p.m., disorderly conduct (disruption):** A school officer responding to a disturbance in the lunchroom took a disorderly ninth grader into custody.

#### Friday, Feb. 4

**9:30 a.m., assault on teacher:** After the Williams incident, a teacher who was clearing the halls got knocked off his feet. A student had approached the teacher from the side and slammed into him, causing him to fall to the floor.

According to the report, police took the 10th-grade student into custody.

Gratz incident records from the previous, 2009-10 school year show 32 assaults on students, 13 on teachers or other employees, and 5 on school police.

As part of Superintendent Arlene C. Ackerman’s Renaissance schools program, Gratz will be turned over next school year to an outside operator, Philadelphia’s Mastery Charter Schools.

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