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Charter-Backed Parent Group Blasts City on Rise of Weapons in Schools

JAMES HARNEY



PARENTS SAY CITY FLUNKS SCHOOL SAFETY: Activist parents Yvonne Guillen, left, and Shamona Kirkland of Families for Excellent Schools were among an angry group that came to City Hall to blast the de Blasio administration for failing to address a rising tide of weapons confiscated in public schools. They have collected more than 20,000 petition signatures demanding an independent state-appointed monitor to ‘hold the city accountable.’

Citing an “outrageous” spike in the numbers of guns, knives and other weapons being brought by students into city public schools, a parent activist group says Mayor de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña deserve no better than an “F” grade for school safety.

“According to the NYPD, the city has found 1,751 weapons in schools since July. This is outrageous,” Shamona Kirkland of the charter-school-backed Families for Excellent Schools said at a press conference May 17 on the steps of City Hall. “That’s 26 percent more than [were found] last year.”

‘Danger’ Schools Worse

Fewer than 100 public schools across the city are equipped with metal detectors, but the concerned activists said that in those schools, the number of weapons confiscated was up 38 percent over the previous year.

“Guns, knives, razors, box-cutters, cleavers, switchblades, tasers are in our schools,” said Ms. Kirkland, a Brooklyn resident who has two children in public schools. “Schools are supposed to be a safe haven for children, not a war zone waiting to happen.”

Fellow activist Joe Herrera said the group “feels the Mayor’s administration and the Department of Education are failing to provide a safe learning environment for our children, so we’re calling on the State Legislature to appoint an independent monitor to hold them accountable.”

Such a monitor, Mr. Herrera said, would “basically investigate, report and come up with recommendations for solutions to address the issue of violence in our schools.”

Bristles At Fariña’s Claim

He said that of the 1,751 confiscated weapons, 959 were knives or daggers, and 500 were razors and boxcutters. Despite the numbers, Mr. Herrera said, city officials did not share their sense of alarm.

“I think Chancellor Fariña said yesterday she was at six schools this week and that she didn’t feel unsafe at all,” the parent activist noted. “I would say that completely contradicts what we’re hearing from the 20,000 people who signed our SafeSchoolsNow campaign petitions calling on the Department of Education to change the way they go about addressing the issue of safety and violence in our schools.”

When asked at an unrelated event about the latest criticism from Families for Excellent Schools, Police Commissioner William J. Bratton seemed to refute their claims, saying: “Our statistics indicate that so far this year school crime is down about 13 percent. We are celebrating that we’re seizing more weapons.

“One of the reasons why the crime statistics are continuing to go down is because the safety agents and the Teachers are working together,” Mr. Bratton added. “Parents also have a responsibility to check their kids before they leave for school.”



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The 3-Gun Rejoinder

Ms. Kirkland and her fellow activists strongly disagreed with the Police Commissioner's assessment.

“(The city) is not being honest with parents, that’s the bottom line. If there’s a (weapons) problem in our schools, the administration needs to take ownership of it,” she said. “The fact that three guns were found in New York City public schools in one week leads me to believe there’s a bigger issue going on.”

Gregory Floyd, president of Teamsters Local 237, which represents the city’s more-than 5,000 School Safety Officers, feels the “bigger issue” may lie not with a state-appointed, independent monitor, but with the parents and students themselves.

“You don’t need a monitor; you need to find out why children are bringing weapons into schools in the first place,” Mr. Floyd said. “The question that needs to be asked—of parents as well as children—is, are kids bringing weapons to school to protect themselves from being bullied?”

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