

BEYOND THE BENCH

LAW ENFORCEMENT/YOUTH DIALOGUE

Pleasant High School is a large suburban high school located just outside Major City. The student body is made up of a diverse group of students from many different socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Pleasant City Police Department has assigned two Police Officers to Pleasant High to serve as School Resource Officers. Additionally, the Pleasant County Superior Court working with the school and other justice partners has recently established the Pleasant High Teen Court.

Recently a new club at Pleasant High, the LGBT Student Alliance has formed and has started to hold meetings. The club's purpose is to provide a social networking opportunity for LGBT students, work to improve the school experience for LGBT students at Pleasant High and to advocate for LGBT issues.

The LGBT Student Alliance has recently approached the School Board to change a school policy that prohibits same-sex couples from attending the Pleasant High Prom. Although the policy change is supported by most of the student body, a number of students are in strong opposition to the change in policy. The policy is to be discussed at an upcoming School Board meeting to be held on the Pleasant High campus.

Questions 1:

1. SHOULD LAW ENFORCEMENT SEEK TO BEGIN A DIALOGUE WITH STUDENTS BEFORE THE BOARD MEETING?
2. SHOULD STUDENTS REACH OUT TO LAW ENFORCEMENT BEFORE THE MEETING? AND HOW?
3. DOES THE COURT HAVE ANY ROLE AT THIS POINT?

At the Board meeting many students, community members and the press attend. The Board approves of the policy change despite the opposition of several community, student and church groups.

As the students prepare for the Prom, tensions around the school seem to pick up. Several gay students are taunted at lunch and insulting messages are spray painted on several lockers.

Questions 2:

1. WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TO THE ESCALATION IN TENSIONS?
2. SHOULD THE PLEASANT HIGH TEEN COURT HEAR ONE OF THE CASES INVOLVING VANDALISM TO A LOCKER?
3. SHOULD THE SCHOOL REACH OUT TO THE COURT TO ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE?

Pleasant High has a tradition to honor one couple as the King and Queen of the Prom elected as a couple by the student body. In support of the new policy and the LGBT students on campus, the President of the LGBT Student Alliance, Jane and her girlfriend, Joan are nominated for Prom Queens. The nomination of Jane and Joan as Prom Queens makes the local news and then on to national news.

As the news picks up on the story about Jane and Joan, the tension on campus escalates. One of Joan's friends tells her about a Friendbook page on the Internet that has pictures of Jane and Joan and insults about them and the prom.

Questions 3:

1. WHAT ROLE DOES LAW ENFORCEMENT PLAY WHEN THE FRIENDBOOK PAGE APPEARS?
2. CAN/SHOULD THE COURT TAKE ANY ACTION WITH REGARD TO THE FRIENDBOOK PAGE?
3. SHOULD THE SCHOOL ADDRESS THE PAGE?
4. FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT, CAN THE INTERNET PAGE CONSITUTE A CRIME?

After several days another Friendbook page appears sponsored by the 'Get Joan & Jane Student Alliance. This Friendbook page solicits suggestions on how to disrupt the Prom and "Get" Joan and Jane.

Question 4:

1. WHAT ROLE DOES LAW ENFORCEMENT PLAY WHEN THE FRIENDBOOK PAGE APPEARS?

2. CAN/SHOULD THE COURT TAKE ANY ACTION WITH REGARD TO THE FRIENDBOOK PAGE?

3. SHOULD THE SCHOOL ADDRESS THE PAGE?

4. FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT, CAN THE INTERNET PAGE CONSTITUTE A CRIME?

A reporter from the local paper does an investigative piece and determines that the Get Joan & Jane page was put up by a Pleasant High Student, Bob Friendly.

Question 5:

1. WHAT ROLE CAN COMMUNICATION WITH THE STUDENTS PLAY IN ENHANCING THE SAFETY OF THE STUDENTS?

2. IS THIS THE KIND OF CASE THAT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE FOR THE TEEN COURT PROGRAM?

Because of the escalating tensions, a group of parents has petitioned the School Board to cancel the Prom in the interest of student safety.