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Big Brother in Our Schools

Granite Bay High School is an innovative, and progressive school where many programs are state winning, title holders, students excel in testing, and the blue-ribbon school has many students and staff that hold many accolades. The school holds all their students to a high standard. Faculty and staff make a strong effort in making sure every student has many opportunities for their next step in life. Since graduating from the school myself, there have been many changes in the way faculty is going about helping students. The new developments result in ways that office members operate, and how students are being treated throughout their day. The safety of students and staff must be number one, but where does the line between invasion and safety belong?

The school's mission is to enforce a "positive learning community of high expectations that prepares all students for post-secondary success" while also "[attending] a safe campus where students, staff, and the community promote social and individual responsibility and integrity." This ideology implements that students will have a positive and workable experience while attending. Staff and students will be safe and looked out for their security and well-being. Changes happening in the recent years have students and staff questioning and debating about what is right for the atmosphere.

Dating back to 2009, a lawsuit was filed against Granite Bay high for the inability of the school to access records of a student that was expelled from his basketball team. Erik Harris and

some of his friends had made a video parody of Granite Bay High's "underground drug culture" and had posted it on Youtube. The school found the video and expelled Harris from the basketball team. In order to fight for his sons' starting point guard spot, Mike Harris, father, asked the school for records of his son's involvement in the video. The school allowed the Harris family to access "cumulative and disciplinary files, but wasn't allowed access to emails, audio recordings or notes from meetings pertaining to [Erik]." The school argued that the family was requesting information in the format that was "beyond the capacity of [their] technology department." This led to a lawsuit which ended in the right for the Harris family and all GBHS families to be allowed access to all files pertaining to their children. The school, in regard to this lawsuit states, "based on this experience, new policies and procedures are being put into place to ensure that all future requests for public records are handled appropriately." By having this change in place, GBHS has since then, made many other new additions in order to prevent future complications. This lawsuit began a new high school that would be almost unrecognizable nearly a decade later. The effectiveness of the court order has shifted the campus in a direction of total control and new ways to fight back in the judicial aspect if needed.

The students' safety on campus is the number one concern for not only in this school, but all over the country. Many schools are trying to find the best solution to address the increasingly publicized active shootings going on around the nation. Students' education should not have a constant fear factor everyday that they walk onto campus. In July of 2016, in Granite Bay High's Board Meeting Minutes, they state that they are going to "implement a professional development plan that focuses on improving the use of technology." Shortly after during that school year, a few cameras were set around the parking lot. These were set in order to find or identify any

threat attempting to enter the campus. While I believe that this is a beneficial safety measure, others tend to believe it was the stepping stone into an entirely different outlook on policy.

In 2017 Jake Criscione, a fellow student of mine, wrote in the school paper about these security cameras being implemented through Granite Bay High and other district schools. He writes, “technology has found itself more and more incorporated with education such as Google Drive, chromebooks, and probboards.” In which then the district feels as if security cameras would “emphasize the goal [of making] campuses safer,” and potentially more up to date. Criscione interviews Ron Severson, Roseville Joint Union High School Department Superintendent, Jennifer Leighton, GBHS principal, and a fellow student David Zagaynov. The superintendent and principal argue that having this added development in technology would enhance their “safety and security” standards. They continue to state throughout the article that “the cameras will help [them] identify who is responsible for vehicle vandalism in the parking lot, who was involved in bullying or a fight or who grabbed your backpack at lunch.” While this might be beneficial for some reasons, adding to the parking lot cameras now onto campus leads people to believe that the “new use of technology” might be invading into our schools environment and social norms. Zagaynov states that it is an “invasion of [his] privacy” and believes that it would “infringe on the integrity of a learning environment.” As a student, having a camera at every turn allows for a feeling of paranoia. With this feeling comes a lack of openness for that personal being. High school is about finding yourself and taking the first steps into discovery, but by implementing more and more cameras every year along with the emotion may close off students and instead lead them on a path of constant fear of higher authority.

Along with enhancing technology within the school, staff has taken upon themselves to random drug searches for students. By reviewing students who may look suspicious before

school leads to these “random” searches. Keyuri Pillary, another fellow student, also wrote in the school paper about these searches interviewing staff as well as students. Attendees are pulled from classes and taken into the office to get searched. Not only is this taking away from the educational experience, but students feel “cornered” and feel as if they are “treated with less respect” by their own educators. According to the students interviewed, staff members have never found anything during their search even though they have been called out of class multiple times. One student, who asked to be anonymous, was called into the office because they had access to a video of “her engaging in illegal activities.” The student was searched, and they found no evidence of misbehavior, but when asked for the cause of search the administration “did not disclose the video to her or her parent.” Contradicting to the lawsuit, the family was unable to access the records in which they requested, but never filed any sort of legal action against the school. Unknown to most, security cameras are also in place for the use of illegal activities happening around campus. Pertaining to the drug searches, GBHS uses cameras in the parking lot hoping to catch a student smoking, drinking, or doing any other unusual activity before school. It gives the school a totalitarian feel in which students are always turning over their shoulder. Severson believes that “most people are supportive” of the way they implement the new rules and policies, but it shelters students in a way where they may not feel safe or secure as the faculty and board preach.

More recently, in 2018 there was a threatening note stating that a student was going to shoot up the school. I was personally affected by this note. I was in my swim practice when the lockdown bell went off. We all quickly ran into our storage room, dripping wet, silence, and full of fear. An hour later at around 2:30pm, the Sheriff’s department came to clear us from the room, search our backpacks, and set us free. I later found out that they “conducted a room-by-room

search and students were released as the rooms were cleared.” Some students, most of them my fellow friends, were not released till 5pm. While all students were safe, and no threat came to life, the measures that the Granite Bay staff took upon themselves was effective and helpful. So why all these added changes? The safety of students and staff are always number one, but why go through the extreme measures of having security cameras in every hall for student safety? Staff handled the situation calmly and quickly, so it seems unnecessary for the school to be spending lots of money on cameras at every corner.

Staff around campus have a lot to say about this new implemented “safe” security. John Sherman is a staff member on campus. He is a math teacher, the head coach for the twenty-two-year winning swim team, and a father of four. As a teacher and a father of a current student at Granite Bay High, he has many different perspectives of this new implemented policies. Some of these new added security steps are “lock blocks, nineteen new cameras, and stricter locking policies” according to Sherman. He states that “lock blocks [a rubber door stopper in the way of a locked door, so when pulled out of place, the door is immediately locked] are mandatory in every classroom. The doors are to always remain locked and in an event of an emergency lock blocks will be pulled in order to lock the door as quickly and safely as possible.” These were implemented due to the threat on GBHS in February of 2018. These lock blocks were placed in classrooms shortly after for a quicker, safer and more efficient way of locking doors on campus. When asked if the atmosphere of the campus has changed since these recent events, Sherman states that “student culture has changed juristically over the years. Students look at everyone as a potential threat. Everyone is always on red alert, and it is a matter of when not if. There is a fear factor daily, and every mildly aggressive threat, even in a joking matter, must be taken seriously.” This change in culture completely alters how students will feel in a learning

environment. Every joke, every slight implication of violence will be taken seriously and most likely will result in a student being questioned or taken to a counselor's office. This keeps students on edge constantly about what might happen if they say the wrong thing. These trigger words scare staff and students on a regular basis and distract them from what is really important – education. By making these new policies and walking on egg shells with every word makes students hesitant, scared in their own “safe place”, and sheltered from a world that the high school paints to be nothing but success and happiness. Is this the new culture that we want the next generation to grow up in?

Researching all these new added changes happening from an outside perspective as well as the ones I experienced, makes me curious as to what is to come next. In the novel 1984, by George Orwell, Winston is a government worker. His job is to eliminate documents that contradict with the way that the government has made the public eye available to. People in the novel do not and are not allowed to have an original thought. Winston argues that “sanity is not statistical,” meaning that people get to decide what is sane. This total control of thinking for someone else is what this novel revolves around. O'Brian is someone in the novel that Winston admires. O'Brian is a man who allegedly is against the government Party, hoping to stage a rebellion. He resembles hope, for a new life, change, and much more beyond the Party, but by the end of the novel, Winston has a harsh reality check. O'Brian has been a part of the Party this whole time. He tortures Winston as the government attempts to knock original thought out of his mind. In reading this novel, the thought of having no control over something so powerful scared me. Linking GBHS to the novel, while I do not believe the scenarios draw a parallel, there are some similarities in the fear of students not being able to have control of their high school experience. Students should not have to be in fear of getting in trouble for possibly looking

suspicious, or if another student makes a false accusation against them. Students hope for change when they are called into the office and are sent free without anything found, but the constant calling back in for the excuse of “previous events” allows for the annoyed teen to disrespect the faculty members. This relationship between students and staff can become toxic for the culture of the school. Without the respect for higher authority and the mutual feeling for the students, Granite Bay will have failed to achieve what they want most, a positive place for students. By analyzing the similarities between fact and fiction made me question how Granite Bay will move forward. Will they change policy? Or will they keep moving in a direction of total control?

In conclusion, Granite Bay High Schools new changes for safety have been building by the years. While some changes benefit the school and help protect it even more so, some of these enhancements also worry student parents, and even staff. The gray area between invasion of privacy and safety is one that which many people do not even attempt. While I applaud Granite Bay for wanting the best for their students, I believe that students should also have a say in what goes on around campus or potentially allow them to be educated on changes happening and why it will be beneficial for them so that there is a level of respect coming from both parties.