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SROs, *Continued from page A1*

that the district would not be renewing its contract with school resource officers, also referred to as SROs. With schools in the district continuing hybrid learning at the end of last year, the data released Tuesday was the first look at incidents in schools in the return to in-person learning.

“There is a narrative that says, ‘Oh well we’re not holding students accountable.’ You can see by those numbers that there’s thousands of incidents from where we’ve held students accountable so that’s not necessarily the issue,” said Co-Assistant Superintendent Iton Udosenata. “What we do want to do is make sure that we are building relationships with the students and using restorative practices to hold the students accountable.”

The data, presented by Udosenata to the board, compared disciplinary numbers from Sept. 1 to Nov. 5 of this year with numbers during the same dates in 2019. Data from the 2020 school year was not used due to it being impacted by remote and hybrid learning.

In the fall of 2019, 45 students in the district committed 57 expulsion violations. So far in 2021, six students have committed a total of six violations. Udosenata explained that an expulsion doesn’t necessarily mean a student was kicked out of school for good, but that their behavior warranted them being removed from their “current education setting.” He said that expulsions usually last for a year.

“There are some incidents where it is our legal obligation to expel. So I know that some people may say, ‘Well that’s because we aren’t expelling for certain offenses.’ Some of the egregious offenses that you may have heard about in the school community are probably the ones that came to those six,” said Udosenata. “But the thing to point out is that number is significantly lower.”

As far as in-school and out-of-school suspensions go, there have been a total

of 1,006 this year compared to 2,232 in 2019. The 2,786 insubordinate violations this year is also a massive reduction from the 6,231 in 2019.

A continued concern among district leadership and the board was the overrepresentation of Hispanic and Black student suspensions compared to populations.

In total, Hispanic students accounted for 55% of all suspensions despite being 45% of the student body. Black students accounted for 2.4% of suspensions while being 1% of the student population.

“The overrepresentation of our Hispanic and Latino population, it’s important for us to drill down and understand what’s happening there. We’ve already started to work on bringing the community into that conversation,” said Udosenata. “We hope to turn the dial and the next time we give this presentation that number is low.”

There have been a total of 386 fights this year compared to 272 in the fall of 2019 — a number that district leadership say they anticipated. Udosenata said the emotional impact of the past 18 months may have led to an increase in these incidents.

Board Director Satya Chandragiri felt there was a disconnect between the board’s presentation and sentiment expressed by parents.

“I don’t want to overlook the fact that we are in the news now, perhaps the national news. A serious incident that gets sent to the media. Parents are really scared and asking, ‘Are our children safe, is the safety going to be there, who is keeping an eye?’” said Chandragiri.

Chandragiri didn’t directly mention what incident he was referencing, however, on Nov. 15 a student at Stephens Middle School was arrested for having a gun in his backpack.

“As you can tell with the data that was just shared, schools are very relatively safe unfortunately for a few incidents that have spilled from the community into the schools,” said Board Chair Osvaldo Avila. “As a parent of two children in middle school and high school, I am not scared of them being inside a school building in any one of our schools.”

What we do want to do is make sure that we are building relationships with the students and using restorative practices to hold the students accountable.

— ITON UDOSENATA
Co-Assistant Superintendent, Secondary,
SALEM-KEIZER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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