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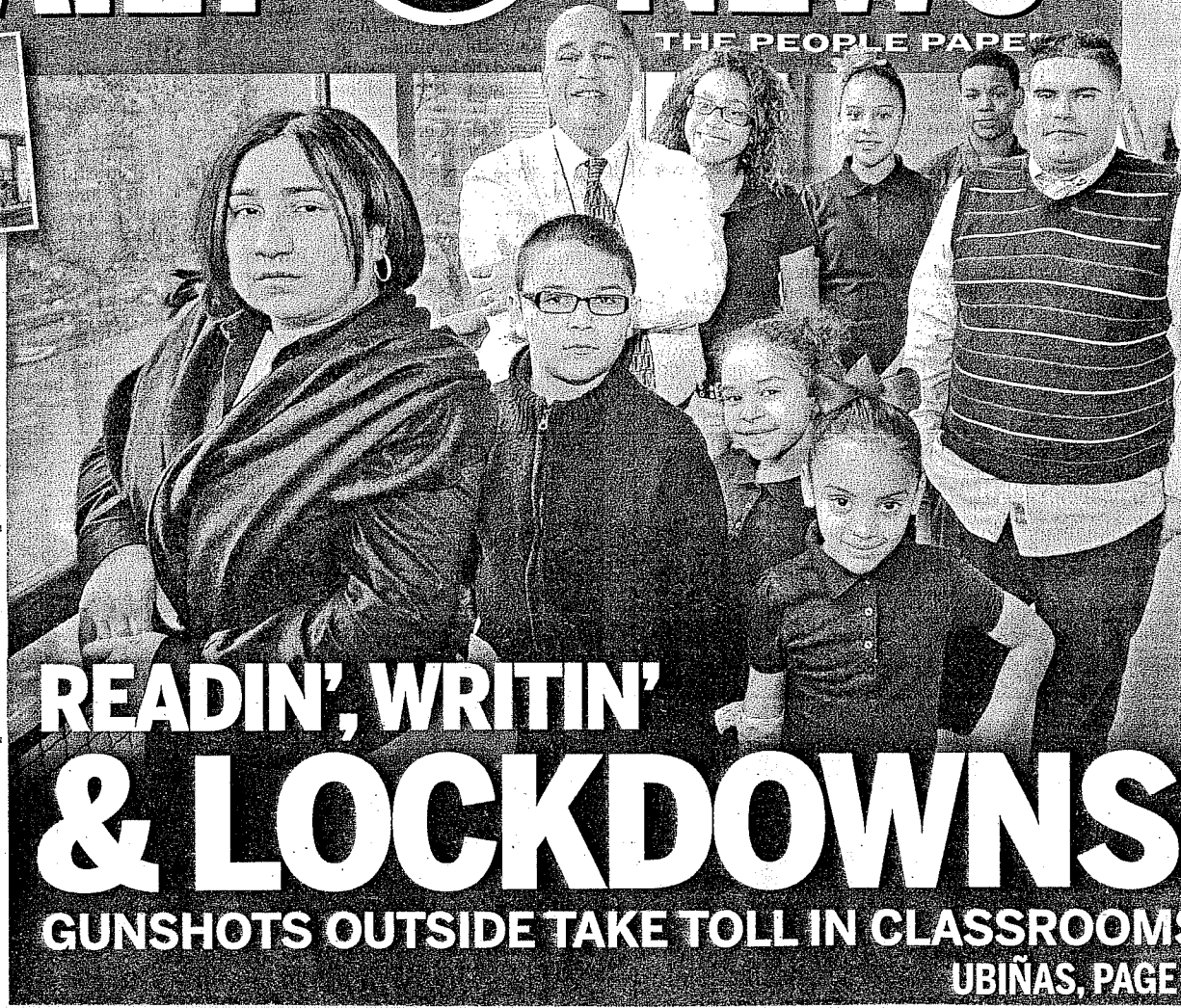
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READIN', WRITIN' & LOCKDOWNS

GUNSHOTS OUTSIDE TAKE TOLL IN CLASSROOMS

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TOUGH LOCK

The normalcy of school lockdowns should be a community wake-up call

THE BALLOONS were up, the streamers were flying and the bouncy house was on its way.

Then gunshots rang out.

"We heard the six shots," said David Chiles, executive director of the Providence Center, a community organization on 4th Street between Huntingdon Street and Lehigh Avenue. "I was kind of away from the rest of the group and remember looking at them and everyone just stopped and faced the sounds. It was just still for a while and we were all just waiting, thinking, 'OK, what's going to happen next?'"

What happened next is that after all the planning and anticipation, after children from local community organizations and schools giddily looked forward to an afternoon of face-painting and fun and candy — of being kids — the Providence Center's annual Halloween Festival at Fairhill Square Park was called off.

Meanwhile, because of those gunshots, the students and teachers at nearby Julia de Burgos Elementary on West Lehigh were on lockdown — for the fifth time in eight weeks.

When we talk about the obstacles students in some neighborhoods face in their lives and educations, it's often in the abstract. What a luxury.

You know what's not abstract? Students and teachers who almost weekly in the past two months heard the crackle of Code Blue over the loudspeaker and



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had to lock the doors and turn off the lights and hit the floor.

"Everyone be quiet!" Sometimes they have to lie there for more than an hour. On Halloween, they huddled in corners in their pj's because it was Pajama Day at the school. Outside, worried parents wondered what was going on, if their kids were OK.

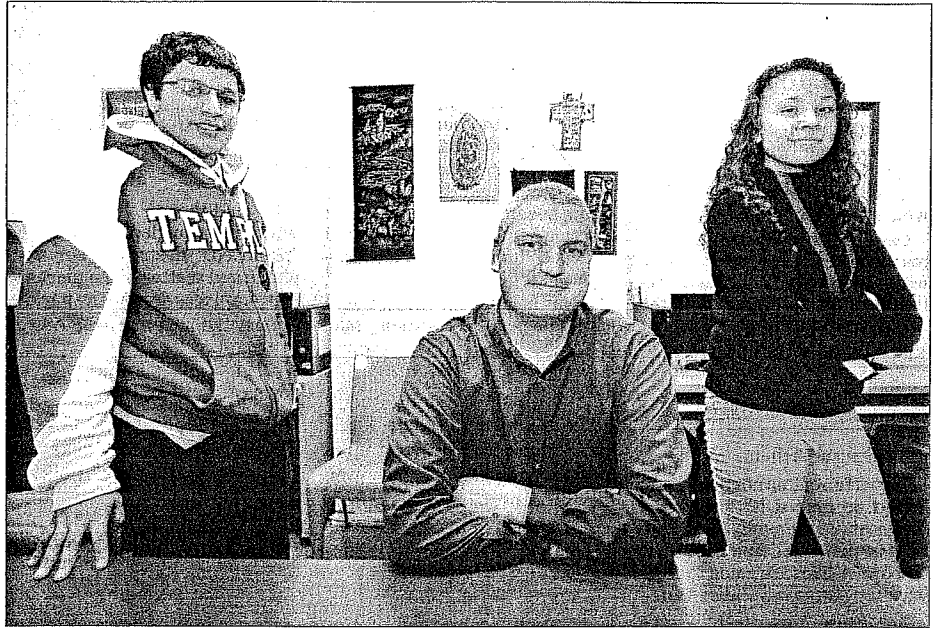
Heartbreaking. But unless someone dies, like in the deadly shooting outside a North Philly charter school in September, few beyond the neighborhoods ever hear about these lockdowns or their impact.

Some apparently aren't even reported to the school safety office, according to the district. When I asked how many lockdowns they had on the books for the whole district, I was told six. I'm going to take a leap here and guess that number is off.

"I feel like we're professional right now at a lockdown," Burgos principal Maritza Hernandez said when we chatted in her office the other day.

The 38-year-old first-time principal, who grew up in Fairhill, wasn't trying to be funny. She was matter-of-factly stating a depressing fact.

And the fact is that these children and teachers aren't just being traumatized, they're being



YONG KIM / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

David Chiles, executive director of the Providence Center, with teen leaders Benjamin Figueroa and Samantha Cornelio, who can relate to the tough conditions students at Burgos have experienced.

cheated.

"Our concern when we have these lockdowns, besides the children's safety, is how do we make that up?" Hernandez said. "The teachers and the staff have been amazing at making sure they pick up where they left off, but that means that the kids don't get to go to music or art because we have to make that time up somewhere."

And in the middle of all that catch-up are changes to daily rou-

tines that every kid needs to feel safe and a new definition of what's "normal."

"Some of the students are scared," Hernandez said. "And some . . . they act like this is normal. They're like, 'Miss, I hear this all the time . . .'. It breaks my heart because I'm a parent, so if my children come home and say, 'I heard gunshots,' they would look at me like, 'What are you going to do about it?' and 'When are we moving?' and 'How fast are we

moving?' For the children here, it's, 'I'm walking home, see you later,' and I'm thinking, 'Are you going to make it home?'"

I know we've heard all this before. Tough neighborhoods. Tough kids. Tough attitudes. I don't know what's more messed up here, that children continue to grow up thinking chaos is the norm or that we as a city, as a society, continue to grow accustomed

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Husband in Pennypack slaying: 'I just snapped'

He'll stand trial in wife's murder

BY MENSAN M. DEAN

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CHRISTOPHER Murray, the Northeast Philadelphia man charged in August with killing his wife in Pennypack Park, yesterday was ordered to stand trial for her murder.

During much of the preliminary hearing before Municipal Judge Teresa Carr Deni, Murray covered his eyes with his hands, which were handcuffed.

Despite the restraints, Murray managed to wipe away tears while listening to homicide Detective Howard Peterman read the Aug. 9 statement he gave police.

Murray, whose white hair makes him appear older than his 48 years, claimed that Connie Murray, 46, the mother of his two daughters, got "physical" during an argument on the evening of Aug. 4 and he snapped and strangled her to death.

The fight, which took place as the couple sat on a bench near the Crispin ball field, was sparked by her anger over his sending text messages to another woman, the defendant said in his statement.

Connie Murray, who was born without her right arm below the elbow, became angry and started pointing her finger in his face and smacked him, Murray's statement said.

"I was holding her arms, then I just snapped," Peterman said,

reading from Murray's statement.

When detectives asked if he choked his wife, Murray, who is 6 feet 2 and weighs more than 200 pounds, replied: "Yes, I guess I must have. I don't remember doing it."

Murray told detectives that the relationship with the other woman was emotional rather than sexual, and that the woman's husband was aware of the situation.

He said that after he strangled his wife, he "panicked," destroyed her cellphone and scattered the pieces in various places around the park.

Early the next morning, Aug. 5,

he called police and reported her missing, and four hours later a dog walker stumbled upon her body.

On Aug. 9, Murray agreed to take a polygraph test, Peterman said.

Murray began giving a confession just before 11:30 p.m. that evening, he said.

"I am deeply, deeply sorry for what happened," Murray said in his statement. "I wish I had a time machine to go back. I wish I could just go home to bury my wife and say goodbye to my kids."

Defense attorney Andrea Konow argued that Murray should be held for third-degree

murder because he lacked the specific intent to kill.

"This is clearly an argument that moved into a physical confrontation and ended in Mrs. Murray's death," she said.

Assistant District Attorney Joanne Pescatore persuaded Judge Deni to hold Murray for trial on general murder, which will allow a jury to decide between premeditated first-degree and third-degree murder.

Pescatore said the blunt-impact injuries on Connie Murray's body indicated that she tried to fight off her husband despite having only one fully functional arm.

He meant to kill her, said Pescatore, who told reporters that strangulation "is such an up-close and personal crime that you would have to feel the life of that person actually going out of them. It's not something that takes place in seconds. It's more like minutes."



Connie Murray



Christopher Murray

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right along with them.

"By virtue of this not being publicized, or noticed, it's almost like the greater community has decided that perhaps this is just what these kids' lives are going to be or what they deserve," Chiles said.

No. These kids don't deserve this — neither do the students at Discovery Charter, who yesterday were reportedly put on lockdown when a 19-year-old man was shot in the leg on the same block as the school. And not the students from Pan American Academy Charter School, who were put on lockdown after a shootout in broad daylight in September that left one person dead and another wounded.

No one knows that better than two of Providence Center's teen leaders who grew up in some of the city's toughest neighborhoods and who work with the students at Burgos: Benjamin Figueroa, 16, and Samantha Cor-

nelio, 17.

The sound of gunshots was a part of their lives growing up in and around Fairhill, but even they've been rattled by all the lockdowns.

downs.

"These kids have been through a lot more in one school year than I've ever experienced," Cornelio said.



Julia de Burgos Elementary principal Maritza Hernandez (from left), with counselor Jose Carrera and teacher Oscar Oquendo.

ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Figueroa said his family moved around the city in search of safer neighborhoods, but they couldn't outrun the violence. He was about 8 when he saw someone get shot outside a school playground.

"You want to push it out of your mind because you're scared. But it never really goes away."

Police Capt. Michael Cram, commanding officer of the 25th District, said that despite the lockdowns, there has not been a spike in shootings. He said there has been a marked improvement in the neighborhood.

"It hasn't been overnight, and it's not perfect, but it is better," he said.

Still, some things remain constant.

"Quite honestly the drug trade is not a peaceful game," Cram said. "And these are thugs who don't care about anyone but themselves. It doesn't matter if there are innocent victims, if it's a church, a school. Nothing is off-limits to them."

When I bemoaned the conditions so many children have to live in, Cram offered some tough love.

"But it's reality," he said, "and it should motivate everyone out there to rise up so that people know that kind of behavior is not acceptable. That's what we need. Cops can help, and we do, but neighbors take back neighborhoods."

On Tuesday, the students at Burgos are leading a peace walk.

"We wanted to empower the kids," Hernandez said. "We wanted to show them that they have a voice in their neighborhood, and in their future."

Even better would be if the rest of the city stood with them, because these kids in neighborhoods we like to forget about are our future, too.

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