For Teshada Herring, the action was unmistakable: The girls smearing Vaseline on their faces and fitting scarves to their heads were preparing for a fight.

The ritual — well-known in Philadelphia schools — is intended to keep skin from scarring and hair from getting ripped out.

As Teshada passed the group on her way to class at Audenried High that morning, the events of the previous week flashed through her mind — a fight she had witnessed, Facebook posts warning that someone from her neighborhood would be attacked, a text blast to her phone that all but named her as the intended victim.

She wondered: Would they come for her?

Minutes later, while taking an algebra test, Teshada was unable to stop thinking about the pack of girls. She glanced up from the test, looking at the classroom door. The girls in scarves passed by. Teshada was terrified; now she was sure they were coming for her.

Suddenly, a band of more than a dozen girls and boys — captured on video roaming the halls and looking into classrooms — barged through the door.

The group converged on Teshada and began to beat her. In less than a minute, they vanished.

“\text{It was like a tornado},” her teacher would later say, “\text{They went one way, then they went the other way.}”

In Philadelphia, schools are no sanctuary.
on Teshada, which left her bleeding and dazed, was the 2,095th violent incident the School District recorded in the 2009-10 year.

Within a few minutes, a video at the three-story school recorded violent incident No. 2,096, another attack in a hallway in a largely unused part of the building that teachers had complained about for months. Students rushed past a security guard as the fight erupted. Then, he waded into the fray, reaching down to help a girl who had been knocked to the ground and kicked and punched by her assailants.

By June, the district’s total of violent incidents had grown to 4,541. That means on an average day 25 students, teachers, or other staff members were beaten, robbed, sexually assaulted, or victims of other violent crimes.

That doesn’t even include thousands more who are extorted, threatened, or bullied in a school year.

And those are just the incidents that are reported; teachers, students, and administrators interviewed by The Inquirer during a yearlong investigation say many are not. During the 2009-10 school year alone, 183 cases came to the district’s attention only after the city police made arrests.

Violence in Philadelphia schools is more than the sheer numbers. The specter of violence traumatizes students and teachers, and stifles learning.

Audenried, housed in a gleaming, new $60 million building in Grays Ferry, is equipped with a sophisticated camera-surveillance system. But that was no deterrent to the band of youngsters bent on attack who roamed the corridors.

In the attack’s aftermath, Teshada — then a 15-year-old freshman — had to confront the elemental question of whether she could stay in her neighborhood school and learn.

And her teacher, Brynn Keller, after witnessing the assault, grappled with her total inability to protect a student in her classroom.

Incidents of violence like this raise the question of whether Superintendent Arlene C. Ackerman, in the midst of her third year, is fulfilling her pledge to make Philadelphia schools safe places to learn.

Ackerman contends that on her watch the district has taken strong steps to curb school violence — such as enforcing a zero-tolerance policy on discipline and expelling students. She cites a drop in reported incidents as proof the efforts are working.

Moreover, she said, school violence is a
national “public health problem” that will require an entire community to resolve: “We’re going to have to fix it as a collective effort and not expect the school to take on the responsibility for trying to do everything.”

Ackerman conceded that the School District must do a better job developing responses to violence, but that getting hundreds of “schools to implement these programs with fidelity is where we still have a long way to go.”

And she placed much of the responsibility on teachers and principals.

“When young people rush into a classroom, when they roam the halls, that’s an adult problem — of the educators in that school,” Ackerman said, referring to Teshada’s assault at Audenried. “Having been a teacher, having been a principal, I never had that happen in my classroom, and I sure didn’t have it happen in my school, because we were clear about what we would tolerate, what was acceptable and what wasn’t.”

Good discipline occurs in classrooms with good teaching, she said.

But many teachers and other school staff have said that even good teaching can fail in the face of violence, and that the district has done little to help. They, as well as students and parents interviewed by The Inquirer, are openly skeptical of the district’s antiviolence efforts and its assertion that it enforces zero tolerance for violence.

“Really? Because you can pretty much punch a teacher and still go to school,” said teacher Hope Moffett, who was in an adjoining classroom when Teshada was attacked. In a January interview, she compared the assault to “a prison riot.”

Since then, Moffett has become openly critical about violence and Ackerman’s plan to turn Audenried into a charter school run by a nonprofit company. Despite receiving positive evaluations, Moffett faced firing for giving students bus tokens to travel to a demonstration opposing Audenried’s conversion and then talking to the press about being disciplined. The district backed off after the union sued.

The Inquirer’s investigation

The Inquirer spent a year looking into violence in Philadelphia public schools, interviewing

Assaults Remain the Major Problem
While serious incidents rose and fell from the 2005-06 to the 2009-10 school year, assaults persisted. Some other major offenses — fire, weapon, and drug crimes — fell sharply, driving an overall decline. Assault remained the largest crime category with 3,330 assaults out of 5,027 serious incidents in 2009-10.

A crime-by-crime breakdown
Over the last five years, the district had the most success cutting crime rates for weapon, fire, and drug and alcohol incidents. The rate is based on crime frequency per 1,000 students. Assault and robbery rates fell slightly while morals offenses edged up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>06</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>08</th>
<th>09</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>Five-year change</th>
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<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drug and alcohol</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>-23.7%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>06</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>08</th>
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<th>Five-year change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minor change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>-5.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morals</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>+4.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: About 1% of incidents occurred at non-School District locations and were not calculated.

Assaults: A growing share of serious crime
Assaults made up 66 percent of all serious incidents reported in 2009-10, up from 61 percent in 2005-06.
hundreds of teachers, parents, students, and education experts about the district’s problems.

It also commissioned an extensive, independently administered survey by Temple University that sampled the opinions of more than 750 teachers and aides — 6 percent of the 13,000 the district employs.

More than two-thirds of those who responded to the survey reported that the violence and disruption in their building hindered their students’ ability to learn. And more than half said violence had worsened during the last three years.

Educators in schools throughout the district spoke out about high levels of violence and disruption in their schools.

“There are far more disruptive and violent students than our system can handle,” said one middle school teacher, who spoke of students who “hop from classroom to classroom . . . causing chaos.”

The Inquirer also obtained thousands of internal School District police reports of violent incidents dating back to 2007. They show that during the last four years serious crimes occurred dozens of times a day, in every corner of the city, at every level of school.

Case histories of assaults that landed in Common Pleas Court were reviewed, including that of the two girls and a boy who joined several others in the assault on Teshada at Audenried.

And a database was created with information provided by the School District andanalyzed, detailing more than 30,000 serious incidents — from assaults to robberies to rapes — reported in the district during the last five years.

Even taking the district’s numbers at face value, the results are stunning:

- Violence worsened in 111 of the district’s 268 schools in 2009-10. (Because some schools were closed or converted to charter schools, the district counts 257 schools this year.)
- In the district’s 32 neighborhood high schools such as Audenried, the violence rate increased 17 percent over five years — to 51.1 reported incidents of violence per 1,000 students in 2009-10.
- Assaults accounted for two-thirds (66 percent) of all serious incidents, up from 61 percent five years earlier.
- Nine out of every 10 schools — from elementary schools on up — reported a serious assault last year.
- Nearly three-quarters of the schools reporting violent incidents had at least one teacher assaulted. There were 690 teacher assaults in the district that year.

Although the numbers are alarming, considerable evidence shows they may not even be accurate. Documented cases of underreporting suggest the problem of violence may be even greater.

Teachers and other school staff said they faced constant pressure from administrators to not report violent incidents, which renders the district’s statistics suspect.

Depending on the principal, schools vary widely on how they report and handle violence and whether they call city police — a problem that Deputy Mayor Everett Gillison conceded. Some principals would rather handle matters themselves, he said.

“Different schools have different cultures and different ways of handling matters,” said Gillison, who oversees police matters for the city. “What we have to do is try to change the culture, and that takes time.”

In many cases, the district’s main intervention system has evolved into an exercise in paper shuffling, rather than a way to get troubled students the help they need. So many students were enrolled in the program last year — 51,166, or one-third of all students in the system — that teachers and counselors are overwhelmed.

When antiviolence programs do work — and creative, effective initiatives have flourished in some district schools — they aren’t implemented on a wider basis.

None of these findings surprise Jack Stollsteimer, the independent safe-schools advocate between 2006 and 2009, who was charged with monitoring violence in the district until state officials eliminated his job.

“The district is just a disaster when it comes to school safety,” Stollsteimer said. “No administration I’ve seen has adequately addressed the problem.”

Long-standing problems

In Philadelphia — the most violent large city in America for the last two years, according to FBI crime statistics — many of the problems afflicting the district are long-standing and predate Ackerman’s tenure, which began in June 2008.
Dozens of Philadelphia schools, including Audenried, sit in neighborhoods plagued by poverty, hunger, drug abuse, parental neglect, and crime. Making these schools havens where the district’s 155,000 students can learn is a vexing problem that resists an easy solution. Deputy Superintendent Leroy Nunery said the district was in the early stages of developing a comprehensive approach to violence, but was facing a shortage of funding. The district’s $3.2 billion budget allows it to spend more than $13,000 per pupil, far less than wealthy suburban districts spend. It also faces a budget shortfall for the coming school year that could exceed $600 million.

“In this constrained budget environment, we’re not going to have the luxury of throwing a lot more dollars at the problem. We’re going to have to fix this in the classroom,” Nunery said.

Against this gloomy background, the School District has found some points of light, frequently citing test scores moving up during the last eight years as evidence of success — achievements that have won Ackerman national accolades, including one from a group she formerly led that lauded her as the nation’s top urban school leader.

And some district schools — even those in tough neighborhoods with many impoverished children — rarely see violence. But some of the safest schools, such as Central High and...
Masterman, are magnets, with selective enrollments. Even with these undeniable successes, the problem of violence persists in the schools.

In late February, the city’s Human Relations Commission issued a report that concluded that conflicts among racial and ethnic groups were widespread in schools.

And a mid-March report by Jack Wagner, the state auditor general, called violence in the schools “a chronic problem” and said an outside watchdog was needed to monitor school violence.

In the weeks before those reports, a brawl at Simon Gratz High in Nicetown, possibly gang-related, landed one combatant in a hospital with a broken eye socket; a sixth grader was arrested for taking a gun to Heston Elementary in West Philadelphia; and one fifth grader grabbed another by the head and began “grinding on her” at Bregy Elementary in South Philadelphia, according to the school police report. Police were not called in the latter incident until the complainant’s mother went to the school and was upset that they hadn’t been called.

New steps to fight violence

As The Inquirer began questioning district officials and seeking documents for this series, the Ackerman administration was recalibrating its approach to violence in the schools.

It was already under national scrutiny for its failure to stem violent attacks on Asian students by African Americans at South Philadelphia High School.

One dramatic move was the removal in August of James B. Golden, the district’s safety chief for five years and a former Philadelphia police captain. He later told reporters that the district’s problems stemmed in part from a lack of focus and direction.

“It’s an environment where academics are in charge. Educators are in charge,” said Golden. “However, there are nonacademic challenges and issues for which you need other professionals to be involved in addressing.”

Despite his role as the district’s top security officer, he said, the administration failed to consult him on key decisions. In one, at South Philadelphia High, Ackerman approved the installation of high-tech security cameras.

Later, in September, Ackerman authorized a no—bid, emergency contract to spend $7.5 million putting security cameras in 19 schools deemed by state and federal guidelines to be “persistently dangerous.”

About the same time, the district launched a plan to address safety at what it identified as the 46 most troublesome schools, Audenried among them.

Plagued by low attendance, chronic truancy, and high suspensions, these 46 schools account for nearly half the district’s violent incidents, though only 24 percent of enrollment.

The district also created a commission that includes top city officials to study violence and launched a campaign against bullying. It also increased expulsions for violent behavior.

Many of those who have faced school violence say these are familiar responses to problems that have gone unchecked for years.

But new cameras won’t deter an attack as brazen as the one on Teshada at Audenried.

An attack that happened at 8:59 a.m. in the presence of a teacher and a classroom of more than 20 ninth graders.

An attack that left Teshada bleeding and sprawled on the floor, with her hair yanked out from the front half of her head, welts on her face, and a lump under one eye.

“Our hallways are well-equipped with cameras,” said Keller, the Audenried teacher whose classroom was invaded by the mob of students looking for Teshada. “These students roamed not just my floor but the second floor as well, for a period of five or 10 minutes before they entered my classroom. Nobody said anything.”

‘The prison on the hill’

Borders by housing projects and I-76, Charles Y. Audenried High for years has been one of the district’s most troubled schools. In its former building, at 33d and Tasker Streets, dubbed “the prison on the hill,” academic failure and chaos reigned.

In 2003, a large melee inside the school resulted in 16-year-old Jamillah Robinson’s receiving more than 50 stitches to her face and chest after she was attacked with a razor blade. She filed a civil rights case against the School District and eventually settled.

The attack came after the girl and her mother — as Teshada and her mother would — repeatedly called the school, expressing fear and asking for help.

In sentencing five girls for her attack, Kevin Dougherty, administrative judge of Family Court, excoriated Audenried for its lack of control and discipline: “Audenried should hang its head and I-76, Charles Y. Audenried High for years has been one of the district’s most troubled schools. In its former building, at 33d and Tasker Streets, dubbed “the prison on the hill,” academic failure and chaos reigned.

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The district shut the dilapidated building in 2005. Three years later, Audenried High reopened on the same site in a renovated building with a red-slate and purple-brick exterior supported by yellow pillars.

Upon reopening, it enrolled only ninth graders, with plans to add another grade each year. When Teshada was attacked, it included about 350 ninth and 10th graders.

Officials were hopeful that past problems would not resurface.

It was a vain hope.

“I don’t think they should have put that school out there,” said Brittany Lecount, a student who said she watched Teshada’s attack.

“Different streets going to war with different streets, kids fighting each other for no reason.”

The only reason Audenried didn’t join the 19
schools with the “persistently dangerous” tag was that it was new and needed at least two years of recorded statistics to qualify.

The Inquirer’s analysis found that the school was among 55 in the district that had a violent-crime rate the same as or higher than those schools tagged as “persistently dangerous.” But these schools were not labeled as such because they didn’t meet all of the narrowly tailored state and federal conditions.

Added to the 19 “persistently dangerous” schools, that’s a total of 74 — far more than the list of 46 that the School District has singled out for a safety review, and evidence of a far broader problem.

Gang bursts in, starts beating

The morning Teshada Herring was attacked started on a high note in Brynn Keller’s classroom. She was praising her students for their high scores on a district reading exam.

Halfway through first period, she got a call from algebra teacher Michelle Davis, whose classroom was across the hall. Davis wanted to know if Keller could take one of her students. Teshada had arrived at Davis’ first-period class late. She was agitated and refusing to take her test. Davis didn’t know what was wrong with Teshada, and Teshada wouldn’t tell her.

Keller, also one of Teshada’s teachers that semester, agreed. Teachers often trade off students to keep them in class rather than a discipline office.

Teshada took a seat in a cluster of four desks in the center of Keller’s room. Her seat faced the door. At her back was a window looking out on rows and rows of new public housing, Greater Grays Ferry Estates — the old Tasker Homes.

It’s in these neighborhoods that rivalries spark and later flare in school hallways. Children, many of whom weren’t even born when the feuding began, see classrooms as fair battlefields to carry out attacks.

At Audenried, teachers say they learn about gangs from their students, and they’re well-aware of the three rival neighborhood groups named for streets near the school — 27th Street, 31st Street, and 18th Street. The district was supposed to give teachers “gang awareness” training, but never did.

In the face of simmering neighborhood violence, it wasn’t just teachers who were unprepared. It was the building, too. Students had learned to evade hallway cameras by ducking into the alcoves outside classrooms or by getting into the bathrooms. Security officers tightly controlled keys to the washrooms, but students broke in by punching holes in the walls, then reaching in and unlocking the doors.

The hallway where the second fight occurred was in an isolated wing of the building that had just three classes. That meant the small security force was spread thin.

At the time of Teshada’s attack, classes had been in session for 30 minutes, but a security video showed dozens of students milling in the hallway.

Teshada heard them outside. She tried to concentrate on her test — until the door burst open. The band of students streamed in and zeroed in on Teshada.

The rest of Keller’s students darted to the edges of the room. Keller moved toward her phone and called security. “I knew there was nothing else I could do,” she said.

Students began swinging at Teshada, surrounding her like a “swarm of bees,” Keller said. They knocked her to the ground and continued to beat her.

“It felt like a prison riot. My whole room was shaking. Desks were rattling,” said Moffett, who was teaching in an adjoining room.

Two of Keller’s students tried to pull the attackers off Teshada. In the end, one boy covered Teshada with his body to shield her.

The attack left the 24-year-old Keller, a graduate of Neshaminy High School in Bucks County and Temple, feeling helpless.

“I’m supposed to be able to protect them,” said Keller, whose youthful face belies her toughness. “On that day, that’s not something I could do.”

Growing Audenried violence

The attack on Teshada was part of growing violence at Audenried during the last school year. By the end of January 2010, there were 17 assaults, one weapons incident, and nine cases of disorderly conduct and fighting, according to School District data.

The district had failed to send in more security despite repeated pleas from administrators and teachers, horrified by the hall-walking that routinely disrupted their lessons and endangered their pupils.

“It was just wildly out of control,” recalled art teacher Peter Coyle, who said staff routinely had to lock doors to keep out troublemakers.

At 9:08 a.m. — just a few minutes after Teshada’s assault — security tapes show the second assault unfolding in the school. A group of more than a dozen students surrounded a 10th-grade girl, wearing a red sweater vest.

Some of them began punching and kicking the girl, and the attack continued as she lay helpless on the floor. In a matter of seconds, a security guard waded into the crowd and began pulling off attackers.

The back-to-back incidents happened so fast that the school’s small security staff couldn’t react quickly enough. Two of the school’s five security officers were on another floor dealing with the aftermath of the attack on Teshada.

The crowd began dispersing after custodians ran to aid the lone security guard. The victim, who staggered to her feet, suffered an eye injury.

One of the students charged in the second attack said her finger had been broken and she had to have surgery. She blamed the victim, saying the girl had “bumped” her first.

The day would get worse. Teachers would learn later that a South Philadelphia High Athlete, Tyree Parks, was inside Audenried after school to coach a youth basketball game, probably with a gun. After the game, he was shot to death while walking home. Police searching his body found he had been carrying a .32-caliber semiautomatic handgun.

He did not have to pass through the school’s metal detectors, Coyle said, because the youth game was after hours.
Teachers often targets
The young Audenried staff — about 60 per-
cent of whom had three years or less of teaching
experience — was gravely shaken.
“I don’t think people have any idea about the
level of violence we deal with,” Keller said.
The plight of Audenried teachers is repeated in
many schools throughout the city. Many
times, teachers are the victims.
Nearly a quarter of Philadelphia school teach-
ers and staff said they had been physically as-
saulted in the previous school year — 2008-09
— in a survey conducted by the federal Centers
for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC
last spring surveyed 1,350 School District staff-
ers, nearly half of whom responded.
The proportion was highest at high schools,where nearly a third said they had been attacked,
according to the survey.
More than half the workers also reported they
had been victims of verbal threats and assaults
during that year.
Jerry Jordan, president of the Philadelphia
Federation of Teachers, called results of the
Temple and CDC surveys “alarming” and “a
clear call that more has to be done.”
This school year didn’t start out much better.
In November, Jordan met with Ackerman af-
ter two teachers in one week suffered concus-
sions when they were assaulted by students —
one of them at Audenried High. Ackerman and
Jordan followed with a joint memo to staff, re-
minding them to take a hard line on bullying
and assaults.

Hints an attack is coming
For parents who have little choice but to rely
on the School District to protect their children
during the day, the violence is maddening.
Three days before her daughter was attacked,
Teshada’s mother, Bridgette Bennett, called out
of work and went to Audenried to speak with
school police officers. Her daughter had told her
that trouble was brewing, and she had seen the
Facebook posts and text blast warning that
someone was going to be beaten.
“A single parent of six, Bennett works long
hours in housekeeping at Albert Einstein Medi-
cal Center to support her family.
I came home and tell them stories every day
so they can be thankful,” she said. “Live today
like it’s your last.”
When she arrived at Audenried as a freshman
in 2009, she tried to keep to herself.
Most other girls didn’t like her, she said.
She also emphasizes the importance of school: “Without education, there’s nothing.”
But Bennett and many other parents through-
out the city every day must entrust their chil-
dren to the public schools. They can’t afford
safer private or Catholic schools. They can’t all
find spaces in charter schools. They can’t just
pick up and move.
In a poll of 802 city parents with school—age
children, conducted in June by the Pew
Charitable Trusts, fewer than a third gave their
children’s schools high marks for handling safe-
ty. One-third rated their schools “only fair” or
“poor.”

After the assault, Bennett took her daughter
to the police station and filed a report. But she
said what was really needed were more coun-
selors and support in the schools.
“You’re talking about our inner-city children.
These children are fighting. They’re dodging
bullets every day. Their parents are on drugs.
They’re fighting for their lives. They’re being
molested.
“They need to help these parents,” Bennett
said of the School District officials.
Teneka Campbell, 34, whose daughter was
one of the students disciplined in the attack on
Teshada, said the school was out of control:
“The video clearly shows there’s nobody
monitoring the hallways. It’s a shame.”
Teshada remembers a girl hitting her first, but
soon there were lots of blows.
“I saw a boy hitting me, like really hitting
me, like I was a boy,” she recalled.
All she could think about was protecting her
face.
“That’s my main focus,” Teshada said. “You
can cut all my hair off. I’m going to still be me
with no hair.”
Teshada lay crumpled on the floor, the but-
tons and hood ripped off her coat and scattered.
But she got up after her attackers fled and
tried to go after them. She wanted to call her
older sister for help, too, but adults in the room
stopped her.
Despite her injuries, she refused medical at-
tention.
“That would make me feel weak,” Teshada
said.
Achy and bruised, she stayed home for sev-
eral school days after the attack.
She cried when she thought about what had
happened.
“I felt like I couldn’t be protected in here,
even inside,” she said.

Staying out of trouble
Teshada had attended charter schools since
fourth grade and found them more orderly and
safer than district schools. At an Afrocentric
charter, she learned African dance and how to
crochet and speak Swahili.
Her mother told her to give Audenried a try, at
least until she could get into a charter high
school.
When she arrived at Audenried as a freshman
in 2009, she tried to keep to herself.
Most other girls didn’t like her, she said.
What really irritates the troublemakers, she
said, is talking to them in clear, proper English.
“They think you’re trying to insult their intel-
ligence because you’re being intelligent,” she
said.
Teshada, a confident teen who likes to dress
up and make people laugh, said her best weapon is
her smile.
An aspiring nurse, she scored the highest in
the class on one of Keller’s midterms.
She never caused any trouble, her teachers
said, but in trying to avoid it, she skipped class,
and her grades began to suffer.
A few days before Teshada got jumped, she
confided in her mother that conflicts among girls in the school were mounting. There was something about a boy, a disagreement between two girls, and she got caught in the middle, she said.

She had received the text blast on her phone that someone was going to get it.

The text didn’t mention her by name, Teshada said, but she was still uneasy.

“I think they just didn’t like me and needed a reason to fight me,” she said.

**Plea for more safety**

Less than a week after the attack on Teshada, a group of Audenried teachers joined about 100 others at the Guerin Recreation Center in South Philadelphia to tell the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations about school violence. The Jan. 28 hearing was the first of 11 held after attacks at South Philadelphia High.

“There is little keeping our students safe within our school’s walls,” Keller testified.

Several students involved in the attacks that day were sent to disciplinary schools. But others remained at Audenried. A 16-year-old boy was rejected for transfer by the School District’s regional office, even though he admitted to simple-assault charges in court.

Keller still remembers his court case. She was there.

“You will never go back to Audenried High School,” Family Court Judge Abram Frank Reynolds told him, according to Keller’s recollection.

But the boy returned to Audenried within a month while serving out his six-month probationary term.

A female student, whom Keller identified as being in the room, also faced little punishment.

“It leaves a really bad taste in your mouth to know some students involved got away with it,” Keller said.

School District officials declined to address the boy’s case for this article but issued a statement.

“A student could have been allowed to stay at the school for a variety of reasons, including the fact that he/she may have been a special-education student, or insufficient evidence to support their alleged involvement in an incident, etc.”

Special-education students can be disciplined, but the district has to take into account their disability in deciding on consequences.

Moffett said she had asked the principal why the girl had been allowed to remain at Audenried. She was told: “That’s it. You just need to accept it. She had a five-day suspension. She’s going to be here.”

Principal Terry Pearsall-Hargett had no comment.

**Safety aides added, for a time**

After the attack on Teshada, the district added three school police officers, an in-school suspension room for troublemakers, and a full-time “climate manager” to handle discipline at Audenried. It also closed off an unused section of the building where wayward students would wander in. Teachers reported marked improvement in safety.

But in a familiar theme in the School District, the fixes did not endure. At the end of last year, 33 climate managers were axed, including Audenried’s. The district cited budget concerns.

The firings created unrest among teachers, although they say that conditions in the building are calmer this year.

A winning basketball team energized the school. District standardized test scores are improving in math.

But now they have other concerns. Audenried has been named one of the district’s 18 Renaissance schools, a turnaround charter school run by Universal Cos. Inc.

The Renaissance plan means many teachers will likely leave the school rather than take leave from the district to work for a charter.

The day that teachers got the news — Jan. 25, 2011 — a group of them had gathered in the library.

An after-school basketball game was letting out when a gunshot outside pierced the air. Coyle, an art teacher standing in front of a large glass facade, ducked for cover behind a metal pole in the library.

The school’s dean said she had seen an unknown figure pointing what she believed was a weapon. The principal heard gunshots outside the school, and city police found a shell casing outside a school doorway, according to a police report. The school was placed on lockdown for 35 minutes.

**Headed off to new school**

When Teshada returned to school, she saw classmates carrying razor blades for protection; they had gotten them past metal detectors.

And when her mother learned that some of the students involved in her daughter’s attack — including the 16-year-old boy — remained there, she told Teshada: “That’s it. You have to go.”

She moved the family to West Philadelphia in search of a safer school. But in the Philadelphia system, finding such a school can be an elusive quest.

Teshada now goes to Overbrook High, where, she said, she feels safer. But her new school is on the state’s “persistently dangerous” list.

“That’s the way it is in the city,” her mother said in resignation. “You just have to deal with it.”