

SRO Exploratory Committee Meeting

June 23, 2021

6:30-8:00pm

Via Zoom

Attendance: Cheryl Gonzalez, Lisa Loomis, Roger Hart, Dina Ford, Molly Aunger, Diana Martinez, Jon Pulino, Beverly Lawrence, Deb Cain, Bill Porter, Jennifer Cannata, Justin Carbonella, Roberta Downer, Delores Ford, Michael Timbro

AGENDA

- I. Call to Order 6:32
- II. Approval of Minutes from 6/14 - Motion by Molly seconded by Roger
 - A. Friendly amendment by Sgt. Porter study by CT Voices for children found academic performance as measured by avg SBAC scores did not differ significantly based on the presence of SROs
- III. Review of Norms
- IV. Discussion of recommendations re: SRO program
 - A. Comments by Acting Chief Timbro: He's heard from many parents in support of the SRO program. Program is important for building relationships between youth and PD starting from an early age which has led to some instances of youth reporting crimes. He's willing to meet with students to hear concerns about the program. Program is fully funded by PD, which includes 6 salaries for 10 months plus events. He supports updating the MOU and reviewing the program as needed.
 - B. Sgt. Porter added they will continue to use the Right Response guidelines so as to minimize police involvement in disciplinary/non-police matters. The MPS and MPD have a unique relationship as a result of this program - administrators can easily reach out to him if/when needed.
 - C. Questions clarifying the process. Since most of the recommendations are not mutually exclusive, everyone will vote on each one. Members can vote yay as many times as they want.
 - D. Comments by Loomis:
 1. Systems vs. People. The current SROs have done a good job building relationships and being part of the community, but that shouldn't be confused with the system of armed police officers in schools
 2. Most school districts in CT, including Hartford where I work, do not have SROs, and of those that do, most assign them to middle and high schools, not elementary schools
 3. Parents have said they want SROs in high school to manage fights, but SROs, teachers, and admin report this is not their role. They report their

role is to support students through positive relationships, and I think social workers and psychologists are better suited for that work.

4. We heard opposing ideas about what school safety is and how to achieve it
 5. Parents have said they want SROs in schools to protect against external threats, but school safety research and experts report SROs are not an effective deterrent for school shootings. School shooters most likely to be suicidal student. National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) cautions against use of SROs. NASP and Every Town for Gun Safety recommend providing services to meet students' mental health needs as an effective deterrent to school shootings. We had a student report he had to wait 3 months for an appoint at MHS health center. Only resources saying SROs improve school safety are from law enforcement organizations
 6. Overwhelmingly, the adults we've heard from said they feel better with SROs in schools and the young people we've heard from said they felt worse with SROs in schools. Research suggests SROs create an illusion of increased school safety while contributing to environment of fear for students
 7. Adults say the program is working, but by what measure? What is the definition of success for this program?
 8. I believe SROs should be removed, but I will also vote for other reforms because there are some reforms we can find common ground on and some reforms are better than nothing
- E. Response by Sgt Porter:
1. There are just as many experts who say SROs increase school safety as those who say they do not
 2. The 3 month delay in mental health services an problem not related to the SRO program
 3. It's dangerous to publicly announce considering removing SROs
 4. He's voting to keep the program in all schools under an updated MOU
- F. Comments by Gonzalez:
1. Voting to keep program and update MOU, open to other reforms
 2. Adults said students felt afraid, not students
 3. Removing SROs won't increase mental health supports
- G. Comments by Aunger:
1. In favor of revamping the program. Voting to take time to do more research. We haven't heard from lots of students, and this wasn't the best forum to hear from students
- H. Comments by Pulino:
1. Working at summer school in Meriden - SROs there helped locate students who had run away.
 2. Agrees with increasing mental health supports
 3. Voting to keep program and update MOU
- I. Comments by Carbonella:
1. Voting to keep the program but in a youth-centered model
 2. Training has addressed youth through a police-lens
 3. MPS hasn't given people a chance to cultivate a youth-centered model, and this committee has not been the right venue for that. As a district we say we value student voice and agency, but we haven't done that in a meaningful way on this topic.

J. Comments by Martinez:

1. One parent complained about a demonstration of how to correctly use a condom and that safety resource was removed from MHS, but parent and student complaints about the SRO program overlooked. All the data showing that discipline disproportionately affects kids of color has no impact. What is the point of this committee if the voices that are historically ignored continue to be ignored?
2. Perception of safety is not the same as reality
3. There is no local data measuring the success of this program
4. If her employment contract says she needs to report yearly to prove the success of her work and she does not provide that reporting, she is in violation of that contract
5. Parents should be informed about programs that involve student interactions with police so they can opt out.

K. Comments by Hart:

1. Study that found presence of armed guards in schools led to higher fatalities flawed due to use of publicly available data and references armed guards, not SROs. SROs in Middletown work to prevent shootings by building relationships with students
2. Was originally leaning toward removing SROs but impressed with MPS program and oversight. Voting to keep and update MOU

L. Discussion between Porter and Martinez

1. Porter - there are ways for parents to complain about how an officer interacts with students and for parents to opt of of programs
2. Martinez - she did not know who to reach out to. Reached out to principal twice and never got a response. Parents can't opt out if they don't know about the program or the scope of the interaction

M. Comments by Carbonella:

1. This conversation has mostly been about should we keep or remove SROs when what is needed is a more nuanced, broader discussion about school culture. Where is the space for the development of a program that creates a safe school culture that may include but not be limited to SROs.
2. This program can't be all things to all people. We can't underestimate or undervalue the kids saying this program does not make them feel safe.
3. Aunger agrees with need for such space/discussion

V. Vote on recommendations re: SRO program

A. Note that Colleen Weiner was absent from meeting but emailed a statement prior to. Her votes were added based on that email. Also not in attendance were all student representatives. Their voting preferences were not shared and therefore not recorded.

B. Recommendations and votes

1. Keep SRO program as is

yay	nay	abstain
	Molly A Jen C	

	Justin C Roberta D Delores F Cheryl G Roger H Beverly L Diana M Sgt. Porter (new agreement) Jon (new agreement) Colleen W Lisa L	
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2. Keep program as is while more research is done (parent survey, student focus groups, etc)

yay	nay	abstain
Molly A Roberta D Delores F Cheryl G Jon P Lisa L	Jen C Justin C Roger H Beverly L Diana M Sgt Porter	

3. Keep SRO program but update MOU (see draft by Roger Hart) - specify policy related to hiring, removal, training, chain of command, roles & responsibilities

yay	nay	abstain
Molly A Jen C Justin C Roberta D Delores F Cheryl G Roger H Sgt Porter Jon P Lisa L Colleen W	Beverly L Diana M	

4. Keep SRO program but update data reporting and oversight practices

yay	nay	abstain

Molly A Jen C Justin C Roberta D Delores F Cheryl G Roger H Sgt. Porter Jon P Lisa L	Beverly L Diana M	
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5. Keep SRO program but expand training to include youth-centered child development, trauma informed practices, students w/ disabilities and mental health challenges, anti-racism and implicit bias

yay	nay	abstain
Molly A Justin C Roberta D Delores F Cheryl G Roger H Sgt. Porter Lisa L	Beverly L	Jen C Diana M

6. Keep SRO Program, expand training, limit scope of their programming and interaction, and allow parents to opt-in.

yay	nay	abstain
Molly A Justin C Roberta D Delores F Diana M Lisa L	Jen C Cheryl G Roger H Beverly L Sgt. Porter Jon P	

7. Keep SROs at middle and high school, but remove from elementary schools

yay	nay	abstain
Molly A Lisa L	Jen C Justin C Delores F	Roberta D

	Cheryl G Roger H Beverly L Diana M Sgt. Porter Jon P	
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8. Phase out SRO program as SROs get cycled out

yay	nay	abstain
Beverly L Diana M Lisa L	Jen C Justin C Roberta D Delores F Cheryl G Roger H Sgt. Porter Jon P	Molly A

9. Phase out SRO program as SROs get cycled out and replace with mental health or restorative justice practitioners.

yay	nay*	abstain
Justin C Beverly L Diana M Lisa L	Jen C Roberta D Cheryl G Roger H Sgt. Porter Jon P	Molly A Delores F

*Committee members voting nay expressed support for adding mental health supports but not phasing out SRO program.

10. Remove SROs from all schools

yay	nay	abstain
Beverly L Diana M Lisa L	Jen C Justin C Roberta D Delores F Cheryl G Roger H Sgt. Porter Jon P	Molly

11. Remove SROs from all schools and replace with mental health or restorative justice practitioners.

yay	nay*	abstain
Justin C Beverly L Diana M Lisa L	Jen C Roberta D Delores F Cheryl G Roger H Sgt. Porter Jon P	Molly A

*Committee members voting nay expressed support for adding mental health supports but not removing SROs.

VI. Adjournment 8:18