

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER TASK FORCE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS) would like to thank everyone who participated on the Harrisonburg- School Resource Officer (HCPS-SRO) Task Force and dedicated their valuable time in the process to review and provide feedback about the SRO program and the respective Memorandum of Understanding. This report summarizes the work conducted by the HCPS-SRO Task Force and their final recommendations are noted within.

HCPS-SRO Task Force Charge and Background

The HCPS-SRO task force was convened on February 24, 2021. The task force met over a term of ten months. In order to ensure a diverse and inclusive group, SRO-HCPS Task Force Team Leads, Salvador Romero Jr., Director of Equity and Community Outreach, Laura Feichtinger-McGrath, Director of English Learner Programming and Title III, and Leatrice Woods, Vice Principal, Skyline Middle School extended invitations to parents, the Harrisonburg Police Department, advisory groups and community organizations within Harrisonburg community. Ultimately, the HCPS-SRO Task Force was composed of the various stakeholders, including parents with children in the Harrisonburg City Public School system; community leaders and organizers; educators and administrators; two Harrisonburg City Police Department officers, and two Harrisonburg City School Board members. The task force was charged with the responsibility to review and evaluate the current program as it exists and make recommendations that are in the best interest of every student.

It is our responsibility to ensure that every student is afforded a safe and welcoming learning environment. In consideration of this, and the increasing awareness of the negative and fatal interactions between community and law enforcement (specifically within our Black and Brown communities) the Superintendent convened this task force to review and evaluate the Harrisonburg Public School's current School Resource Program as part of their School Safety Audit.

The SRO-HCPS task force agreed early in their review process that all recommendations made by them will be forwarded to the Superintendent, Dr. Michael Richards, and to the Harrisonburg City School Board (HCSB) for further consideration. As such, this report captures the recommendation of a majority of its members, some in support of the program and others who feel that armed police officers should not be in school with children. Please note for varying reasons some members did not provide a final recommendation as to the disposition of the program, however they overwhelmingly agreed that the SRO Program in its current state, is woefully deficient in many areas and needs to be significantly improved in order to evaluate its true impact and effectiveness in the future.

The members of the task force spent the first few months focused on quantitative data and information gathering in order to learn more about the SRO Program. The later months were dedicated to a less tangible, qualitative review of the program.

In June, the task force provided the Harrisonburg Police Department (HPD) an opportunity to formally speak to the Harrisonburg Community about the SRO Program. Their presentation focused on providing a history of the program, hiring and training, and opportunities to educate and serve as a mentor to the student population.

In August, the task force hosted a Community Town Hall. The panelists were subject matter experts who presented quantitative data and research on the negative impact the daily presence of law enforcement has on an educational community, specifically on Black and Brown children,

and students with disabilities. Both public events allowed the community to learn about the SRO program. They cultivate an opportunity for continued community discussion and feedback about the impact of law enforcement on students and school climate.

In July, the task force was divided into three committees, The School Resource Officer Committee, The Memorandum of Understanding Committee, and the Communication and Outreach Committee. The committees were led by the SRO team leads, met weekly throughout the month of July, and were required to present their findings to the entire task force in August and September.

1. School Resource Officer - Research Committee

The committee's goal was to research the roles, responsibilities and program effectiveness of SROs on a national, state and local level and assess the value and effectiveness of the current SRO program on the educational community, with a direct focus on HCPS students. The research committee met weekly throughout the month of July, 2021, and used the [United States Department of Justice Case Studies of 19 School Resource Officer Programs](#) to guide their work.

The committee attempted to gain a comprehensive understanding as to program structure and outcomes by reviewing the following program areas:

- Program description
- Program history/origins
- Budget
- Planning and implementation/coordination
- Recruitment and training
- Program activities
- Program monitoring and evaluation
- Outreach and community support

This checklist would allow the committee to conduct a compare and contrast analysis to schools with well-established SRO programs. In an effort to analyze further, the committee interviewed key HPD personnel and relevant key constituents within the HCPS community. In addition, the committee requested to review written protocols, policy and procedures as it relates to the bulleted areas above. While this committee learned some information through verbal inquiry, outside of the current Memorandum of Understanding, the committee was unable to obtain any written evidence of program description, implementation, monitor and outcomes etc. The SRO Research Committee made a final presentation of their findings to the task force.

In sum, the committee determined that the 25+ year old, city funded SRO program was highly deficient in many areas and had no performance metrics or outcomes to justify a favorable review.

2. Memorandum of Understanding Committee

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Committee completed a comprehensive review of the current MOU. The committee met weekly during July, extensively discussing concerns and worked through various iterations of the document. In August, the committee presented a proposed modified MOU. Committee recommendations included an increase in accountability, stakeholder input, written protocols, and a need to establish a common understanding among all stakeholders that school administrators and teachers are responsible for school discipline and

that school resources officers are not involved in the enforcement of school rules. [See Appendix A - Draft Proposed MOU.](#)

3. Communication and Outreach Committee

The Communication and Outreach Committee was primarily responsible for developing and managing methods of communication within the community during the evaluation process. For the most part, during the later months, the HCPS-SRO Task Force focused on collection of qualitative information. By way of focus groups, online surveys, questionnaires and individual interviews, the committee was able to aggregate data and discuss feedback during their meetings.

The committee found a need for open, continuous and collaborative communication as well as a critical need to increase stakeholder awareness and training. A significant part of the community feedback was anecdotal and reflected mixed opinions regarding the value of the program. For, example, some community members acknowledged Black and Brown students may be targeted, feel unsafe and may even be disciplined more often when police officers are in the school; but notwithstanding, they still supported a daily law enforcement presence. Some of the community expressed strong concerns, fear and requested the program be terminated and others were adamant that police officers serve as a deterrent to crime, and increase the overall feelings of safety in the school.

HCPS-SRO Member Recommendations

Each member recommendation is reflected in Appendix B. Several of the recommendations reflect a desire to continue the SRO program, with a great deal of reliance on anecdotal evidence. However, they all acknowledge their research has identified significant problems with the program and has offered areas of immediate improvement. Other task force members provided reasons to terminate the program. The justifications were supported with research, data and feedback from the parent focus groups and direct interviews. Those members maintain SROs do not increase school safety and that Black and Brown students and students with disabilities are disproportionately targeted and arrested. They reference that in 2020, The Virginia School Climate Survey showed 1 out of 4 high school students reported they do not feel safe with police officers in their schools. [See Appendix B: Recommendations/statements from Members of the Task Force.](#)

Appendix A

DRAFT PROPOSED MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Guiding Principles

Excellent public education is essential to the well-being of individuals, communities, and the Commonwealth of Virginia. A positive school climate encourages and inspires good behavior and relationship building. Further, a safe school environment recognizes the value of meaningful engagement and input from all stakeholders: students, parents and teachers. Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS) and the Harrisonburg Police Department (HPD) are committed to the development and practice of a safe and excellent public education for all learners, staff and community. Harrisonburg City Public Schools and the Harrisonburg Police Department enter into this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) setting forth the respective roles and responsibilities of both parties regarding the use of school resource officers (SROs).

Purpose

The purpose of this MOU establishes the protocol and outlines expectations for engagement by the Harrisonburg Police Department that may involve students and others during school hours. Both parties agree the vast majority of student misconduct can be best addressed through classroom and in-school strategies.

Specifically, this MOU aims to:

1. Promote program effectiveness and accountability with annual review by an oversight committee. That committee shall be comprised of the Sergeant of the Community Resource Unit (CRU), a member of Central Office Leadership, a building administrator, student representative, parent representative and at least one representative from community-based organizations that are focused on the protection civil liberties for minorities.
2. Incorporate the SRO as a part of the school community, in an effort to minimize the number of students unnecessarily out of the classroom, arrested at school, and court involved. Wherever possible, school-based infractions shall be addressed through the use of non-punitive interventions that improve school safety and academic performance, and not through harsh, exclusionary measures.
3. Create and communicate a common understanding among HCPS Board members, staff, parents, and students; HPD officers and staff; the local court system, and the broader community:
 - a. Of the overall SRO program goals,
 - b. That school administrators and teachers are ultimately responsible for school discipline and
 - c. That law enforcement is not involved in the enforcement of school rules unless there is also a violation of the law.

HPD will work in unison with HCPS and building level administrators to identify and achieve the SRO program goals. The success of the School Resource Officer ("SRO") Program will rely on effective communication among the Police Department, the School Division, the school principals and community stakeholders. The oversight committee will review this MOU, analyze data and measure program success annually. These reviews shall be made public.

This MOU reflects shared aspirations for ongoing cooperation between the Police Department and the School Division, all in a collaborative effort to promote understanding and the safety and security for the benefit of students, employees, families, and the entire school community. It does not create and is not to be construed, used, or cited to create or impose any standards or obligations beyond those already established in law. This MOU also does not make and is not to be construed to make the employees of either organization an agent of the other organization.

Supervision

The SRO will be under the immediate supervision of the Chief of the Harrisonburg Police Department ("Chief of Police") or designee. When necessary, the Chief of Police or designee may direct the SRO to perform other necessary tasks as needed away from the school. Notification of SRO absences shall be communicated clearly with school administrators.

The Police Department will work in unison with the principals of the School Division to identify and achieve the SRO Program goals. Specific metrics to measure success shall be identified. The SRO will consult directly with the school principal (the "Principal") for assignments during school hours. While working closely together, the SRO and the Principal are independent of one another and will not undertake any act on behalf of each other as an agent for one another.

An SRO-related work schedule will be established annually, in accordance with the school calendar, between the Chief of Police or designee and the Division Superintendent or designee. The School Division liaison will be designated by the Division Superintendent, and the Police Department liaison will be the Sergeant of the Community Resource Unit (CRU).

School Resource Officer Role

SROs should be considered active members of their assigned schools. The SRO facilitates the effective delivery of law enforcement services and assists with matters related to safety and security. To do this effectively in the school setting, SROs are expected to engage in training relevant to the communities served. The SRO should receive ongoing training in the areas of:

- Adolescent development
- Implicit bias and anti-racism
- Cultural responsiveness
- Trauma informed care
- Mental health issues
- Appropriate responses to students with disabilities and knowing the rules/rights of such youth
- Specific de-escalation strategies for youth

Unless there is a clear and imminent threat to safety, requests for law enforcement assistance are to be made to a school administrator and such administrators should, if appropriate, request assistance from the SRO.

SROs are expected to assist school administrators in developing school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plans. SROs should work with school

administrators in problem-solving to prevent crime and promote safety in the school environment. SROs are expected to collaborate with school administrators and other school personnel to support positive school climates that focus on resolving conflicts and minimizing student involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

SROs serve multiple, interrelated roles to be carried out with the aim to contribute to school safety and security and to promote positive and supportive school climates. The key roles of an SRO are:

- Law enforcement officers - SROs assume primary responsibility for responding to requests for law enforcement assistance from school administrators and coordinating the response of other law enforcement resources to the school. SROs should work with school administrators in problem-solving to prevent crime and promote safety in the school environment. In all cases, the SRO's role as a law enforcement officer should take precedence over any other roles performed by the SRO.
- Law-related educator - As resources permit, SROs should strive to assist with presentations to school personnel on law related topics such as law enforcement practices, changes in relevant laws, crime trends, crime prevention, school safety strategies, and crisis response procedures. SROs may also deliver law related education to students using lessons/curricula approved in advance by HCPS.
- Expected to set a positive example in handling stressful situations and resolving conflicts, and should regularly show respect and consideration of others.

Principal Role

- The Principal and the school leadership team shall participate in annual training with the HPD to include a review of roles, communication protocols and documentation procedures for incidences that include SROs. School leadership, in partnership with the SRO, shall annually present an overview of the SRO program to all school personnel.
- The Principal and designated caseworkers will provide specific consultation on special needs students, including those on Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) with SROs.
- The Principal shall be the main point of contact with the SRO. Should the Principal be out of the building, a designee shall be appointed and will assume the responsibilities of the Principal for the duration of the absence.
- The Principal will ensure ongoing communication with the SRO to exchange information and discuss areas of concern.
- The Principal will conduct all school-related investigations until such time that the evidence necessitates consideration by the SRO to pursue criminal charges. If there is evidence to merit pursuit of criminal charges, the SRO will assume responsibility for the criminal investigation. The Principal will make, and document, every possible attempt to contact the parent/guardian unless exigent circumstances make contact at that time with the parent/guardian impractical, as determined by the Principal, or when such notification is prohibited by state law. The Principal or designee may observe the criminal investigation in order to help protect the school environment and the relationship with the student(s) and parent(s) and to inform the Division Superintendent.
- The Principal shall include SROs in in-service programs when appropriate to increase the effectiveness of the SRO's ability to accomplish assigned duties.
- The principal will lead the evaluation of the SRO annually with input from staff, students and parents and share that assessment with the Chief of Police or designee. This evaluation should coincide with HPD's employee evaluation process.

- The Principal will immediately notify the SRO when threats have been made against the school, staff or students. The HPD acknowledges and understands that the School Division uses University of Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines, which distinguishes between different categories of threats.

Criminal Investigations/Questioning

- The SRO will be the initial investigative authority involving all substantive threats made against the school, staff or students, although the HPD acknowledges that School Division officials and staff also may need to conduct an investigation as well as part of their management operations.
- The Police Department's criminal investigation and questioning of students during school hours or school events should be limited to situations when the criminal investigation is directly related to the school or, if unrelated, when delays might result in a personal danger to any person (or property), flight from the jurisdiction, destruction of evidence, or other compelling circumstances. Disruption to the educational program and operations should be avoided whenever practical.
- When a criminal investigation necessitates the interviewing of students during school hours, the investigating officer will notify the Principal or designee and explain the situation in advance. The Principal will make every effort to notify the parent(s) of the child and inform them of the need for the officer to interview the child for the criminal investigation, so that the parent(s) may be present, as determined by the Principal, during the interview, as applicable under state law. If the exigency of the matter or of other circumstances does not allow time for the parent(s) to arrive timely, the SRO will conduct the interview with the student in accordance with legal guidelines; and the Principal, in the exercise of administrative discretion, may be present unless the Principal's presence is otherwise prohibited by extant law. If the SRO identifies a parent or guardian as the subject of the criminal investigation, especially if the investigation is regarding a child protection services complaint, then an effort to inform the parent(s) will not be made as described above.
- The SRO will document student interactions within a criminal law investigation and notify the Principal of any criminal investigation as soon as practical.
- The SRO will comply with established legal requirements regarding self-incrimination, including heightened, developmentally appropriate warnings and the use of the student's primary language as necessary and practicable.
- The SRO will coordinate, when practical, any criminal law enforcement activities with the Principal so that the action between the agencies is cooperative and in the best interest for the school and public safety.
- Directory information, defined as student names, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, heights and weights or members or athletic teams, dates of attendance, awards and honors received, and student pictures, may be released to the SRO without parent/guardian consent. In addition, student addresses and telephone numbers may be released with the permission of the Division Superintendent or designee, and further information may be released consistent with applicable law.

Differentiating Disciplinary Misconduct from Criminal Offenses

School administrators and personnel are responsible for school discipline. Although SROs are expected to be familiar with the HCPS code of student conduct, the rules of individual schools, and their application in day-to-day practice, SROs should not be involved with the enforcement of school rules or disciplinary infractions that are not violations of law.

Consequences of student misconduct should be effective, developmentally appropriate, and fair. Interventions and school sanctions should help students learn from their mistakes and address root causes of misconduct. School administrators should consider alternatives to suspensions and expulsions and law enforcement officials should consider alternatives to involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems for student violations of a law.

Arrest Procedures

In general, no petition or other legal process should be served during school hours or at a school event. Should there be a need to serve a student or school employee with a legal process such as an arrest warrant, the Principal will encourage the process server to make all reasonable attempts to serve such documents off school premises as determined by the Principal; however, if the documents must be served on school premises, they must be served in the Principal's office of the school at which the student attends, at another location at the school designated by the Principal, or the main office of the facility at which the employee is assigned.

The execution of an arrest warrant on a student or a school employee during school hours should be avoided, but, if necessary, because of special circumstances, it should be coordinated through the Principal or designee whenever practical. If not, the Principal will be notified by the SRO as soon as practical.

When making an arrest, the SRO will follow standard criminal law enforcement practices used by the Police Department and authorized by applicable law. This arrest process will include the completion of all appropriate reports, fingerprinting, photographs and any documentation that may be necessary.

Search and Seizure Procedures

The Principal may conduct searches of students' property and person under their jurisdiction when individualized reasonable suspicion exists that the search will reveal evidence that the student has violated or is violating either the law or the rules of the school. The standard on the search by the Principal generally is individualized reasonable suspicion, not probable cause.

The SRO may observe school-related searches, as may be requested by the Principal. These searches must be at the direction and control of the Principal or designee. If the Principal has or obtains evidence related to alleged student or employee criminal misconduct, the evidence shall be entrusted to the possession of the SRO, who will promptly secure and safeguard it for future reference or use by both law enforcement and by school officials. A copy or image of the evidence may be retained by the Principal or designee, and the SRO will cooperate with the process for making a copy or an image. Such evidence (e.g., electronic files) entrusted to the SRO will be made promptly available to the Principal or Division Superintendent or designee(s) by request by the Principal or Division Superintendent or designee(s) for school related or school division-related purposes, with the SRO or other law enforcement custodian also being available as may be necessary or useful to authenticate the evidence and any chain of custody.

The SRO will not request an administrative search for criminal investigation purposes or have the Principal purport to act as an agent in any circumstances.

As soon as practicable, the student's parent/guardian shall be notified of the search via telephone, email or in person in a language the parent/guardian can understand.

Physical Intervention by School Resource Officers

An SRO should not be involved in the physical restraint of a student unless there is imminent danger of serious physical harm to self or others. As sworn law enforcement officers, SROs may intervene to de-escalate situations.

Physical intervention by SROs is undertaken in accordance with policies and operational procedures of their local law enforcement agency. If an SRO is involved in the use of restraint or physical intervention, the action must be reported to the school principal and the SRO's supervisor and the rationale for the action must be fully documented.

SROs should be aware of the Virginia Board of Education's policies and guidelines on seclusion and restraint and related local school board policies and will attend training offered by the local school system on their use of seclusion and restraint by school employees. SROs, however, must continue to operate by their own department's policies and state law regarding physical intervention and use of force.

Additionally, HCPS and the HPD/SRO will coordinate to ensure that **every** reasonable effort is made to inform the parents/guardians on the day of the incident in a language the parents/guardians can understand.

Crime Reporting

Pursuant to §22.1-279.3:1. B, Code of Virginia, law enforcement agencies are required to notify a division superintendent and/or a principal when a student in their school commits certain offenses that would be a felony if committed by an adult and the release status of the student. School superintendents who receive such reports are required to report the information to the principal of the school in which the students are enrolled. As a general practice, SROs should notify the principal as soon as practical of any significant law enforcement events occurring at or in association with the school (e.g., at a school bus stop or off-campus activity, during or outside school hours) whether or not the offense would be a felony if committed by an adult.

Pursuant to §22.1-279.3:1. D, Code of Virginia, certain types of criminal activity that come to the attention of the principal or school staff shall be reported immediately to the SRO as specified in school policy. No SRO or school administrator shall be required to file delinquency charges. After such notification is made to the SRO, HCPS will ascertain the disposition of the incident in order to complete the School/Law Enforcement Reporting form. Schools and SROs shall be encouraged to deal with school-based offenses through graduated sanctions or educational programming before a delinquency charge is filed with the juvenile court.

Threat Assessment

Threat assessments shall be conducted in accordance with local school board policies adopted as required by §22.1- 79.4., Code of Virginia and consistent with model procedures and guidelines published by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. SROs should serve as members of threat assessment teams and assist in monitoring of subject students as well as determining the need, if any, for law enforcement action.

School Safety Audits

School safety audits will be conducted annually as required by law to assess school safety conditions in schools. SROs, in collaboration with school administrators, will conduct school inspection walkthroughs using a prescribed checklist and will collaborate in other school safety audit mandates including school crisis and emergency management and response planning and preparation.

Data collection

Data will be collected on use of force, searches, questioning, arrests, and referrals to court. This data shall include what action was taken, the SRO's name and location, the student's demographic information as found in the Student Information System (includes age, grade, race, gender, disability status (if applicable), English Language proficiency status (as applicable), student offense and offense with which student was charged if applicable. This data shall be made available to the public in summary form, redacting individual identifiers.

Grievance procedure

Any student, parent/guardian, employee who believes an SRO has violated a law, policy or this MOU may file a grievance with the HPD Supervisor or the school principal. Grievances shall be processed according to HPD policies.

A standard form and HPD grievance procedures will be available in English, Spanish, Arabic, Kurdish, Tigrinya, Swahili, Russian and Ukrainian and available on the school's website, the division website, at each secondary school and at the HCPS Central Office.

Appendix B

Recommendations/statements from Members of the Task Force

- B1. Nassar Alsaadun, Parent, Welcoming Harrisonburg Council
- B1. Tiffany Brutus, Parent
- B1. Boris Ozuna, Parent, FUEGO
- B1. Karen Thomas, Grandparent, NENA
- B1. Monica Robinson, Grandparent, NAACP
- B1. Hannah Wittmer, Parent
- B2. Molly Butler, Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)
- B3. Captain Jason Kidd- Harrisonburg City Police Department
- B4. Candace Orenic, Parent
- B5. Chad Burke, Vice Principal Thomas Harrison Middle School
- B6. Master Police Officer, Tony Hermes- School Resource Officer
- B7. Durmount Perry- Special Education Teacher, Harrisonburg High School
- B8. Kaylene Seigle, HCPS School Board, Member
- B9. Onesimo Baltazar Corona- Futuro Latino
- B10. Leatrice Woods, Vice Principal, Skyline Middle School
- B11. Shonda Green, Parent
- B12. Laura Feichtinger-McGrath, Director of English Learner Programming and Title III

B1 (A collective recommendation/statement by 6 members of the Task Force)

Nassar Alsaadun, parent, Welcoming Harrisonburg Council

Tiffany Brutus, parent

Boris Ozuna, parent, FUEGO

Karen Thomas, grandparent, NENA

Monica Robinson, grandparent, NAACP

Hannah Wittmer, parent

We, the six undersigned members of the Harrisonburg Public Schools SRO Task Force, recommend that SROs not have permanent offices or a daily onsite presence in the schools. We believe that the Harrisonburg Police Department can provide the necessary law enforcement functions to HCPS without having officers stationed in schools.

There are compelling reasons for removing SROs from our schools.¹

- The presence of SROs is linked to an increase in arrests in school for low-level, non-violent childhood behaviors that historically would be handled by teachers and administrators.²
- Black and brown students, and students with disabilities, are disproportionately arrested and given criminal citations for these minor offenses.³
- From 2010-2020, 23.5% of arrests in HCPS in the 2017-2018 school year involved Black students, while just 10% of the student population was Black. In the 2017-2018 school year, 14.5% of students referred to law enforcement in Harrisonburg were Black, while Black students made up just 9.7% of the school population. There is no evidence that students of color misbehave at higher rates than their white peers.
- In 2017-2018, Hispanic students in Harrisonburg were 1.4 times more likely to be referred to law enforcement than in Virginia as a whole.
- In 2017-2018, disabled students in Harrisonburg comprised 25% of students referred to law enforcement, but just 10.9% of the school population.⁴
- There is evidence that regular interactions with police officers have a harmful effect on students' academic performance. This is especially true of Black students, who are more likely to exhibit signs of trauma as a result of these interactions.⁵
- Research shows that SROs negatively affect school climate.⁶ Of the 1,101 HHS students who responded to the 2020 Virginia school climate survey, one in four answered that they do not feel safer with SROs in school.⁷
- Trained educators, administrators, counselors and social workers are best equipped and most effective in educating and mentoring students

There are no good reasons for keeping SROs in our schools.

- Nationally, there is no evidence that SROs are effective in preventing crime or improving school safety.⁸
- Remarkably little data exists about the SRO program in Harrisonburg, despite the 25+ year history of this program and the millions of dollars we have invested in it. Of the data and information presented to the task force, we have seen no metrics that

support the need for SROs to serve any educational or mentorship function within our schools.

- More than half of the parents who attended the Task Force’s parent focus group recommended that police should not have a daily presence in schools. These are the parents who invested the most time and energy, by coming to an in-person event in the midst of a pandemic. By contrast, there is no assurance that online survey participants were actually parents or Harrisonburg residents. Thus, online survey responses are unreliable. Nonetheless, it is notable that just 56% of respondents to Harrisonburg’s community survey believed that SROs contributed to a better learning environment. The majority of remaining respondents (71%) felt they don’t contribute to better learning, and the rest were unsure.
- The Legal Aid Justice Center memo points out that “While some members of the Harrisonburg community may report feeling that the SRO program is beneficial and makes them feel safer, the data may show that those members are not the ones mostly affected by the presence of the SROs.”
- A decision to remove SROs aligns well with the HCPS Strategic Plan, which recommends “when making a decision that affects a multitude of people, use an equity lens.”
- Law enforcement functions can still be performed effectively in those rare events where a serious crime or threat is present, without a daily law enforcement presence inside the schools.

We propose that Harrisonburg City redirect the funds presently allocated for SROs to our schools. SROs have asserted, in task force meetings and at the June 2021 community presentation, that they do mentoring, drug counseling and various levels of social work. Those functions should be performed by people professionally trained and qualified to carry them out. To the degree HCPS administrators use SROs for support, schools may benefit from additional senior personnel or additional professional development for current staff. Funds should be allocated accordingly.⁹

Many other communities have created school safety plans that do not include SROs. Some districts have hired non-law enforcement personnel to work as School Safety Coaches; some have made arrangements with their local police department to have officers patrol in the vicinity of the school to minimize response time in the event of a crisis. We recommend that HCPS administrators consult with staff in Toronto, Los Angeles, Arlington, Charlottesville, and other districts that have terminated their SRO programs. This task force, despite meeting for ten months, unfortunately did not find the time to have conversations with any districts who had made that choice.

We also want to note that the problem is not a lack of training. The problem is that the fundamental role of police is different from the roles of other educational professionals, who do not directly threaten students with violence or punitive legal measures. We strongly oppose any attempt to “re-imagine” the SRO program via additional training for officers. The scarce resources we would commit to such training would be better used for improving other aspects of our schools.

Notes:

¹In the numbered points below, we will be adopting, incorporating, and referring to documents compiled by the Legal Aid Justice Center and Strategies for Youth.

² *How Do School Resource Officers Impact Racial Equity in the Nation's Schools: A Review of Research & Scholarship* (hereinafter, "Research & Scholarship"), p. 11, available at

<https://strategiesforyouth.org/sitefiles/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/How-Do-SROs-Impact-Racial-Equity-in-Schools.pdf>

³ *Research & Scholarship*, above, p. 12.

⁴ IDEA Status of Students Receiving Disciplinary Actions, Office of Civil Rights Data Collection, available at <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/profile/9/district/32518/disciplinereport>

⁵ *Research & Scholarship*, above, p. 14.

⁶ *Research & Scholarship*, above, p. 15.

⁷ Harrisonburg High School's 2020 Virginia School Climate Survey, available at

https://www.dcs.virginia.gov/sites/all/modules/secondary_climate_results/data2020/HARRISONBURG%20CITY/HARRISONBURG%20CITY%20HARRISONBURG%20HIGH.pdf

⁸ *Research & Scholarship*, above, p. 10.

⁹ Our recommendations align with those of the Arlington County Public Schools SRO Work Group, which we have relied on in composing this document.

B2

Molly Butler, Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

After many months of research, discussions, and interviews concerning School Resource Officers (SROs) in Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS), I have learned a lot about SRO programs nationally as well as our own program in Harrisonburg. I am part of this Taskforce representing the HCPS Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). I am part of SEAC as a parent of multiple children with special needs and also a former special education teacher.

Over the past months, I learned that the objective of the SRO program is to help provide an environment in schools that is safe for ALL students so they can access their education to the fullest potential. Safety is paramount for a positive educational experience.

On the whole, while not perfect, the SRO Program in Harrisonburg appears to contribute to the safety of our schools in a positive and effective way. My overall recommendation is that HCPS and Harrisonburg Police Department (HPD) **continue the SRO Program with some changes to improve its efficacy**. There are many positive aspects about our SRO program that need to be highlighted, and there are also weaknesses in the program that need to be addressed in order for it to be a program worth continuing. My specific recommendations and justifications are discussed below.

As part of the SRO Taskforce, I was part of the Research Subcommittee. The Research Subcommittee as a whole found that records and data collection across all areas of the Harrisonburg SRO Program are severely lacking. We found that there really is little to no system

of checks and balances of the program to ensure it is functioning at optimal capacity and following the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The issue of record keeping and data collection needs to be addressed ASAP to bring the program into compliance with the MOU and to ensure and have quantitative proof that the program is effective. The data collected should be reviewed regularly to pick up on any issues that need to be addressed and to amend the MOU as needed to address all issues.

Due to lack of quantitative data kept, most of the data we collected in our research was qualitative/anecdotal through interviews, questionnaires and observations and may not be representative of the entire HCPS population impacted by the SRO Program. However, the questionnaires and interviews with parents and students that followed after our research seemed to reach a broader population and gave opportunity for all constituents to voice their experiences and opinions. All of which were considered and contributed to the qualitative data collected.

Through my interviews with teachers' parents and students, I learned about the personal experiences with specific SROs in our schools. These experiences contribute to my impressions that have enabled me to make my recommendations.

One of the biggest areas of concern for safety is at Harrisonburg High School. The extreme level of overcrowding in the school contributes to higher levels of stress among students and staff. Higher levels of stress contribute to more outbreaks of aggressive behavior which puts students and staff in danger and certainly negatively affects the overall environment for learning. I have been told by multiple students at HHS that fights happen or are a threat on a daily basis.

They have said that the presence of SROs is the only thing that keeps the fights from getting completely out of control because students respect the authority of police officers. The presence of SROs also keeps some fights from happening in the school at all for fear of being held accountable by the law. Instead, they plan fights for off school grounds. Without SRO presence, students would have higher stress levels as fights become more and more out of control. Keeping order in the school is necessary for a safe learning environment and should be a combined effort by multiple authority figures, including School Administration, Staff and SROs.

The biggest positive finding from my research was that our Harrisonburg SRO Program differs from many problematic national programs in that we have a policy that SROs are not to handle school disciplinary issues. Disciplinary issues are the responsibility of school administration and staff, and SRO's do not routinely get involved in disciplinary actions. On the whole, this policy is enforced and followed by staff and administrators. My interviews with an SRO, HCPS teachers, and HCPS administrators confirmed that this policy is standard knowledge and followed by HCPS staff and SROs. Because SROs do not routinely get involved in disciplinary actions, there is much less opportunity for abuse of power, or for SROs to have negative interactions with youth. This policy is vital to the health of a positive SRO Program. It helps to provide a safer environment for learning and should remain a major tenant of the program.

As a member of the Research Subcommittee, my focus was on the SRO Program as it relates to students with special needs/disabilities. Through my research I learned that nationally, students with disabilities, like students of color, are disproportionately punished over their white, non-disabled peers. It is unclear due to lack of records and data kept within the Harrisonburg SRO Program whether this disproportionality is also true for Harrisonburg, so it must be presumed the national data carries over to our local program. These issues decrease the level of safety for

the students that fall into these groups that have biases against them and they need to be addressed.

There is a nation-wide issue of implicit bias and systemic racism. I believe a lot of these issues are born out of ignorance and lack of knowledge of, and experience with, cultural/ability groups different from one's own. The best methods for addressing the issues of bias against students with special needs and people of color is two-fold...through relationship building and through specific training.

Positive relationships with officers in the schools will not only provide a safer environment for learning, but can also be an inroad to positive relationships outside of school and as adults. Relationship aide in removing fear and stereotypes about different culture groups, so building positive relationships needs to be high priority. Relationships need to be built so people can get to know each other as people first, before identifying someone by their racial group or ability level. The earlier on these relationships happen, the less time there is to develop biases. One way to accomplish this is to have officers integrated into the school system where they can develop meaningful relationships with students from an early age and throughout their adolescent years. Collaborative Projects and events that promote a positive relationship between students/schools and police should be included in the SRO program. Events like a Youth Citizen Police Academy, sports camp run by police, after school events, safety programs, etc., would all contribute to the development of healthy and positive relationships between youth and police. I recommend the development of these types of relationship building events and activities.

The SROs in Harrisonburg already have a focus on building positive relationships with students including students of color and those with disabilities. I was told multiple stories of how SROs have made a positive impact on students that are in a risk category for being discriminated against. One story that stood out the most to me was about a young man who is large in stature and a person of color, who also has disabilities that cause impulsive, aggressive behavior. He is at HIGH risk for being mistreated because of his aggressive behaviors (caused by his disability) and the fact that he is not white. His behaviors could easily be misconstrued as being defiant and belligerent, and in turn responded to inappropriately by authorities. However, the SRO in his school had built a trusting relationship with him through his time in the school. Because of this relationship, the officer knew his behavioral challenges and understood they were part of his disability and could not be responded to in an aggressive manner or it would immediately escalate him and cause a higher level of aggression. The officer was able to relay this information to fellow officers on patrol in the community. With this knowledge, when this young man became aggressive in the community, the officers were able to deescalate the aggression in a peaceful way and avert what could easily have become a life-threatening situation for the young man had he not been known by the SRO.

Any potential SRO candidates should be thoroughly vetted for signs of racism or inherent discrimination against particular people groups. The SRO's that are chosen to be in our schools should be passionate about making meaningful and positive connections with ALL students. These positive relationships will carry over from school, into the community, and into students' adult lives, effectively reducing negative interactions with police.

The other important method for combatting bias is through education and periodic training. Education and training should include training in recognizing implicit bias. It should also include training in specific disabilities...particularly those that impact behaviors. Several disabilities have symptoms that affect behavior in a negative way (like Autism). These negative behaviors that are

caused by the disability can appear as defiance to someone untrained. Defiance is often met by punitive measures. Punitive measures as a reaction to someone's behaviors caused by their disability, can significantly escalate their negative behaviors. This escalation can in turn be met with even harsher punitive measures which again only escalates the problem instead of helping to solve it. It creates an environment that is unsafe for the student, which does not support a positive learning environment.

Trauma is another contributing factor to negative behaviors that could pose a risk. Past trauma is not easily identifiable by looking at a person. It can be very difficult to anticipate negative behaviors that are trauma related and not pure defiance. SRO's need to be trained in recognizing trauma and its effects

on people so if they are called by administrators to get involved in aggressive (criminal level) behaviors, they can recognize when a behavior is a trauma response (or caused by a disability) and respond in a way that deescalates the behavior and creates a safer environment for learning.

Thus, it is my recommendation that the Harrisonburg SRO Program significantly increase the training requirements of SROs. Training should be significantly more than 40 hours prior to

entering the SRO Program. Training and education should continue at least annually so SROs can stay up to date on the current needs of the community they serve. Training should include a

significant emphasis on factors that affect behavior (like special needs and trauma). Training should include Restorative Justice practices and of course training in combatting implicit bias and discriminatory practices.

I also think it would be beneficial to pair SROs with trained mental health professionals (social workers, psychologists, counselors, etc.) or at least increase the number of available mental health personnel in the schools to aid in dealing with problematic behaviors before it gets to the level of law-breaking behavior. The Commonwealth of Virginia recommends the following ratios for school counselors: 1:350 counselor-to-student ratio for grades K-8 and a 1:250 ratio for grades 9-12. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of not more than 1:250. These recommendations should be followed.

SROs should also be required to meet other high standards to ensure they are a good fit for the program in personality and enthusiasm. Applicants should be officers that are passionate about building positive relationships with youth and the community. They should also be sensitive to the issue of implicit bias and be open to regular training to recognize and combat biases against people of color and people with special needs/disabilities. SROs should be trained as guardians not warriors.

Another recommendation I have to improve the Harrisonburg SRO Program is to strive to have the SRO demographic reflect that of our city. We need more diversity within the SRO program (and police department in general). Harrisonburg Police Department needs to aggressively recruit officers of color to be included in the SRO program so that students of color have SROs that look like them. They could even develop a program that helps train high school students for a career in law enforcement and provide incentives that would draw in students that represent the demographics of our school and city. Having SROs that come from similar backgrounds and/or look like our students can help reduce fear of officers that some students report, and increase a sense of safety which promotes a healthier environment for learning.

Lastly, our research found that the SRO Program in Harrisonburg is significantly misunderstood or unknown. There needs to be an effort to boost awareness of the program. There needs to be education of school staff, students, parents, and the community so they can learn what the purpose of the SRO Program is to clarify what role SROs play in the school and community. Doing this will help utilize SROs in a more effective way, and will also help keep SROs accountable for doing their job of helping to keep all students safe in the schools so that learning can happen effectively.

B3

Captain Jason Kidd- Harrisonburg City Police Department

After serving on the SRO Task Force and after much thought regarding this matter, I strongly recommend for the School Resource Officers from the Harrisonburg Police Department to remain in our Harrisonburg City Public Schools. Contrary to what some attempt to argue, I believe that SROs are a deterrent to crime and other threats to safety in our schools. Preventative measures are very too difficult, perhaps even impossible, to accurately measure. It seems that many of the arguments against having SROs in the HCPS focused on data from outside of Harrisonburg and from SRO programs that were very different from the partnership between the HCPS and HPD.

I served on the MOU subcommittee and worked with the other committee members on revising the proposed MOU so that it reflected the goals of the task force of creating a document that more clearly defined the purpose of the SRO program the roles of those who are involved. I think that it is important to note that prior to this project, the MOU had not been the subject of public attention or revision from non-HCPS and non-HPD personnel aside from the attorneys representing each agency. As such, the language of the MOU was more consistent with a legal document or a police directive than an MOU that was intended for public interpretation. However, this interpretation has been healthy as we learned that we could strengthen the document overall. After revising the MOU, I believe that by taking into account the different perspectives through which the MOU will be viewed in the future, we provided a starting point for the MOU that best reflects what the varying stakeholders will want from the HCPS-HPD relationship regarding SROs. My recommendations for the MOU have been taken into account when the subcommittee brainstormed and debated the various points of the document, and the final product reflects the group's collective perspective.

It appears that many of the problems with SRO programs result from when SROs take actions based on violations of school rules or when the lines between school administrators and SROs are blurred. For example, truancy is a common reason for referrals based on national data, but here in Harrisonburg, our SROs normally have no involvement in issues related to truancy. Other examples include that in some jurisdictions around the country, SROs are considered school administrators and they enforce non-criminal matters such as school dress code, cellphone etiquette, in-class behavior issues, etc. These are not criminal matters, but can become a criminal referral based on the outcome of each case. Our local SRO program specifically states that SROs

are not to be involved in enforcing school rules that are not violations of law, which helps to separate the SROs from having a role in school discipline. I recommend that any analysis that we conduct regarding SROs takes into account the variation that exists between SRO programs - since national data typically merges all SRO programs together, it is dangerous to draw conclusions from inconclusive data.

Based on comments and observations from the HPD as well as representatives of the HCPS, it does not appear that Harrisonburg SROs are directly involved in school discipline. The HPD SROs appear to have numerous resources available to them to avoid contributing to the "pipeline to prison", such as involving school personnel in the decision-making process regarding whether or not to criminally charge a student for a delinquent act, making a referral to HPD's Restorative Justice Program rather than charging the referring the case to the court system, and then finally when a case might be referred to the court system, making recommendations for alternative consequences such as diversion, counseling courses, etc. One of my recommendations is simply to focus our local perspective and experience to drive our implementation of any changes to the SRO program, rather than allowing anecdotal and statistical data from vastly different types of SRO program from around the state and country to drive how the program is designed and how it operates in practice here in Harrisonburg. Specifically, I recommend that school administrators and HPD supervisors should be more actively involved in the SRO program in the HCPS. There should be more collaboration and regular communication about the activities and assignments of SROs. Additionally, there should be more training to HCPS about the purpose of the SRO program and the specific functions of SROs.

Finally, there have been six total arrests specifically at the schools in the last four years, according to HPD arrest data per each school location. This differs slightly from the total number of arrests from school-related incidents, as some arrests may be effected for school-related incidents when the actual arrest did not take place on school property. The data that was provided to the task force for the period from 2010-2020 indicates a change occurred around 2017 regarding arrests in HCPS - there have been many fewer arrests for school-related incidents since 2017 when compared to previous years. While arrests and subsequent referrals to diversion in the court system may have been a focus in the past, both HCPS and HPD currently stress that alternative resolutions to court referrals are the preferred option, when appropriate. I again recommend that at a supervisory and administrative level, there should be regular communication about the handling of incidents to ensure that our practices reflect the current collective goals for the SRO program.

B4

Candace Orenic, Parent

I recommend that the SRO program be continued with earnest and diligent efforts made at improving the program. The idea of ending a program based on national political agendas,

without clear and measurable data showing local impacts, and without working toward improvements, is plain failure, that's not acceptable.

My recommendations center around communication, being that was my subcommittee focus. A school climate survey taken recently showed us that 25% of students do not feel safe with officers, while 75% do. We cannot simply keep this program and ignore the 25%. The best way to deal with fear is education and knowledge. Many issues in the program can be solved with transparent and collaborative communication within the program and with community members.

Increase overall education of SRO program to help build accountability and trust within the program and with the community.

HCPS and HPD collaborate to create and maintain an SRO program specific link on the school's and HPD's website.

- Short bio/introduction to each school's SRO
- MOU
- Data on suspensions, expulsions, citations and arrests
- SRO role defined/qualifications/ training
- Written guidelines to guide staff interactions with SRO
- SRO use of force
- Student rights

HCPS and HPD collaborate to develop training and teambuilding for staff and SROs.

- Workshops together
- Virtual training modules

HCPS and HPD collaborate to educate and involve students and parents

SROs could send out a mass mailing of a postcard with short bio/introduction to households enrolled in their assigned school.

- Open house/orientation
- Social media could feature each SRO
- Grievance/Praise reporting system
- SRO specific events
- DADs on DUTY, Watchdogs, some parental safety/support group
- Host an annual community town hall on the SRO program that allows community members, HPD, and HCPS to come together to discuss and share ideas, experiences and expectations.
- Create an oversight committee consisting of members from each partner organization and community members. With a goal of reflecting on the SRO program's yearly performance.
- HCPS and HPD to implement a daily log/journal that tracks SRO interactions with students
- Yearly Performance Evaluations
- SRO self-evaluation
- Principal/student evaluation of SRO
- HPD evaluation of SRO

- Come together to discuss

The justification for these recommendations is simply supported by the lack of data presented from HCPS and HPD showing the successes and failings of the current SRO program, the mixed response by staff and community members on their understanding of the program and my personal conversations with neighbors who expressed a need for maintaining safety in our schools.

Also, data that shows that minorities are being disproportionately arrested has been presented as a reason for removal of the SRO program. My understanding is that our SRO's go to where they are called to help. Even so, the reasons behind this disproportion should be explored and resolved by doing more to address root causes of crime committed by our youth and continual training in bias with school and police staff. I believe this is an opportunity to make true progress, to promote recovery and healing within our community. Finally, during this process, alternatives to an SRO program have been discussed. I see these not as alternatives to but as separate and valuable programs needed in addition to a robust SRO program. Instituting any programs that help support, increase accountability, and address needs of our youth and their families will be a step in the right direction. Increasing parental involvement within the middle and high school will also be a win. We should make a better SRO program while working toward increasing mental health and restorative programming, and parental involvement.

B5

Chad Burke, Vice Principal Thomas Harrison Middle School

Problems:

- Unable to articulate the goal of the program
- Community is unaware of the goals of the program
- Perceptions and feeling that are connected to the SRO program

Potential Solutions:

- Develop and communicate what the SRO program is and how they can create a more inclusive community
- Be transparent in how SRO's can support students and families in the communities that they serve
- Change the narrative for some school community members from punitive to support and friendliness

I recommend that the SRO program remains and grows in the Harrisonburg City Public Schools. There is always room to improve and I would like to see the program develop to meet the needs for all students, families and community members. What that looks like and how we get there is a challenge that will take all stakeholders in the community. I believe the focus of the SRO program should be geared towards "education for all." My "why" is to work to have a safe school/community. I know that there are different perspectives regarding law enforcement but having an opportunity to work to change some community members' feelings could lead to a more inclusive environment. "All" people should feel safe in their school and community.

B6

Master Police Officer, Tony Hermes - School Resource Officer

Harrisonburg City Public Schools were closed due to the Pandemic of COVID 19, in March 2020. School officials, Administrators and teachers were all tasked with finding a way to continue to educate the youth of our community, while at the same time ensuring that students and educators alike were able to be as safe as possible from an unseen foe. Once the schools were shut down by Governor Northam, the four School Resource Officers were tasked with various jobs and duties within the Harrisonburg Police Department. Officers Skelton, Bowers, Ray and I were all eager to return to school, interact with the students, and be a part of their educational experience.

When it was learned that the HCPS policies were going to be revised, and the School Resource Officer Program was also going to be looked at, I remember telling myself, the other School Resource Officers, and my Supervisors at HPD that, when the time comes, given the social unrest at the time, the SRO's "story" needed to be told, and it needed to be told by the SRO's. While the Community Resource Unit Supervisor could speak to what the School Resource Officer Program IS...the School Resource Officers themselves are able to speak to what the program DOES. When the Task Force was launched in March 2021, I jumped at the chance to participate. It was, and still is, vital that the information about the 28- year partnership between HCPS and HPD be presented fully, accurately and in context.

History of the Program

HCPS and HPD entered into a partnership to have School Resource Officers in the High School in 1994. At that time, one officer was assigned Harrisonburg High School community. Soon, both Middle Schools had a Resource Officer working with those communities as well. Since then, there have been 28 different Resource Officers: male, female, black and white, that have applied for, and been assigned to, City Schools. They have worked with Principals, counselors, educators, and the students themselves, bringing their experience, both personal and professional, enhancing both the educational experience of the students, and safety and security of all the members of the school community. Education, Mentorship and Protection; this has always been the function of the School Resource Officer Program in Harrisonburg. To this end, each Officer attends an initial 40-hour SRO course to focus the officer for the unique challenges of working in a school. As able, they attend continuing education relevant to current school Resource Officer issues. At one time, Virginia Rules was a curriculum that the SROs would teach in specific classes. As educators have been asked to do more with less time and resources, that curriculum, though still available, has not been introduced in the classroom for several years. However, when invited, we have spoken to Law classes, driving classes and Newcomer classes, on appropriate topics. We empower driving age students with information how to navigate a traffic stop, and other interactions with police should they occur. We answer questions about the law and how it applies to them when the police interact with them. We take pride in answering questions about our roles in the school to the Newcomer classes, and that we are here as an advocate for them, we are here to protect their rights, and for their safety. It is this role that I stepped into in the fall semester of 2018. It is this role that has been the most rewarding of my 30 years with HPD. It is this role that

has allowed me to interact with students at the high school level and middle school level, cultivating relationships with them, educating them about police work, with the goal of reducing the fear and anxiety that sometimes accompanies police interaction.

Lessons Learned from the Task Force

From its inception, it was very clear that not much was known about the SRO Program within HCPS. Little was known about the mission of the SROs, what training was involved with the SROs, and what the relationships between School Administration and SROs's, and where the funding for the SROs originated. The perception existed, and seems to still exist for some, that SROs are involved with School Disciplinary issues, and that SRO's actively look to "arrest or refer" students for mistakes they make on a school campus. Questions arose about arrests out of the schools, and what the SRO's role in the school was. The Task Force and it would seem some members of the community at large had very real concerns, but I felt that these concerns stemmed somewhat from the lack of information.

Much work and investigation were conducted into the program; its history, training, policies, and particularly into the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Much time and effort were spent reaching out to members of the community, parents and the students themselves, in an effort to get their feedback on the SRO Program. Listening to the feedback from those stakeholders, I again noted that misperceptions, misinformation about the program were present within those groups. Staff and students within the school didn't know what SRO's roles are, while being supportive of our presence. Some staff and faculty believed we were there to enforce school policies. Some parents didn't know there was an SRO program, others didn't know what it was for, leading to concerns about "police in schools", and the "targeting" of students for discipline issues. I learned that some people held the belief that there should be no action or offense by a student on school property that should ever lead to a criminal charge.

It was crystal clear to me that, between HCPS and HPD, somewhere along the line our 'messaging' had failed. It was also clear that the documentation within the Program needed to be seriously strengthened. The dearth of information and documentation created a vacuum, into which people and groups could fill with bits and pieces of incomplete or inaccurate information...and then pull out an inaccurate representation of the program. It was vital to have an opportunity to present to the public, and the Task Force, the facts, and details of the SRO Program. I was given that opportunity on June 23, 2021. I took great pride and care in presenting the details and mission of the HPD/HCPS School Resource Officer Program and setting the record straight about how it operates. It was important to me that the 'human' part of the program; the relationships that the SRO's have fostered over the years be demonstrated. Statistics, numbers, and studies are impersonal, and without context, can say anything a person wants them to say. "Studies and Data" have their place, but to disregard "anecdotes" of positive relationships and interactions as irrelevant is to disregard the actual experience of young adults and children, and the importance of those experiences to those children. Those experiences are the mission of the SRO Program. Those experiences are invaluable, as those children will talk about their positive experiences to other children, and to their parents. It is those relationships and experiences that bridge the gap between the Police Dept and the youth of our community. It fosters conversations between the Officers and students that are so very important right now. The school offers a neutral setting for those conversations to happen, a setting where students have the moral support of their friends when speaking to the SRO, in an environment that they are comfortable in. It allows the SRO's the opportunity to educate students about the police profession, to offer information that empowers the students with the ability to navigate interactions with the police outside of school.

The SRO' is also a resource for the faculty and staff, as well as the parents. Assisting in appropriate classes with the students, covering topics such as safe/responsible cell phone use, the law as it applies to student age people, and being available for those parents who are not comfortable going to the police headquarters and talking about issues they may have with their kids. This is important as a parent can talk to their child's principal, counselor and file a report with the SRO if necessary. This has proven to be valuable on several occasions in my four years serving as an SRO.

Above all, the SRO's true value is in those relationships that are built by being available to the students. By being in the halls at the change of class, or in the lunchroom when they can stop and talk for a minute. By being available to those students that are not comfortable going to a teacher or counselor.

Recommendations

The School Resource Officer Program has been in place since 1994. It has been a generally effective way to reach out to and educate the youth of our community. It has, for the most part, operated under the radar so to speak, as it does not draw attention to itself. The SROs are carefully selected, and have proven to be an asset to the HCPS Community. It has, however, gone too long without an upgrade so to speak. In a society that is increasingly asking for transparency and access from their Police Departments, the same should be expected of the SRO Program.

Therefore, it is my recommendation that the SRO Program be continued, but with more transparency and documentation built into the program. This transparency begins with the messaging. The goal should be that every parent, student, and new staff member be aware of the program, its function and purpose, and its limitations. This can be done by developing protocols on how the SROs are involved in student/parent orientations. There should be information about the program, its purpose and function, the individual SRO, and contact information for the SRO's supervisor on each Schools Webpage, and be translated into various languages, for more equitable access to all members of the community.

Clear Protocols should be in place addressing when school administrators can involve an SRO, and there should be documentation for these requests. Both HCPS and HPD should have a copy of this documentation. As well, if a teacher makes a request for an SRO to address their class on a topic, this also should be documented. If a parent, student, or a counselor request to speak with an SRO, this should be documented. If an SRO engages in an official capacity; stolen/lost property reports, traffic crash assistance...etc., documentation should follow. This documentation can be compiled into an "annual report" and given to the School Board, or their designee to review at a specified interval, possibly to coincide with the review of the MOU. This report can be made available to the public if allowed by law/policy. This accomplishes the goal of detailed documentation and transparency.

It is my recommendation that SRO's attend appropriate training sponsored by HCPS as it applies to their function within the schools. Conversely, school administrators, Central Office personnel should attend training for the SROs as appropriate. This would lead to better communication and understanding between Administration and the SRO and promote a team mindset.

I recommend that a member of the school administration be included in the interview panel during the hiring process for new School Resource Officers. This allows input from the schools into who serves in their schools, and promotes idea sharing between HCPS and HPD. At the last NASRO Conference the SRO's attended in Florida, there were many school administrators that attended training with their SROs.

I recommend that an evaluation system be set forth and agreed upon by HCPS and HPD, with appropriate input from the administrators of the school where the SRO is assigned.

I recommend that School Resource Officers be utilized in the classrooms more, particularly in the High School. SROs are an asset to newcomers, new drivers and those studying aspects of the law. Whether there is an official lesson plan or rather a Q and A session would at the instructor's discretion. Appropriate documentation would be required.

Final Thoughts

People who interact with police officers, whether negatively or positively, tend to remember those interactions. School Resource Officers can help those with negative interactions/trauma, by being a consistent, accessible, and non-enforcement presence in the schools. I have personally spoken to a teacher who informed me that she was having a trauma reaction to my uniform. The next week she approached me and added that she feels her being able to see me and talk to me daily, on her own time, helped her as she worked through that uniform related trauma. In like manner, being open and approachable can help those students in similar situations. Through education and example, if your SROs are able to reduce the anxiety and fear of police that some of our young people may have, then perhaps we can help avoid the bad decisions that might be made out of that fear in a future interaction with police. At the same time, SROs can build new relationships with those students who reach out to them. I know students who have interacted with police on the weekends and away from school and have asked for the SROs by name as someone they want to speak to. These students are examples of the trust that is possible to be fostered between student and officer. Your School Resource Officers are there for every person in the HCPS Community.

B7

[Durmout Perry - Special Education Teacher, Harrisonburg High School](#)

I appreciated the opportunity to work with a group from across the community with diverse perspectives to study this topic.

I have been with HCPS for 13 years and attached to the high school for 10 of those years. My work includes teaching in the classroom, a lot of informal conversation with students in common spaces, classroom observations, and family interactions- both in and outside of school building. I am not a resident of Harrisonburg, but my children attend HCPS. I also have a lot of conversations with SROs on a daily basis. Because of my status as an employee and a non-resident parent, it is absolutely not my place to make a recommendation to keep police officers in the Harrisonburg schools. However, should the SRO program continue, there are many areas that need improvements.

Some recommendations:

- Everyone should be aware there are police officers in the building and all should know what those police officers can and cannot do. That information should be on the HCPS

website and each of the school's websites. The information there should include an overview of the program and details about the role of the school resource officer (SROs) in relation to school discipline. Clear grievance procedures should be easily accessible and understood. All information should be available in multiple languages and in an audio format.

- Data regarding interactions should be regularly and formally collected, easily accessible, publicly shared, and meaningfully discussed with stakeholders, including community members.
- The MOU must be explicit as to not allow police officers to turn minor infractions that may be subjective and inconsistent into criminal offenses. As per the ACLU, children should not be subject to formal law enforcement intervention for ordinary school discipline issues.
- Put into place data collection/documentation procedures based on best practices from model policies with data meetings scheduled with stakeholders' multiple times per school year with intention of examining trends/disparities/areas of concern.
- The SRO should receive ongoing training in the areas of:
 - Adolescent development
 - Implicit bias and anti-racism
 - Cultural responsiveness
 - Trauma informed care
 - Mental health issues
 - Appropriate responses to students with disabilities and knowing the rules/rights of such youth
 - Specific de-escalation strategies for youth
 - Working with youth in groups
 - Working with both youth and adults along the spectrum of immigration status

B8

[Kaylene Seigle, HCPS School Board, Member](#)

I serve on the MOU subgroup.

Although the information that has been provided came from other localities, it has helped in some ways to compare how Harrisonburg SROs and the Police Department handles situations with students and their community. I personally try to keep my focus on what 'Harrisonburg' is doing.

During my research with presentations and small groups, I have learned different perspectives. One perspective is, that students and families of different cultures has had negative experiences with law enforcements or militants. I've become aware of these fears and concerns due to those experiences. Another thing I've discovered is, there's currently little communication with students, parents and some staff about School Resource Officers being in the schools and why they are there.

In order to address these issues, I believe the SRO program should be introducing during Orientation. Families would be more aware of the program, plus it would help give an explanation

to what the program is about and the role of the officers being in the schools. It may not be a 100% solution, but it would be a start.

Harrisonburg Police Department has been training their officers about community policing and racial bias. HPD currently trains on how to address situations in cases of mental health crisis. This type of training is applied to SROs as well. They know the students and staff and their crisis.

School Resource Officers are officers who choose to be in the schools, to keep students and teachers safe from active shooters and other dangerous scenarios, not because they are given an assignment.

My recommendation is for the program to remain, but it can be reimaged.

B9

Onesimo Baltazar Corona

Introduction

The role that each person plays in maintaining stability and security in communities is a determining factor for things to be in place and to work as they should, anticipating outcomes that are not noticed (things are not noticed when everything is fine), people always talk just a little about the good things but when something bad happens, revolutions might happen to attempts to disturb or break structures that seek to damage that stability and the right balance, and make it fail. This happens in all types of communities, with changes that are due to the particularities, conditions and needs of each people, but the meaning is the same, that each one does what he has to do to maintain balance and security.

In schools everyone plays a role so that a normal day is really normal and that everything goes smoothly and not because of the actions or tasks of those who are involved (teachers, parents, officers, administrators and others) in the day to day of the schools, it does not mean that things are not being done, so it is necessary to ask yourself over and over again and decide if it is worth moving the pieces drastically without knowing the causes or the reasons with accuracy and depth since this can cause an instability, or evaluate and follow up on what is being done to accommodate the pieces according to the needs and gradually.

1. Do not remove, it's better to improve

SROs should not be removed from schools without having reliable evidence that they are not useful for the safety of students and staff. What has to be done is a review of the duties/tasks they are in charge of and give timely follow-up to them so that they meet the objectives which must be specific, measurable, achievable and realistic to guarantee safety, a healthy and stable environment in educational centers. SROs play an important role in schools that is sometimes not seen because the participation and involvement of all stakeholders is little or none. When something is not working, the necessary changes must be made to identify areas for improvement, not discard what is built and adjust without having the evidence to support that

there are no more options to explore or alternatives to consider. The safety of the students can be guaranteed by different sectors, including parents, teachers, and of course police officers when the responsibilities are perfectly well established and defined and each one fulfills the function that they need to do.

Specific recommendation:

- Program continuous evaluation.
- Delineation of responsibilities.

2. Open and continuous communication

Effective and clear communication can be a key factor in making a system functional. When those involved have in their hands the necessary elements for better decision-making, the results are effective. When it comes to the safety of children, this point turns out to be more relevant.

The communication mechanisms between parents, teachers, school staff and SROs must be at the same level so that everyone identifies what is being done. When those effective procedures and those that are not, are identified, it is easier to make the necessary changes. The opinions of everyone involved is important, but it is more important when they are really considered to improve safety environments in schools, because of this, good and constant communication will always be an effective tool to establish controls and parameters that guarantee the safety of students. Knowing what role each group or person plays in the safety of schools is essential to know how to respond and what actions to take, and this can be achieved thanks to effective communication and that each one knows their obligations so that they act based on the facts.

Specific recommendation:

- Involvement of all stakeholders in the flow of information.
- Follow-up meetings.
- Accurate reports.
- Accept suggestions and make necessary changes with the necessary justification.

3. Evaluation and monitoring

It is difficult to know the effectiveness of something when it is not evaluated or you do not have data to compare with or even worse, the necessary changes are not carried out to make a program functional according to real needs.

This is why it is necessary to establish mechanisms that allow an impartial evaluation and, in this way, to be able to know those positive and negative results and from there, carry out improvements and monitoring in order to always implement processes that seek better results and impact.

The numbers always indicate or allow to see those things that need to be eliminated, changed or improved, that is why the actions always have to be focused on applying them with impartiality, justice and equality, and if these conditions do not occur, it is necessary to review the reasons why, to have clear and precise answers to all the questions that those affected have, in this case, answers to parents and students.

If the specific problem lies in something that can be accurately identified and changed, it will be easy to carry out continuous improvement. An example is, when an imbalance is detected

between the number of white, Latino or African American students who are reported or referred with police officers, we must look for the right answer, and the responsible must be able to respond and explain with evidences and necessary proofs. Parents need to know the reasons why it happens and discard unfounded theories

before taking actions that can generate radical changes and break with the previously adopted and functional schemes.

Specific recommendation:

- Evaluation and feedback to programs.
- Detection of weak areas and opportunities for improvement.
- Involvement of all stakeholders

4. Capacity and teamwork

Training and having the necessary tools to carry out a job is essential. Personnel charged with ensuring the safety of children in a school environment should be able to do the job. Currently, there are many factors that can complicate problems such as, easy access to technology (when is used incorrectly), social media (abuse), misinformation or access to a lot of fake information, are some of the elements that contribute negatively to behaviors, and when we talk about the relationship with school safety, we realize the need to have staff with sufficient capacity to help a good coexistence.

By having professional teams that understand and apply concepts related to cultural competence, inclusion, equity, justice, and that are committed to school safety not as a number or a task to fulfill but as an essential action to integrate different multicultural groups in safe environments, they make a difference in the results that can be achieved.

Specific recommendation:

- Continuous training and evaluation.
- Follow-up to the bad and good outcomes (findings).
- Continuous improvement of procedures.

5. Multidisciplinary groups

Conditions and needs change according to external environments and other factors that affect the course of a program. When it comes to the safety of the students, and with full knowledge of the new needs, it is important to have multidisciplinary groups that help identify which are the best alternatives or changes that must be implemented in response to current conditions.

Professionals in social justice, mental health, family development, restorative justice, prevention, behavior, human relations, child psychology, mentorship programs, among other disciplines must work together to find solutions or new alternatives. It is not about replacing someone just because there are failures, (which have not been tried to solve) rather it is about working together to look for options and that the studies, evaluations, feedback from those involved are the parameters that indicate with data and tests the weakness or inefficiency or what is not being done well and if the numbers show what need to be changed, then decisions must be made to replace or eliminate that something that is not working.

Specific recommendation:

- Encourage teamwork.

- Professionals in different areas that help maintain security.
- Monitoring and continuous improvement of programs.

6. Parental (Community) involvement

Actively listening to the feelings and ways of thinking of the community to modify plans and programs is effective when they are really listened to, when their concerns are addressed and taking care of them in an equally and impartial way. This make sense when justice and active listening is present.

The connection and participation between those who have the responsibility to ensure safety in the student community is relevant when everyone is working to achieve the same goals.

Changing the procedures with everyone's feedback is effective because it is not the decision of just one, it the opinion from different stakeholders. Parents need to understand that to have safety schools they need to be more active and participate with actions. At the end, parents need to adopt the idea that the problems of one, affect another at different levels.

By understanding the interests of the community and especially the needs, specific strategies can be designed where parents are protagonists in the development of school plans.

Specific recommendation:

- Encourage integration with activities that involve parents more.
- Improve communication between schools and parents.

In conclusion, School Resource Officers must remain because they are a fundamental piece for the student's safety. What is need to be done is to evaluate the program and make the necessary changes or adjustments to ensure effectiveness by listening all of them involved.

B10

[Leatrice Woods, Vice Principal, Skyline Middle School](#)

Introduction

Being a part of this work has been rewarding in that I have met and worked with a number of good people on the task force. Additionally, I have learned quite a bit about the program, its inadequacies, and its potential. With that being said, I have worked for Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS) for 13 years. Twelve of those years were spent at Smithland Elementary School as a classroom teacher. This is my first year as an assistant principal at Skyline Middle School. My niece (5th grader) and nephew (10th grader) are students of HCPS. I will be quite honest in noting that I am not a Harrisonburg resident and am not sure I can make the decision concerning whether or not SROs remain present on our campuses; however, I can assure you that if it persists, there must be significant changes.

Education

The Research Subcommittee, Community Forums, and interviews demonstrated a vast amount of misinformation concerning what SROs are actually doing in schools. All stakeholders (community members, students, families, teachers, administrators, etc.) need to know exactly what role SROs have in schools. Stakeholders should clearly understand and be able to easily articulate what an SRO can do, what an SRO cannot do, and what SROs do in the HCPS schools. There should also be a clear grievance protocol outlined for families and community members. These pieces of information should be outlined clearly and easily accessible - in multiple languages and in audio on district and school websites, handouts, presentations/tables at Open Houses and Back to School nights, etc.-to all stakeholders. This information should not be riddled with educational or legal jargon. Additionally, the district's SRO program could create and release bi-monthly newsletters which are sent out in multiple languages and in multiple modes of communication to families of children of HCPS and community members. This newsletter could highlight things SROs are doing in schools, ways in which they are a part of the community, resources for families based upon what families are struggling with, etc.

It is pertinent to note, when a program is not understood by those it is supposed to protect and assist, they cannot hold the program and its participants accountable. When stakeholders are not able to hold the program and its participants accountable, they are stripped of their safety and comfort. When a program is not understood, it is viewed as concealed and protected by stakeholders. It is in this way stakeholders can easily become silent casualties. To correct this, stakeholders must be educated and held in a high esteem. They must be considered those who need to be protected, not those who others need to be protected from.

Documentation

Based upon the Research Committee's findings, there is no evidence of records kept by HCPS or HPD concerning the interactions SROs have with students or other stakeholders. This in itself is problematic because one cannot be held accountable when there is no evidence of wrongdoing *or* appropriate behavior when handling situations. The SRO program must be transparent. Data concerning SRO interactions should be formally collected on a regular basis. The data should be easily accessible to all stakeholders. A committee of stakeholders should be formed to review the data collected quarterly. Grievances should also be collected in an accessible manner and should also be reviewed and followed up on by the committee. With data collection and the analysis of that data comes accountability. With accountability comes actionable steps for improvement. Without this in place, the SRO program will never serve the ever-changing needs of our population and community.

Clear Standards and Protocols

Clear standards and protocols must be established. These need to be clearly established and communicated to all stakeholders. The "Education" section of this document can be referenced. An SRO manual must be created and shared with all stakeholders. The manual must be clear and concise. It must not be riddled with jargon of any kind. It must also be distributed and available to all stakeholders in multiple languages - written and in audio formats - and on multiple platforms.

Training

Training with HPD SROs and HCPS administrators should take place each year. This training should review the purpose of SROs, all standards and protocols, documentation practices, grievance protocols, and the SRO manual. The SRO manual should also be reviewed for necessary changes each year.

SROs should also receive certified and ongoing training and evaluations in the following areas - implicit and explicit bias, anti-racism, cultural responsiveness, mental health, working with students with special needs, working with families who are maneuvering poverty, and de-escalation with children.

School Administrators, School Mental Health Employees, and SROs should be required to meet at the beginning of each year (and throughout) to share specific attributes of the school's population and appropriate ways of communicating and working with the population. Throughout the year, particular students should be highlighted and ways of appropriately working to help them and their families should be shared.

Summary

I feel SROs should stay in schools for the remainder of the year with work beginning now until over the summer to redesign the SRO program in HCPS schools. Once the recommendations for redesign are in place, a probationary year should be enacted. During the probationary year, all aspects of the redesign should be fully implemented and followed to fidelity. There is value in having a positive presence of diverse officers in schools because it enables all children to see another profession that they could choose. In my very new position as an assistant principal during an amazingly tough year, there have been five families (to my knowledge) who have worked with the SRO to get connected to resources needed in their lives. The positive impact on five families is not enough to justify the existence of a program; however, with the redesign and changes, that impact would be larger. Let me be clear, the SRO program needs drastic changes and improvements. Not only are tangible changes pertinent, a mindset shift is necessary. SROs should be utilized to help build positive relationships inside the school AND protect children from the outside world, not protecting children from children or staff from children.

[B11](#)

[Shonda Green, Parent](#)

My final recommendation is that SROs be removed from the Harrisonburg City Public Schools. My recommendation is based on my personal experience with SRO's, the programs failure to provide evidence of policy, procedures, supervision and success. I also based my conclusion on the feedback this committee received from school surveys, community climate assessments, focus groups comments and individual interviews conducted with community members. I am also deeply concerned with the impact armed officers have on black and brown children.

Lack of Appropriate Training:

My personal experience with SRO's was that they stated they are like social workers, counselors, occasional traffic control at front entrance during morning arrival, and mentors in the schools. My concern is that social workers and counselors are required to take continuing education courses yearly as well as on-going training throughout the year. They are required to have a license in order to practice. I am concerned they are providing services they are not properly trained to do. According to SRO's, the training they are required to take is a 40hr training every 2 years. The training topic is also optional and not required. SROs should be

required to take cultural diversity classes, child psychology courses, positive interaction, and several other trainings geared toward working with children. Their current training does not include these topics.

Racial Implication/Profiling of Students in School

They are police trained to enforce the law and shoot at their own discretion. This has caused safety concerns for black and brown children as there is a national crisis regarding negative interactions between police and black and brown people. There is on-going racial profiling and countless deaths to demonstrate there is a serious problem with people and how they engage with black and brown people. There is definitely an injustice. All students/people should be treated equally regardless of the color of their skin. Students that are uncomfortable around police which are also SROs are faced with the challenge of concentrating while at school. Many may be distracted at the mere presence of police so close to them. School should be a safe place for students to learn in a positive learning environment. It is a fact that students do not learn when distracted, afraid and worried/fearful. Many black and brown students feel this way due to negative police interactions nationwide with police. Students should not be responsible for trying to get along with police or prove they are not doing anything wrong, or how to have positive interaction with police. This should be the responsibility of police.

The Role of SRO's in HCPS unclear:

SROs were not able to provide exactly what type of mentoring they do. There was one example of how they interact with students. There was a girl that did not speak to SRO on the first day of school and began to smile at SRO a few weeks later. SROs also stated they give out candy to students. These interactions are clearly in no way mentoring.

I also observed a newly hired female resource SRO having no interaction with students or parents during a welcome back to school day. I observed her walking throughout the halls carrying gear. I purposely walking past her, made eye contact, and smiled and nodded my head and she turned her head looking forward, with no acknowledgement at all. This was the same officer that stated during a Zoom call with SRO sub group that she “would not take the position as an SRO if she could not carry her firearm because she needed to get home to her child ever night”. Although she stated she loved kids and looked forward to working with them, she stated she could not provide examples of how she would initiate positive interactions with children. It is my opinion that someone needing to carry their firearm around children all day should not work with them because there must be some sort of fear or uncertainty. Such officers should be assigned to the streets in order to enforce laws and possibly fight crime with their firearms.

Community Perceptions of Fear and Retaliation:

As a task force member, I was concerned with how many black and brown people in the community fear the police and were afraid to speak to me regarding the issue in fear of retaliation. There were also many white people that I spoke with that were afraid to speak out regarding their opinion about the police in HCPS, fearing retaliation. The same was true from school employees in addition to being afraid to lose their jobs if they did not side with police remaining in schools. My further concerns would be just how many others feel the same exact way but remain silent out of fear.

Recommendations

If HCPS decides to continue a relationship with HPD then it is important that the program be revised and include the following recommendations:

1. Change their titles to something more child friendly. Such as School Safety Coaches/Coordinators.
2. They should not have offices. If they need a space to address an issue school, an administrator should be responsible for locating such a temporary space. For example, the conference room. They are guests in our schools, not employees of the school.
3. They should not carry firearms. If there were an instance where there is an intruder, local police would be dispatched anyway. The police would then come to enforce the law not SRO's as they stated they are not there to enforce law nor have they needed to do so. One SRO could not secure the entire perimeter. Carrying firearms being discharged should be contingent on students being out site. If the SRO is face to face with an intruder standing near students or staff, what is the procedure? When asked SRO was unable to provide an answer. Stating it has never happened.
4. I strongly recommend that moving forward SROs be required to complete trainings with the following topics: cultural sensitivity, family dynamics, child psychology, working with students with disabilities, and specific Autism training as some behaviors may appear defiant or pose a threat. SROs should be mandated to attend sensitivity, and race relations training. They need to be aware that not making eye contact in some cultures is not disrespectful but viewed as being respectful. They need to be made aware that because they are all white, black and brown people have different experiences and challenges they will never have to face simply because they have a different skin color. This training should take place throughout the school year and should be at least 40 hrs. in length per topic. As well as a test, with a passing score of 90% mastery in order to determine understanding.
5. A community oversight group should be formed. This will help address the lack of trust many in the community and in the schools have expressed. The group should be comprised of parents, 1 school administrator, 1 member representing a minority group, such as the NAACP, 1 high school student, 1 middle school student, and a representative from Dr. Richard's office. The group will be tasked with monitoring the SRO program by reviewing data, holding SROs accountable for what they are required to do and what they do not do within their clearly defined role, provide input of shadowing and observations of SROs, and participate in hiring process.
6. The hiring process should require experience with working with children. HCPS staff administrator and equity group members should be involved in decision making of the hired SROs.
7. SROs should be required to collect data daily and submit weekly iteration logs and reports to admin team, their supervising officer, and community oversight group.
8. SROs should be required to attend school-based functions in order to build rapport in a more relaxed environment, allowing for more communication.
9. SROs should also participate in registration/back to school day. This would allow them to properly introduce themselves to students and parents. They should also be required to conduct a police interaction workshop for students. Especially, students of different ethnic backgrounds, special needs students, and students new to the school and community. SROs should also build a strong rapport with the Black Student Union, Hispanic Club and other clubs of that sort as well.

Laura Feichtinger-McGrath, Harrisonburg City Public Schools, Educator

Appreciated the opportunity to work with a group from across the community with diverse perspectives to study this topic.

I have been with HCPS for 23 years and attached to the high school for 11 of those years. I spend 30-40 hours a week with adolescents, primarily at the high school level. My work includes a lot of informal conversation with students in common spaces, classroom observations, and family interactions- both in and outside of school building. I am not a resident of Harrisonburg. Because of my status as an employee and a non-resident parent, it is absolutely not my place to make a recommendation to keep police officers in the Harrisonburg schools. However, should the SRO program continue, there are many areas that need significant improvements.

Overarching thoughts

We must pay attention to the climate of the school and our classrooms, recognizing when and where implicit bias exists. We must be sure that our policies and decisions are made thinking of our most vulnerable students or those who will be most deeply impacted by our decisions. We must pay attention to discipline disparities and be sure that all “rules” are applied consistently and fairly after first being sure that the rules are not hidden. Those of us in school buildings are very aware of the mental health issues of adolescents and we must continue to learn how to help nurture resiliency. Having structure and high expectations are necessary for that. All school policies must be clearly and transparently interpreted by school employees and students/families. Schools and families are in a partnership regarding the responsibility for our students. Students spend significantly more time out of school than in school, particularly throughout the pandemic.

To reiterate and expand, all school policies must be clearly and transparently interpreted by school employees, students/families and, in this case, law enforcement.

Some recommendations:

- Everyone should be aware there are police officers in the building and all should know what those police officers can and cannot do. That information should be on the HCPS website and each of the school’s websites. The information there should include an overview of the program and details about the role of the school resource officer (SROs) in relation to school discipline. Clear grievance procedures should be easily accessible and understood. All information should be available in multiple languages and in an audio format.
- Data regarding interactions should be regularly and formally collected, easily accessible, publicly shared, and meaningfully discussed with stakeholders, including community members.
- The MOU must be explicit as to not allow police officer to turn minor infractions that may be subjective and inconsistent into criminal offenses. As per the ACLU, children should not be subject to formal law enforcement intervention for ordinary school discipline issues.

Memorandum of Understanding

The revised MOU:

- increased transparency
- increased data collection
- elimination of language that could be perceived as giving HPD opportunities to surveil/eavesdrop on students
- addition of stronger language for expectations of family communication, including the use of interpreters as necessary
- increase in clarity regarding school misbehavior and criminal behavior

Research

The work of the Research subgroup found little to no documentation/evidence/data on the SRO program.

Recommendation:

Put into place data collection/documentation procedures based on best practices from model policies with data meetings scheduled with stakeholders' multiple times per school year with intention of examining trends/disparities/areas of concern.

Recommendation:

- The SRO should receive ongoing training in the areas of:
- Adolescent development
- Implicit bias and anti-racism
- Cultural responsiveness
- Trauma informed care
- Mental health issues
- Appropriate responses to students with disabilities and knowing the rules/rights of such youth
- Specific de-escalation strategies for youth
- Working with youth in groups
- Working with both youth and adults along the spectrum of immigration status

Recommendation:

Annual training with HPD and HCPS for **administrators**, including key Central Office staff, to include a review of roles, communication protocols and documentation procedures. There should be an updated manual or guidebook provided at this training.

Programming – In my job as Director of EL/Title III, I encourage all of my sheltered classes to invite community helpers into their classrooms to explain their roles. These visits are planned into our lessons. Certainly, these new/newer arrivals have had limited exposure to American law enforcement and do not have that unique historical trauma that many from over-policed areas of the US have had. For them, the introduction of school-based police officers as helpers does provide a positive foundation to build upon. This particular population is often undocumented and the adults are often living in fear. The SROs at the high school have – through the years - been there to support undocumented teens who are the victims of criminal activity, particularly trafficking. These young people would most likely not have alerted law enforcement otherwise.

There are a lot of kids and some adults, both immigrant and non-immigrant, who have limited understanding of what is considered criminal and they are susceptible to misinformation through social media and word-of-mouth. Law-related lessons would be beneficial to both students and some adults.

End of document