

Dear Dr. Cheatham and Members of the MMSD School Board:

We, MMSD high school nurses, dedicate ourselves to serving our students. We, as public health servants, implore you to continue the Educational Resource Officer (ERO) program in our high schools.

In a perfect world, law enforcement would not need to be part of our children's learning environment. But we are not living in a perfect world. We face great challenges in the work we do to promote the health and well-being of our student body. These great challenges extend beyond illness and disease. Schools are not immune from the threats plaguing the health of our larger community. We already know gun-violence, drug abuse and human trafficking show no respect for boundaries, and that includes the walls of a school.

Our EROs are a vital link to the safety and public health of our school. Our officers assist in creating the weekly school safety plan, they work closely with members of our student services team, they defuse in-school conflicts, and they establish valuable relationships with our students. Both staff and students have great respect for our community officers. They talk with students, offer options and defuse situations that might otherwise result in arrest. They are honest and, therefore, trusted.

As nurses, we are first responders to emergency situations in our schools. We are called into situations involving guns, assaults, and drugs. We rely on the support of our EROs to help us manage such critical situations. They intervene when there are threats of physical violence to our students and staff. They reduce the dispatch time between EMS and the school because of their direct line to EMS. They have disarmed individuals in our schools when called upon. The sense of security they bring to volatile incidents allows us to focus on the emergent medical needs of the students involved.

It is difficult to imagine doing our work without the support of our ERO. Each day we, along with other staff, help students learn positive ways to deal with the stress and conflict encountered within and without our building. EROs play a vital role in this effort. Many staff we have spoken with will seriously consider leaving their jobs without an ERO on site.

Schools do not develop gangs, manufacture guns and drugs, or promote fights as a way to resolve conflict. These issues extend into our schools from the larger community. While we embrace the need to think of new ideas for positive solutions for our challenges, the removal of the community officer is not the answer. We fear this solution will come at the detriment of the public health of our school-community.

We invite you to come spend a day at our schools. Witness for yourselves the work our officers do. Despite the public perception being put forth, our EROs offer heart, not hurt. Our students regularly seek out the ERO for counsel. We witness joking and laughter during passing periods and at lunch. We start our week feeling well-informed and with a plan of action after our Monday morning briefings. And we feel a sense of security that allows us to focus on the work of educating and supporting our students.

Do we need additional mental health services available in our schools? Absolutely! But it would be short sighted to create funding for these services by sacrificing EROs.

In closing, we offer our full support to the officers who help us in this mission of ensuring the public health of our schools.

Sincerely,

Margaret Corbae, RN, MPH and Meg Goss, RN, MPA, La Follette HS

Marie Dietrich, RN, MSN and Jane Imholte, RN, MSN, Memorial HS

Stephanie Gramann, RN, MSN and Lauri Ysen, RN West HS

Bonnie Ohm, APNP and Kelly Sexson, RN East HS

Carol McCarthy, RN, MSN, PhD District-wide Nurse