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School Resource Officer Community Engagement School Board Report

Purpose

As a part of the decision making process regarding the school resource officer contract up for renewal, the school community and others were invited to come together and discuss the use of school resource officers (SROs) in Mankato Area Public Schools. The goal was to engage students, parents and community members in dialogue to gain their perspectives on the topic of SROs in MAPS. Participants were encouraged to provide feedback, as well as recommend changes and new practices they would like to see implemented. Every attempt was made to keep any information coming from the district as neutral. The feedback from the sessions would be summarized by theme into a report for the school board for their consideration.

Process

Engagement sessions:

Engagement event locations, times and intended participants.

Engagement sessions were released to the public in a Mankato Area Public Schools press release inviting students, parents, and community members to the open sessions.

PWMS Cafeteria: October 29th, 6:30-8pm. Communities of Color. This event was for parents of students of color and students of color who attend PWMS and East High School. Administration and liaisons reached out to our families with students at PWMS or East.

PWMS Cafeteria: November 2nd, 5:30pm-7pm. Administration and liaisons reach out to their families with students at or will attend PWMS or East. Open to the public.

West Auditorium: November 5th, 5:30pm-7pm. Administration and liaisons reached out to their families with students who attend or will attend West and DMMS. Open to the public.

East Auditorium: November 10th, 5:30pm-7pm. Administration and liaisons reached out to their families with students at or will attend PWMS or East. Open to the public. Canceled due to the weather.

Lincoln Auditorium: November 11th: 5:30-7pm. Communities of Color. This event was designated for immigrant and refugee families. Mankato Area Public School liaisons would be present to help facilitate the conversation. Liaisons reached out to our families with students from their respected schools. Open to the public.

Virtual: November 17th, 5:30pm. This will be a virtual event for those who could not attend the other events. Liaisons are reached out to their families with students at their respected schools. Open to the public.

Lincoln Auditorium: November 20th, 10:30am-11:30am. Communities of Color. This event was designated for our immigrant and refugee families. Mankato Area Public School liaisons would be present to help facilitate the conversation. Liaisons reached out to our families with students at their respected schools. Open to the public.

For most of these sessions, approximately 20 to 40 people attended. Our liaisons were present for several of them to help with interpretation with their respective families. Ignite the Youth had members present at every session. Most of these sessions had facilitators from the YWCA and the Mankato Area Diversity Council. Most sessions included an introduction to the topic and then breakout sessions to engage participants through a series of questions. Sessions ended with statements made by participants that wanted to share their individual thoughts or those from their respective groups.

A survey was open to the public on Speak Out Mankato for approximately four weeks for anyone that wanted to complete the survey. Slightly more than 300 people completed the online survey. The largest percentage of people completing the survey were born between 1970-79 and the second largest group born between 1980-89. Approximately 8% of the survey respondents would fall within the age range of our students. The majority of those who completed the survey were female.

Student sessions

Principals at PWMS, East, and West held listening sessions with students in their respective schools to gather information around the relationship between SROs and MAPS. Additionally, Superintendent Peterson met with groups of students at Mankato East High School, Prairie Winds Middle School and Dakota Meadows Middle School.

District Leadership Team

During several district leadership team meetings as well as a small group session consisting of various district leaders across the district met to discuss the same questions asked during the engagement sessions.

Themes

Community engagement events:

Positive Reasons for SROs- Numerous response can be grouped into these categories:

- ☐ SROs provide safety by being present for students and staff
- ☐ Develop positive relationships with students
- ☐ Breakdown barriers and build trust with students
- ☐ Protect students from drugs, fights, outside intruders
- ☐ Law enforcement career mentors

Negative Reasons for SROs-Numerous responses can be grouped into these categories:

- ☐ Students feel intimidated, unnerving, fear, controlled by their presence
- ☐ News of SROs in media is different
- ☐ Ignites fears/trauma in students of color, lack of trust for police officers
- ☐ Representation of systematic abuse, generational trauma
- ☐ Suspension rates higher in schools with resource officers
- ☐ Police discriminate against people of color
- ☐ School to prison pipeline
- ☐ Lack of appropriate training to work with students
- ☐ Carrying a gun is threatening for many students
- ☐ Administrators should use parents instead of police
- ☐ Administrators rely too much on SROs, especially for our students of color

Survey

[Survey Results](#)

Students

Positive:

- ☐ They build relationships with students for the present and future
- ☐ They keep the school safe
- ☐ Students can talk to them about legal issues, likes drugs and alcohol use
- ☐ They can break things up if needed
- ☐ They can help you when you are in trouble

Negatives:

- ☐ They discriminate
- ☐ They are intimidating and make students feel uncomfortable
- ☐ Many students avoid the SROs
- ☐ Bad experiences with police in the past - trauma
- ☐ Someone carrying a gun in school is scary

Some other comments and thoughts by students (West):

If you have had any interaction with an SRO, how would you describe that experience?

- ☐ I have been ticketed by Officer Mohr two times, and even though I was in trouble, he seemed like he really cared about me.
- ☐ He seems more like a teacher than a cop.

- ☐ I have had good interactions with him, but I have heard some kids say that they will not talk to him. They have said he seems like a good guy, and they might talk to him if he wasn't wearing a police uniform.
- ☐ I talk to him in the cafeteria. I see a lot of kids talking with him.

Do you believe SROs support or disrupt your school experience?

- ☐ Doesn't really have an effect on me.
- ☐ I like seeing Officer Mohr.
- ☐ When I have been in trouble, I feel like he has been supportive. It would have been worse if it were just a regular cop. Mohr shows he cares about kids.
- ☐ I don't feel strongly one way or another, but I do think that having a police officer in school makes some kids feel uncomfortable.

Should partnership between the school and Mankato Public Safety look different moving forward?

- ☐ I think it works how we have it.
- ☐ Some kids might feel better if Mohr didn't wear a uniform

School Resource Officer Program (East)

- ☐ I know we have one, but I don't interact with them.
- ☐ I've never talked with them.
- ☐ The money could go somewhere else; seems intimidating and if it makes students uncomfortable, can they wear 'normal' clothes?
- ☐ If we do keep it, maybe they can build more relationships and go to classrooms and have conversations
- ☐ Having them inside the schools will help kids when they get outside school
- ☐ Good to have some relationship with police

Positive and Negatives SROs (PWMS)

- ☐ I feel like SROs are somewhat avoided by students.
- ☐ Protect the school
- ☐ Prevent shootings, be there if someone needs help, not as bad as bad police
- ☐ Some students could have only had bad experiences with Police in the past
- ☐ They help with safety - outside people or students who bring in weapons or drugs.
- ☐ Helps protect from school shooters, carries a gun which can be scary for students, she helps people.
- ☐ Makes the school feel safer, just in case
- ☐ We haven't ever needed it
- ☐ That they can help us in a bad place
- ☐ People think they are threatening, other people think that they are just keeping us safe.

District Leadership

Positives:

- ☐ Create relationships with families and students
- ☐ Immediate response when one is needed
- ☐ An SRO understands better than other uniformed police in interacting with kids
- ☐ Insight on students that school may not know
- ☐ The right personality can be great
- ☐ Know our special education students well and can remain calm in challenging situations keeping the dignity of the student intact.

Negatives:

- ☐ Interact with students of color more often
- ☐ Not present everyday
- ☐ The wrong personality could do damage
- ☐ The police uniform is not seen as positive by all students/families.
- ☐ Should be careful not to criminalize drug use and feel like we need SROs in our buildings in order to support/punish violators. If we do, we may be supporting racially coded ideas and language (war on drugs).
- ☐ If having an SRO was truly something that we all agree is best, then the District should have gone for a contract with NM five years ago when an SRO was placed at PWMS.
- ☐ We know the presence of uniformed officers makes some of our students uncomfortable and / or triggers a trauma response in them

Summary

Between the engagement sessions from students, parents, and community members to the online survey results, there were strong opinions on both sides regarding the relationship with Mankato Area Public Schools and the Mankato Department of Public Safety / School Resource Officers. Throughout the sessions, themes were developed around the many positive and negative reasons for SROs in our schools. Our immigrant families, particularly the parents, strongly supported maintaining the relationship with our SROs while Ignite the Youth group strongly opposed having SROs in our schools. Students had a mixture of opinions regarding the relationship between MAPs and SROs as did the district leadership team. The survey which had the greatest contribution of community input had strong opinions on both sides of the topic, but overall the majority supported keeping SROs in our schools.

Attachments:

[FAQ](#), [Survey/Engagement Questions](#), [Contract/Job Description](#)

Positional Statements: [YWCA 1](#) / [YWCA 2](#) / [YWCA 3](#), [Free Press--My View](#), [Letter to the Board](#)

Respectfully submitted,

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