

Special Policing Subcommittee Meeting

November 30, 2022

The meeting was held virtually.

Ellenor Barish called the meeting to order at 7:20 pm. Subcommittee members Ellenor Barish, Sarah Phillips, Aisha Banda, Anuj Bhardwaj, Dayshawn Simmons were present at the start of the meeting. In addition, Interim Superintendent Curley, Samantha Eligine, Alicia Kersten, Gretchen Brion-Meisels, Jasmine Fernandez, Jessica Boston Davis, Leiran Biton, Sebastian LaGambina, and Susana Hernandez Morgan were in attendance. Andre Green joined the meeting in progress. Nineteen people were in the audience at the start of the meeting.

There were two items on the agenda.

1. Community Feedback Update

First, Sam Eligene, Director of Data, Assessment, and Accountability presented deeper analysis of data from student focus groups held at the high school in October. She identified key themes: Safety and Security, Anti-bias and Adolescent Training, Role of SRO/CPO, De-escalation Tactics, and Relationships with Students. She also presented five recommendations based on the analysis:

- Provide transparency in SRO/CPO selection process/criteria
- Clarify role of SRO/CPO in schools and in punitive procedures
- Increase SRO/CPO understanding of student experiences with police and associated trauma
- Investigate options to reduce student concerns related to police weapons (i.e. guns, tasers)
- Create connection/community between SRO/CPO and students

Ms. Eligene noted that there seemed to be some degree of disconnect between the social-emotional and mental health supports already in place and what students are aware of. This may be related to the timing of the focus groups - early in the school year.

Dr. Brion-Meisels, highlighted the need to prioritize relationship-building in any SPS-SPD partnership.

Next, Leiran Biton, President of the Somerville Council of PTAs presented results from a School Safety survey conducted by the district's PTAs. The survey was circulated online primarily and was available in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and English. There were 464 respondents. Key findings identified by Mr. Biton included:

- Respondents were not representative of the demographic makeup of SPS in terms of ethnic background, language, or income.
- Many respondents seem to have made up their minds on the issue of policing.
- Many respondents felt ill-equipped to respond to some questions.
- Respondents mostly feel their children are safe in school.
- Black and Latinx respondents feel that a police response is warranted in more cases than white respondents do.
- Only the West Somerville Neighborhood School had a majority of respondents wanting an SRO at their school.

- With the exception of the Argenziano School, a majority of respondents from every school wanted Community Police visits at their school.
- At Argenziano, a majority of respondents wanted no police presence at their school beyond emergency response.

2. SPS Administration Proposal

Dr. Curley began his presentation with a review of the process and community feedback. High School co-principals shared insight around the challenges of the current situation and the need for clarity of process and established relationships between students/staff and a responding officer. Dr. Curley went on to propose that the district adopt a School Liaison Officer (SLO) model. Under this plan, there would be two specially-trained officers who would support the high school on a part-time basis, focusing on de-escalation, building relationships, and promoting public safety. Dr. Curley outlined how this plan would differ from the SRO model of the past, including: expanded training; more structured interactions with students, staff, and families; a shorter list of matters that warrant police response; and a clear report/complaint process. Finally, Interim Assistant Superintendent Jessica Boston Davis provided a summary of school climate and student support services that have been added or expanded upon in the past two years.

Andre Green requested clarification around the law that requires officers to be armed when on duty.

Questions from subcommittee members led to further details on the proposal put forth by the district. Dr. Curley informed the group that while this proposal is focused on the high school, the MOU would be written to apply to all schools in the district. He also stated that the district would have a role in selecting the officers for the SLO positions. While the details of training for the officers haven't been settled, Dr. Curley did say that "cross-training" for officers and district staff might be an opportunity to build a stronger partnership. Finally, he reiterated that the officers' time in the high school would be much more structured than under the SRO model and clarified that there would be more intentional, opt-in interactions with members of the school community.

There was also some discussion about when deliberation and voting would occur and exactly what would be voted on. Ellenor Barish stated that she hoped deliberation and voting could happen at the December 20 meeting. Andre Green recommended that an additional deliberation meeting be scheduled. Sarah Phillips wondered if this body would be able to select/create an MOU in as little as a couple of weeks. Ellenor Barish said she didn't believe this body was responsible for a complete MOU but that she would refer to notes from last year for guidance.

With no further items on the agenda, the meeting was adjourned at 8:52 pm.

Documents used:

School Liaison Officer PROPOSED - Presentation
Safety Survey Preliminary Results - Nov 15 2022
School Liaison Officer Proposal

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