

Present: Andre Green (Chair), Sarah Phillips, Ellenor Barish, Elizabeth Doncaster, Matt Buchanan (Vice Chair), Glenda Soto, Jessica Boston Davis, Aisha Banda, Johanne Thomas, Mary Skipper, Anuj Bhardwaj

The meeting was called to order at 6:08 pm.

Dayshawn Simmons and Paige Tobin joined the meeting later.

There were 20 people in the audience.

Chair Green opened the meeting with some logistical updates, announcing that meeting dates would change to Mondays and Wednesdays in order to keep the subcommittee as inclusive as possible. He also announced that the district website has a page dedicated to the Policing Subcommittee which includes a form where constituents can give feedback and ask questions.

Director of Student Support, Elizabeth Doncaster, gave a presentation on the district's experience with the School Resource Officer and with Community Officers. (The presentation is available in the meeting packet.)

Chair Green noted that SROs were required by state law in all school districts. With the elimination of that requirement, in combination with a national racial justice awakening, School Committee is revisiting the district's policy.

Superintendent Skipper noted that with the exception of a very brief period, Somerville High School has had just one SRO during her tenure with the district. She clarified that the Somerville SRO and Community Officers received very specific training around interacting with kids and sometimes participated in district professional development which might not be the case everywhere.

Principal Buchanan spoke of his experience with the SRO role in Providence, where the SRO was a regular staff member. He found that the SRO knew of conflicts before the administration, allowing for more time to intervene and that the SRO's mediation and de-escalation training was helpful.

Ms. Doncaster reviewed some of the training specifics that prepare officers for these roles and reviewed the differences between the roles. While they have similar training, the SRO works in the school whereas the Community Officers were assigned to the schools and the school day but primarily addressed safety issues around the school. In both cases, officers were able to build relationships with students and staff.

Superintendent Skipper said that the SRO was a resource for parents as well and that Community Officers can be familiar faces for young people when conflicts arise off school property.

Ms. Doncaster noted that in the past, if there was a serious crime committed in a school, the SRO would respond at the high school and the Community Officer would respond at the other schools. Now, without those programs in place, she gets whoever happens to be on duty.

Superintendent Skipper elaborated that the SRO provided an educational component in addition to law enforcement in the case of hate crimes, for example.

The conversation shifted to the ways in which SPS supports students' mental health and interpersonal struggles and how those positions might overlap with or differ from the SRO role. Ms. Doncaster outlined how services are offered at the high school via 3 district social workers and a crisis manager. Additionally, the district has started groups at the high school and middle school grade levels after reflecting on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey data. Superintendent Skipper listed some of the additional supports available throughout the district, noting that right now the High School does not have a waiting list for counseling services. Ms. Doncaster said she would provide a comprehensive report on all of the roles, staffing levels, and structure of the mental health supports available through SPS. Superintendent Skipper clarified that School Adjustment Counselors provide services for students with IEPs and they are the ones who respond - not the SRO - in cases when those students might be having a hard time.

Chair Green brought up the issue of fighting at the high school and asked how the district is addressing the recent uptick.

Superintendent Skipper spoke to the challenges of social media, breaking up fights so that nobody gets hurt, and preventing fights in school as well as off school property, noting that despite these challenges, the district has stopped more fights than have happened. Principal Buchanan talked about building school culture in a new building with a new administration.

Ms. Banda made the distinction between the absence of the SRO and the impact of the pandemic on students' interpersonal relationships, with Superintendent Skipper agreeing that the uptick in fighting cannot be directly attributed to the absence of the SRO. The superintendent also noted that the new building calls for new models of supervision. She went on to describe how the loss of the SRO reduces the district's ability to advocate for students in some cases and may result in more families going directly to the SPD. When asked how families are made aware of other options and what those options are, Superintendent Skipper and Principal Buchanan talked about outreach strategies - primarily electronic or virtual given the pandemic - and highlighted the mediation program which Ms. Doncaster described in more detail.

Chair Green introduced Paige Tobin, one of the School Committee's attorneys and a resource to the subcommittee as far as the roles of the officers and our rights and responsibilities as a school district.

Mr. Simmons pointed out that for some students having a uniformed officer in the school might make going to school and focusing on their work more difficult. Mr. Buchanan described how his experience with SROs is different from a typical officer coming into a school, boiling it down to the relationships SROs build with students.

Chair Green turned the discussion to the need for the SRO to be in uniform and if so, whether they needed to carry a gun. Administrators confirmed that no officer has ever drawn a weapon in an SPS building. Ms. Tobin confirmed that an officer in uniform must be armed. She went on

to describe changes in how the law says SROs will be assigned and the more robust training requirements outlined in one of the new draft MOUs.

Dr. Phillips requested more specific information about when SPS requests assistance from SPD and what the outcomes are. Ms. Doncaster described some of the situations that might result in police involvement and how those decisions are made and she provided some data regarding outcomes. Chair Green reminded the subcommittee of the importance of protecting student privacy in discussing data around these incidents.

Dr. Phillips followed up with a request that SPD be asked under what circumstances they file a Form 100.

Finally, there was a short discussion around how the district is impacted by students' social media use and how it is helping students and parents develop social media skills and safety. Superintendent Skipper said that this is part of the new library skills curriculum, there are assemblies and parent information sessions. This is also an area where SPD is sometimes involved and SPS supports impacted students and their families.

Chair Green reviewed follow up questions for SPD:

- What happens when a contact is referred to SPD
- What reports might be generated from these referrals
- What results in a permanent record
- What is later discoverable

Mr. Buchanan noted the importance of clarity on these points particularly for undocumented children so that they feel safe and secure

Chair Green listed points where the subcommittee would like more information from the district:

- What is our full suite of mental health supports?
- Exactly what are we calling police for?

Ms. Soto amplified Ms. Banda's request that the district capture student voice around the impact of the SRO.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.