

Special Policing Subcommittee

The January 31 2023 meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:32 pm. Subcommittee members Andre Green, Sarah Phillips, Aisha Banda, Anuj Bardhwaj, Dayshawn Simmons, and Ellenor Barish were present. Interim Superintendent Jeff Curley was also in attendance. There were three people in the audience.

There were two items on the agenda.

1. SPS Update

Dr. Curley informed subcommittee members that he is working on internal guidance for staff and administrators on when to call SPD and limits of information sharing. At the same time, Somerville Police Chief Femino is working on a policy for officers, covering any interactions in the schools. Collaboration with the Mayor's Office and the police around an updated MOU is ongoing. Dr. Curley hopes to have a draft of guidance ready by the time this subcommittee's recommendations are presented to the full committee.

2. Further Deliberations on Recommendation to School Committee

Dr. Phillips made a motion: **I move that this committee recommend that the superintendent work to establish an MOU with the SPD focused on calling an off-site SLO for the three incidents of criminal and delinquent conduct named in the State's 2022 model MOU.**

Andre Green seconded the motion.

There was some discussion about how narrow a directive should be. Dr. Phillips read aloud the descriptions of "incidents of criminal and delinquent conduct" as described in the model MOU. Conversation turned to what happens after the negotiation of a new MOU.

Mr. Simmons proposed a friendly amendment: **Upon a tentative agreement with the SPD, the superintendent will bring back a draft for approval by the full School Committee.** Dr.

Phillips accepted the friendly amendment.

Chair Green noted that this change would require a new policy stating that any MOU must be approved by School Committee, something he would refer to the Rules Management Subcommittee. Dr. Curley clarified that negotiating the MOU would take time. His immediate priority is to bring clarity to the field with a guidance document and to ensure that responding officers will be trained to work with juveniles whenever possible.

The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Phillips introduced a new motion:

I move that this committee recommend the School Committee and district administration work together to ensure there are sufficient funds in the next SPS budget to implement and institutionalize the motions of this committee. Funds could be used to hire contractors to support the development of guidance and training for school staff as well as expand prevention programming such as the engagement specialists, the mediation program, or restorative justice efforts.

In response to Andre Green's concern that this wording could be interpreted to mean that the SPS budget has funded policing in the past or might in the future, Dr. Phillips amended her motion (*italics*).

I move that this committee recommend the School Committee and district administration work together to ensure there are sufficient funds in the next SPS budget to implement and institutionalize the motions of this committee *that are unrelated to paying for policing services*. Funds could be used to hire contractors to support the development of guidance and training for school staff as well as expand prevention programming such as the engagement specialists, the mediation program, or restorative justice efforts.

Though there seemed to be broad support among subcommittee members for prevention programming as well as a desire to convey that support to the full School Committee, the group discussed whether this motion was appropriate given that the purview of the subcommittee is the relationship between SPD and SPS.

Dr. Phillips withdrew the motion.

Conversation turned to whether the subcommittee would have an opportunity to assess and even approve an MOU between SPS and SPD. Mr. Green, who formed the subcommittee, stated that he believed the subcommittee had done all it could for the time being.

Dr. Phillips raised the issue of STEPS, which was included in former Superintendent Skipper's presentation at the first meeting of the subcommittee. She floated the idea of a motion to permanently disband STEPS which Mr. Simmons said he would second. Mr. Green argued that the wording left too much room for a similar program to be instituted under a different name and that if the School Committee were to adopt the motions already passed STEPS - or similar programming that would put police in schools in non-emergency situations - would not be possible.

Dr. Curley stated that any MOU between SPS and SPD should apply to any police present in any of our schools at any time. This raised concerns for Mr. Simmons - given the focus on safety of high school students and staff up to this point, he wondered if there should be a uniform policy across all grade levels. Mr. Green pointed out that some aspects of an MOU, such as the three incident categories, would be based on state law. Dr. Curley clarified that while an MOU would govern SPD involvement in all of our schools, it would not necessarily apply to all grade levels in the same way.

Dr. Phillips proposed a motion: **I move that this committee recommend the Superintendent focus the MOU on the three incidents laid out in the district's original proposal, revising the purpose, mission, goals, and objectives sections of the model MOU and cutting the second full paragraph on p. 3 that's about intervening in incidents that do not meet the thresholds of criminal and delinquent conduct.**

Mr. Simmons seconded the motion.

(At 7:30, Dr. Curley excused himself from the meeting due to a scheduling conflict.)

Mr. Green wondered if this motion was too detail-focused for this stage of the process. Dr. Phillips clarified her concern that the Commonwealth's Model MOU would allow school staff to invite police into the building to break up a fight, for example. Mr. Green raised the issue that School Committee has not yet determined whose job it is to get between students trying to harm each other. Ms. Barish worried that the specificity of the motion might imply that this subcommittee has no other concerns in the Model MOU. Mr. Green expressed concern that this language might leave district administrators without an important option.

Dr. Phillips called the question.

The motion passed with four in favor and two opposed.

Ms. Barish made a motion: **I move that this subcommittee recommend to the full committee that the SPS budget not fund police involvement in schools.**

Mr. Green seconded the motion.

Ms. Barish wondered if she should amend the motion to allow the exception of paying for professional development for officers involved in SPS schools. Mr. Green clarified that the district does not generally pay for per unit of professional development. Dr. Phillips suggested changing the motion to say that SPS budget would not fund salaries and benefits for police officers. Mr. Simmons suggested a friendly amendment: "Not including already established professional development opportunities for SPS staff." Ms. Banda expressed her opposition to this friendly amendment, explaining that she did not believe the psychological safe space necessary for engaging in anti-bias/anti-racist/equity work could be established with police officers in attendance. Mr. Simmons withdrew his friendly amendment.

The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Phillips asked if the subcommittee needed to make a formal motion terminating the old MOU. Mr. Green said that was already in progress.

With nothing else on the agenda, Ms. Barish thanked everyone for their contributions to the subcommittee's work and adjourned the meeting at 7:58 pm.