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Milford Board of Education

Meeting Minutes

April 30, 2013

Board members present:

Tracy Casey
Michael DeGrego
Suzanne DiBiase
Laura Fetter
Susan Glennon
Dora Kubek
Beverley Pierson
Christopher Saley
Mark Stapleton
Earl Whiskeyman

Administration present:

Dr. Elizabeth Feser
Michael Cummings
James Richetelli

I. CALL TO ORDER

The Milford Board of Education held a board meeting on Tuesday, April 30, 2013 at City Hall. Mrs. Casey called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. with the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. Casey thanked the Mayor and members of the Board of Aldermen for attending the meeting. She wanted them to hear first-hand the information shared. She then turned the meeting over to Chief Mello and Dr. Feser to present the School Resource Officers program.

II. SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Chief Mello thanked the Board and the Board of Aldermen for letting him have the opportunity to present. He then thanked the administrators for being present. He told the board we all have learned from the lessons of Sandy Hook. The Chief told the board that following Sandy Hook a high powered committee was formed which consisted of members of police department, health, fire, school personnel and central office staff from the board of education. In the discussions, it was determined that the committee believes school resource officers are critical to improving the security of schools.

In 2007, the Federal Government made funds available to aid in the hiring of school resource officers. However, those funds have not been seen. He then told the board members he looked at towns across Connecticut to learn which towns have SROs. He shared a map that clearly showed the communities that do not have SROs. Milford is the largest and does not have SROs.

Chief Mello told the board Dr. Bernstein is in attendance to help clarify the need for SROs. He then read Dr. Bernstein's biography (on file). He then introduced Dr. Bernstein.

Dr. Bernstein thanked the board and Chief Mello for allowing him to present.

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Dr. Bernstein navigated a PowerPoint that showed patterns of people who have pathway behaviors. During the PowerPoint he shared the myths and that they have not been substantiated. He further explained that if an individual triggers a behavior, policies and procedures need to be in place. SROs typically notice the behavior. Every school district needs a threat assessment team. SROs need to be on the team. He then shared the different behaviors that trigger red flags i.e. bullying, virtual practice behaviors, depression with suicidal thoughts and access to weapons. Three out of four cases bullying is the identified motive.

Dr. Bernstein then told the board SROs are not security guards. They offer school protection plus a police presence. They become part of the school community, a threat assessment team member and act as a positive role model in the school. They promote an environment where kids will talk more. They bridge the gap between police officers and kids. There are many benefits in having school resource officers in the schools.

Mr. Gensure asked about sustainability. Dr. Bernstein told him that after 911, many schools chose to immediately place sec guards in schools. It was in lieu of having SROs. The schools are now saying they should have put an SRO program in place.

Mr. Saley asked about the kids that have fallen through the cracks. What is the percentage of kids that will do these bad behaviors?

Dr. Bernstein responded with the highest crime at schools is theft. It is difficult to predict how many kids will become a threat. It is a low frequency event.

Mr. Saley asked what the population of students who have been identified with red flag trigger events.

Dr. Bernstein told him he did not know.

Mr. Saley asked Chief Mello if he is aware of any programs where the police officers don't carry guns.

Dr. Bernstein told him that every child has attended a parade where police officers carry a sidearm.

Chief Mello told him he does not have any programs like that in Milford. However, the uniform signifies they are police officer's first. It is meant to be protection. He would not want to lose the message. Not having a gun would do that. He wants the kids to make the connection between an SRO and a police officer.

He further explained that having the SRO in a school deters crime.

Mrs. Casey asked the Board of Aldermen if they had any questions for Dr. Bernstein.

Alderman Veccharelli asked if bullying is the biggest cause of threat actions. Dr. Bernstein told him that there are three kinds of people; aggressive, passive and assertive. He then gave an example of a situation and how the passive person would not forget it. How they would continue to think about it for weeks.

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Aldermen Veccharelli asked why the majority of the shooters were males. It is most likely part of the culture. Boys are told to man up.

Alderman Golden asked if a more proactive approach would be to look at the bullies. If there is a good procedure in place, wouldn't that help? He told her there is a small pool of kids who have no connection. Those kids are the ones to watch out for. He further said that every district has to report bullying. Every district needs a central office person reporting incidents for the district.

Alderman Vetro asked what a SRO does in the schools?

Alderman Vitali asked where the SROs will be placed so the district will get the most bang for the buck. He was told the dynamics change as the kid's age. In elementary schools, the kids fight over pencils. In junior high, they fight over sex.

Alderman Veccharelli asked Dr. Bernstein if the SRO would be the first to hear the leakage. He was told the kids will go to the SRO for many reasons.

Mrs. Casey thanked Dr. Bernstein for his presentation.

Chief Mello introduced Fran Thompson, Principal of Jonathan Law. Mr. Thompson told the board that his previous district had an SRO. He further said he knows the C students and the A students. There are 1,000 students in the school. As much as they try to know everyone, there are some that fall through the cracks.

Mr. Thompson reviewed the role of the SRO. The SRO can work with guidance and parents. In addition, they can train staff. They can run programs, build relationships and more.

Mr. Saley asked how many students were in the high school. He was told approximately 400 students.

Dr. Feser explained that her previous district had SROs. Unfortunately, an altercation between two middle school students, and one dying led to the support of hiring SROs. She further explained that they worked with families, ran DARE programs, Stranger Danger, conflict resolution and more. The children knew the SRO was there to help them.

Mr. Saley asked Dr. Feser how many students were in her previous district. He was told 4,500.

Chief Mello told the board that the relationship through social services and the police department should be solid. He then introduced Wendy Gibbons from the Milford Prevention Council. She reported the Council supports the School Resource Officers in the schools. MPC is a coalition to reduce youth drinking. Recently the MPC surveyed Foran students about the desire to have School Resource Officers in school. A large percent expressed they wanted to have SROs in the schools. SROs are trained to be mentors, problem solvers, educators, trainers and safety experts to provide a safe environment for youth to learn. She concluded by confirming that the crime rates considerable drop when a School Resource Officer program is in place. She asked the board to support the program.

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Chief Mello then introduced Lt. Salvatore Nesci of the Meriden Police Department. Lt. Nesci is a former SRO and Commander of the SRO Program.

Lt. Nesci explained the relationship and role an officer has with the school community. He began with the selection of the School Resource Officer. The officer would be interviewed by the principal and the Police Department. It is a collaborative effort of the school and the Police Department. Lt. Nesci told the board intervention is key to building relationships. The officer will work with the students to keep them in school and out of jail. He then told the board the officer is not an administrator, does not issue suspensions and detentions; must know when to lead and to follow. They will have honest and open communication. They are law enforcement professionals with the goal of protecting student's teachers and visitors through an accomplished non-threatening environment.

Lt. Nesci offered his assistance in setting up the program.

Ms. Kubek asked how they work with the red flag students. He told her School Resource Officers work collectively with the school. She followed up by asking if the school personnel would be notified if there was something going on and could affect the school environment.

Chief Mello told her that if an occurrence happens over the weekend, the Police Department may not know which school the individual attends.

A current SRO told the board that she has been an SRO for five years. As an SRO she has gotten to know the students, especially the students who have problems. She has visited the homes of individuals who have issues. She has a background in social work. She also mentioned that she receives calls constantly trying to troubleshoot and identify student's needs.

Officer Cupola, Stratford Police Department also gave background of his day as a School Resource Officer in the Stratford Public Schools, and the bond he has with his students and their families. He told the board the officers become a trusted individual. The students confide and trust in them. He also reviewed several programs the officers teach throughout the year such as DARE, Stranger Danger, drug and alcohol resistance and more. The officers are 12 month employees.

Alderman Veccharelli asked if the SROs would respond to incidents that occurred nearby in town. Chief Mello answered no. The commitment of an SRO is to the school.

Alderman Veccharelli asked if SROs could put in for overtime. Chief Mello answered yes.

Mrs. Casey asked for a recess at 9:15 p.m.

The meeting was called back in order at 9:30 p.m.

Chief Mello introduced Mr. Bill Richards. Mr. Richards is the Deputy Director of the Milford Emergency Management and Chairman of the Milford Schools Safety and Security Committee. Mr. Richards advised the board that the Committee has met every Wednesday since December. Members of the Committee are inclusive of Police, Fire, Health, City and Board of Education. One very important change that was done was the communication to Police and Fire. A camera system was installed that allows Police to see doors at

all of the schools. It was determined that the Crisis Manual for the City would be updated and serve as an assessment model rather than a reactive model. Mr. Richards closed by saying the Committee supports SROs in the schools.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Christine Pavlov – Address Unknown – Ms. Pavlov told the board a clinical School Resource Officer program is needed in Milford. The overarching goal is safety. School social workers are needed in all the schools as well. The taxpayers should consider funding the School Resource Officer program in Milford.

Debra Rodriguez – Ms. Rodriguez is a Foran security guard. She came before the board to let them know that the security guards union supports having SROs in the schools.

Cathi Berni – 96 Centennial Drive – Mrs. Bernis supports the SROS but she has questions. She wants to know where the money will come from and will they be technology educated?

Pam Staneski – 35 Point Lookout – Mrs. Staneski told the board the SRO program came before the board 11 years ago when she was on the board. She encouraged board members to look into grant funding. There are funds left in the grant and legislators should be willing to help.

Tom Beirne – 55 Bayshore Drive – Mr. Beirne wants to know who will pick up the tab.

Unknown Name – 38 Bayshore Drive – Thanked Chief Mello for the presentation. He supports SROs in the schools.

IV. SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS FINAL DISCUSSION AND ACTION

Mrs. Casey asked if the board members would like to speak.

Mr. Gensure asked if things could be done differently.

Dr. Feser told him that having SROs in the schools gives the school system the opportunity to reach out more. There will be more involvement with the kids who tend to stray.

Mrs. Fetter thanked Chief Mello for the presentation. She then asked if the board would be provided the data. Chief Mello supports sharing data. However, there is not always data to be given.

Ms. DiBiase asked where the money will come from.

Mrs. Casey told the board members there will first be a vote to approve the program in the schools as Chief Mello continues to look for funding ie. Grants and need Board of Education approval of the School Resource Officer program. If approved, Mr. Richetelli would then be asked to present where the funding will come from.

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Mrs. Pierson commented oftentimes teachers are not aware of the students who are at risk of committing shooting.

Mr. Saley told Chief Mello is was a very good presentation. It is very challenging to vote on something of this nature. Especially when you don't know where the funds will come from. He asked if something could be done differently. Do we really need an armed guard in the schools.

Mrs. Casey commented the focus is all about the kids. She then reminded him that the bulk of Connecticut has deemed SROs are a priority. Additionally, as previously commented, the police are in the schools regularly.

With no further questions, Mrs. Casey asked for a motion.

Ms. Glennon made a motion to support the Milford Police Department by placing School Resource Officers in some Milford Public Schools. Ms. DiBiase seconded the motion. By a roll call vote, 7-3 (Whiskeyman/Pierson/Saley) the motion passed.

Mrs. Casey asked Mr. Richetelli to present where the funds will come from.

Mr. Richetelli told the board the funds will need to be transferred from the electricity account. The district has seen a savings under the energy savings plan.

Ms. Glennon made a motion to authorize the transfer of \$150,000 from the 2012-13 Board of Education budget Account 4100 (Electricity) into Account 3305 (Security Services), or other such account as may be designated by the Finance Director of the City of Milford, to be used for the purpose of funding School Resource Officers (SROs) in Milford Public Schools. Ms. DiBiase seconded the motion. By a roll call vote, 8-2 (Whiskeyman/Pierson) the motion passed.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Glennon made a motion to adjourn. Ms. DiBiase seconded. The motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 10:25 p.m.

Pam Griffin
Recording Secretary

Susan Glennon
Corresponding Secretary