



Skaneateles Central School District

Excellence in Education

To: SCSD Board of Education
From: Ken Slentz, Superintendent
Date: 20 March 2018
Re: School Security and School Resource Officers

In light of recent school shooting tragedies, verbal and social media threats, and associated responses from parents and communities, school districts across New York State are grappling with how to provide the most comprehensive and responsible school safety and security plans and structures to ensure to the greatest extent possible that students and staff feel safe, are safe, and are therefore able to focus on their learning.

For Skaneateles, we have taken, are taking, and have plans to take a number of actions related to school security as described on *Attachment A*. One specific action being contemplated is the employment of a school resource officer (SRO) or officers.

Purpose of the Item:

To request a discussion by the board of education regarding the implementation of a school resource officer program and to provide administration with direction for further study and/or budgetary preparation.

Background Information:

1. *Utilization* - Prior to the elimination of state funding in 2010 for the New York State Trooper SRO program, Skaneateles utilized the program with a part time model and a full time model. In a recent survey of eleven other area districts regarding school security measures, five reported utilizing a SRO model - some are currently employed through a law enforcement agency while others are retired law enforcement personnel - which is funded through their respective general funds, and two districts are discussing the possibility of implementing a model. A recent survey of Onondaga County districts by The Post Standard/Syracuse.com noted that 55% utilized a school resource officer(s)¹ In a recently administered survey to our full staff, staff response to the question of “I believe that the district should employ school resource officers or school police?” with an average rating of 3.5. A rating scale of 1-5 was utilized with 1 representing “strongly disagree” and 5 representing “strongly agree”.² This and other response averages can be found on *Attachment B*.

¹http://www.syracuse.com/schools/index.ssf/2018/03/does_your_onondaga_county_school_district_have_an_armed_resource_officer_heres_t.html

² Survey return was 60% (201/335)

2. *Research Findings* - Research on the effectiveness of the SRO model is inconclusive³. Anecdotal reports are mixed as well with some districts reporting a strong and beneficial relationship⁴ while others have expressed concern that student behavior is too often criminalized within their schools⁵. One common thread in the anecdotal reports suggests that a strong match of personality to the respective school district as well as a clear set of expectations are critical to the potential benefits of the program.
3. *Funding*- The New York State Senate has passed a budget resolution which would provide additional school security funding including funding for SROs to districts⁶. We will not know until the adoption of the final budget as to whether this funding will be forthcoming. Absent such funding from the state, the district would need to utilize general fund monies to support the implementation of an SRO program.
4. *Models* - Currently, retired law-enforcement personnel are restricted under state civil service rules in the amount of salary that they may make⁷. Districts may submit a waiver request which, if approved, would allow lift these restrictions. Retirees are also typically receiving retirement benefits including health insurance from the agency from which they retired, therefore this would not be a district obligation. Current law enforcement personnel are not subject to any such restrictions and therefore, the costs would be more in line with the current market rate.

Discussion:

Administration request that the board discuss and provide direction on the possible implementation of an SRO program in the 2018–19 school year. Points for consideration in the discussion include:

1. Goals for and outcomes of the program compared to research and the district’s strategic plan. What would the key responsibilities for an SRO(s) be relative to our current strategic plan and our student wellness model? What would the evaluation process be comprised of?
2. The number of school resource officers to be employed. Would the district utilize a districtwide model with one SRO being employed as was the case when the district previously utilized the program?
3. The funding model to be utilized and the prioritization process if the board directs that such a program be implemented. Absent state funding, general fund monies would need to be utilized and a decision would have to be made whether we would seek to utilize a retiree or an active duty police officer.

³ See, for example Cheryl Lero Jonson (2017) *Preventing School Shootings: The Effectiveness of Safety Measures, Victims & Offenders*, 12:6, 956-973, DOI: 10.1080/15564886.2017.1307293; *The Impact of School Resource Officer Interaction on Students’ Feelings About School and School Police* - Matthew T. Theriot, 2016 <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0011128713503526>; and *School Resource Officers: Law Enforcement Officers in Schools*. Nathan James, Analyst in Crime Policy, and Gail McCallion, Specialist in Social Policy, June 26, 2013. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43126.pdf>

⁴ See, for example *What’s the role of a school resource officer? In my school, I’m part of the fabric* | PBS NewsHour <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/school-resource-officers> and County police, schools vouch for benefits of having officers at schools <http://www.theherald-news.com/2017/01/17/will-county-police-schools-vouch-for-benefits-of-having-officers-at-schools/ad4ssnb/>

⁵ See, for example, *Police in schools: Keeping kids safe, or arresting them for no good reason?* - The Washington Post https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/police-in-schools-keeping-kids-safe-or-arresting-them-for-no-good-reason/2015/11/08/937ddfd0-816c-11e5-9afb-0c971f713d0c_story.html and *Are School Resource Officers Part of the School-to-Prison Pipeline Problem?* | US News <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/01/30/are-school-resource-officers-part-of-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-problem>

⁶ <https://www.nysenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senate-passes-2018-19-budget-resolution-controls-spending-protects>

⁷ <http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/resteachers/sdretiree.html>. Waivers are required for salary amounts over \$30,000, but pending senate legislation would lift that cap \$50,000.

4. Implementation of the model in lieu of other district staffing priorities. Depending on the final revenue budget, it is conceivable that choice would have to be made between the employment of an SRO and program area improvements in our special-education and our world language programs.

Timeline:

On March 22, the district will host a school safety and security forum for the community at which we anticipate administering a brief survey which will include a question on as to whether the district should employ school resource officer(s). In combination with staff and student data, funding finalization at the state level, and prioritization within our strategic planning process, the board would then be asked to make a final decision prior to the adoption of the full budget on currently scheduled for April 10.

DRAFT for Board Consideration