



WEST LINN / WILSONVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT

To: School Board Members
From: Dr. Kathy Ludwig, Superintendent
Re: WLWV School Resource Officer Program Review
Date: October 26, 2020

Overview of SRO Program Review

The West Linn-Wilsonville School District and School Board committed this year to conducting a review of the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program using an equity lens. This review will guide the work towards continually improving support to our students.

District staff met during the summer of 2020 with both West Linn Police Department and Wilsonville Police Department leaders to include them in our review process. We value our partnership with our local officers, agency and especially the currently assigned SROs. Our partnership is critical to our commitment of keeping students and families safe at school and district-sponsored events. Our partnership is critical during emergencies or crises interventions (e.g. lockdown, lock out, evacuation). And our partnership is critical to disrupting systems of racism in our community and in our schools.

The current SRO Program in our schools is multi-faceted and highly collaborative with our district leaders and staff. Currently, the program includes:

- Contributing to a Safe and Welcoming School Culture
- Providing law enforcement-related education, counseling, and prevention
- Investigating and Responding to Criminal Behavior
- Engaging in Restorative Practices and Group Circles for Problem-Solving
- Promoting Student Health and Wellness
- Engaging in Quarterly WLWV-First Responder Safety Meetings
- Providing Assistance During School Safety Events, Crises or Emergency Response
- Engaging in WLWV-Joint City Equity Events
- Serving as Liaisons between the District and Wilsonville, West Linn Police Departments

This review of the SRO Program is typical of other district program reviews. When we review a district program we do not review the individuals. We are careful to look at the purpose, investment, effectiveness and outcomes of the program itself.

This review included several aspects, including an opportunity for our community to provide their input and suggestions regarding the SRO Program through a survey. To ensure an inclusion of all voices, intentional efforts were made to reach out and hear the experiences of our students, parents and staff of color in our community.

The SRO Program Review, which spanned summer 2020 through October 2020, included:

- Review of the SRO Program (History, Overview, Costs, Training, Job Description, Referral Data) – this information came from our police departments.

- Feedback from students, staff, parents, community (focus groups, phone calls, survey) – this information came from our community.
- Research of other SRO Programs or School Security Models – this information came from District administrators and Board Members.
- Analysis and Summary of the Survey Feedback – this analysis was conducted by Patinkin Research Strategies, a third-party agency.
- Key Findings and Recommendations by School District Leaders in collaboration with West Linn and Wilsonville Police Departments, High School Principals and student representatives.
- Presentation and Recommendation Regarding the SRO Program by the Superintendent to the School Board at the October 26, 2020 Board Work Session.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The West Linn-Wilsonville School District currently partners with both the city of West Linn and the City of Wilsonville Police Departments to contract two (2) School Resource Officers, one from each city. The City of Wilsonville contracts with the Clackamas County Sheriff’s Office for law enforcement services which includes the officer assigned to the district.

The Cost of the SRO Program to the City of Wilsonville Police Department is \$199,911 of which approximately \$91,000 is charged to the school district. The Cost of the SRO Program charged to the school district by the City of West Linn is approximately \$55,000. Both police departments, in agreement with the district, also charge for extended after-duty hours for events. These costs are reflected in the district’s annual budget.

The SRO in West Linn currently works with the staff and students of 5 primary schools, 1 middle school and West Linn High School. The SRO in Wilsonville currently works with the staff and students of 4 primary schools, 3 middle schools, Wilsonville High School and Arts & Technology High School.

Upon review of the Police Department SRO Program reports, City-School District Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs), community survey outcomes (over 2,400 respondents), student focus group comments and review of the literature and research on SRO programs, several key findings emerged.

Finding 1: The WLWV SRO Program Needs Additional Definition and Clarity

Currently, much of the description of the SRO program is set by past practice and reviewed through annual meetings with verbal agreements regarding specific roles and responsibility, scope of the work and communication pipeline. The current MOUs are very brief descriptions of the program with cost agreements.

- Job Description* – Currently the job description is written by each police department with general understanding of the school district’s expectations.
- Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities* – Currently the School District and cities do not have a joint description in the MOU of specific roles and responsibilities of SROs when working in the schools.
- Scope of Involvement* – Currently the School District and cities do not delineate in the MOU the scope of involvement of an SRO when a conflict or wrongdoing arises (e.g. disorderly conduct versus low-level offenses versus serious offenses).
- Range of Trainings* – Currently the SROs attend the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) Basic SRO Course. Other trainings, meetings and conferences are at the discretion of each police department or individual SRO. There are no specific training expectations written in the MOUs.
- Annual Review of Data* – Currently the School District staff and SROs meet at the beginning of the school year to set the expectations, then meet weekly for leadership meetings, and then as needed to

review individual cases or situations that arise. There is no formal annual review/analysis of the referral data or review of the program itself.

- f. *Communication to Stakeholders* – Currently the School District does not provide a description about the SRO Program to stakeholders where it can be publicly accessed (e.g. district website).

Finding 2: Majority of WLWV Community Reports Positive Interactions with SROs/Program

- a. *More positive interactions with SROs* – An analysis of the community survey regarding the SRO Program found that nearly eight-in-ten respondents who had interacted with an SRO (n=1,171) reported positive interactions: 79% Very positive, 9% Somewhat positive, 10% Neutral, 1% Somewhat negative, 1% Very negative. Students reported 59% Very positive, 17% Somewhat positive, 22% Neutral, 1% Somewhat negative or 1% Very negative interactions. Students of color reported 55% Very positive, 15% Somewhat positive, 31% Neutral, and 0% Negative/Very Negative interactions.
- b. *Prioritized Safe Learning Environment and Building Positive Relationships* - The community survey indicated that a high majority of respondents believe the purpose of the SRO Program is to provide assistance during crisis/emergency response (84%) and build positive relationships with students and staff (83%). These two priorities were also ranked the highest by respondents of color (68%, 74% respectively).
- c. *Smaller Percentage Called for Removal of the Program* – In response to an open-ended question, only 4% (n = 108) of respondents as a whole (n = 2,447) indicated a desire to eliminate the program. A majority who responded to this question (53%) either felt there are no improvements needed or wanted to reiterate that they do not want the SRO program to be eliminated. 7% of respondents suggested better relationships with students. 6% of respondents suggested expanding the program.
- d. *Larger Percentage Called for Retaining Program and Improving* – When asked for additional comments, of those who responded (n = 710) nearly two-in-three think positively about the SRO program and want to keep it in schools. Positive (keep the SRO Program) = 63%. Mixed/Needs Reforms = 10%. Negative (get rid of SRO Program) = 11%. None/Don't Know/NA = 15%.
- e. *Student Focus Groups Lean Positive and Provide Recommendations* – A total of 51 students participated in 1:1 survey or small focus groups regarding the SRO Program. When asked, “What is the job description of an SRO?”, a majority of students provided comments relating to safety, building relationships, informal counseling/support and providing resources. 3-of-34 comments stated a belief that SROs should not be in schools. When asked “What Changes Would You Desire?” to the SRO Program, 2-of-33 comments suggested elimination of the program. All others suggested either to keep as it is or improve certain parts of the program.
- f. *Board Safety Advisory Committee (Summer 2018 Report)* – This committee, comprised of parents, teachers and students, met several times over the 2018 summer to provide the School Board with a report outlining their perceptions of school safety. The committee identified areas of strength including many strong processes already in place; solid training for the processes we follow; active and effective relationship with our first responders. The Areas of Concern identified by the committee did not include SROs or mention of the program. Appendix A of the report identified the current status of the SRO program (two SROs) and that any “possibility for additional SRO staff would need to be discussed during the Budget Process.” To date, neither the School Board nor the District Administration have brought forward a request for adding additional SRO staff during the Budget Process.

Finding 3: Some SRO Programs May Contribute to “School-to-Prison Pipeline”

The literature and research selected for this SRO Program review was considered alongside the survey results and comments from focus groups. Several risk factors/themes emerged that contribute to law enforcement

involvement in schools resulting in students having a negative interaction/experience or obtaining an early criminal record that follows them through life (“school-to-prison pipeline”). These are some of the risk factors:

- a. *When Philosophy of the SRO Program is Only Law Enforcement* – Several studies and survey/focus group comments indicated more negative interactions or experiences when the SRO program or officer only responded through a law enforcement role. NASRO recommends the TRIAD model (Law enforcement, Teacher, and Informal Counselor) be established to promote a successful SRO program and relationship between law enforcement and youth and avoid unnecessary involvement for minor offenses or disproportionate referrals, arrests and confinement of youth, particularly minority youth.
- b. *When School Districts and Law Enforcement Operate as Silos* – In studies where school district leaders did not collaborate with their SROs, abdicated all discipline to SROs, or did not collaborate on the selection of the officer, an increase in minor issues as referrals occurred. Additionally, in these settings there tended to be no shared accountability for disproportionate data or referral outcomes.
- c. *When Roles Are Not Clearly Defined* - In studies where SROs were more involved in discipline and/or minor offenses that should have been handled by staff, an increase was found in referrals and arrests of students in schools *with* SROs compared to schools *without* SROs.
- d. *When Trainings Are Not Adequate* – Based on studies and survey/focus group comments, when trainings are not adequate (e.g. no implicit bias training, no cultural competence training) students experience more negative interactions, lack of relationship and a sense of being “monitored or tracked” even after a small incident.
- e. *When Involvement is Reactive* – Based on studies and survey/focus group comments, when there is a lack of proactive involvement (teaching, informal conversations, relationship building), students tend to view SROs as only law enforcement “waiting to catch wrongdoing”.

Finding 4: Some Model SRO Programs May Contribute to Student Success in School and Life

The literature and research selected for this SRO Program review was considered alongside the survey results and comments from focus groups. Several themes emerged that contribute to an effective SRO program which supports all students’ success in school and long-term for life. These are some of the factors:

- a. *When the Shared Philosophy is Restorative Justice* – Several studies, including NASRO standards, and survey/focus group comments emphasize the SRO’s critical partnership in creating teachable moments, empathy, reinforcement of citizenship and restorative acts. One particular study noted that the philosophy of discipline (prevention-oriented vs. punishment-oriented) in response to a wrongdoing was a key factor for program success and long-term student success. The President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) encourages the culture of community policing to be “Guardians versus warriors: protecting the dignity and human rights of all.”
- b. *When School Districts and SROs Collaborate On and Review the Program Regularly* – Several studies recommend that Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) should be created through a collaborative process that establishes a common vision that meets the needs of the community and reflects the shared philosophy. Both parties should annually examine practices, case studies and referral data to correct any systems of bias, prevent inappropriate referrals, and identify areas for improvement.
- c. *When Roles and Responsibilities are Clearly Defined* – A national assessment of SROs discovered that when specific roles and responsibilities were not defined, problems were often rampant and lead to role confusion and conflict (NASRO; Finn and McDevitt, 2005). The NASRO provides role descriptions to support the TRIAD model. A recent “Model Memorandum” by the California ACLU (2016) written for school districts and police departments outlines sample role definitions that provide guidance, protect students, and strive to eliminate harmful long-term negative consequences for young people.

- d. *When Training is Multifaceted* - Several studies and survey/focus group comments indicate that in settings where SROs are well-chosen and well-trained, they can focus on building authentic relationships based in cultural competence, prevention and early intervention.
- e. *When Involvement is Proactive* – Several studies and survey/focus group comments indicated that proactive school-based law enforcement relies on positive relationships between officers and students. These relationships build trust and reduce school or student safety issues by gaining knowledge of issues occurring and developing effective prevention strategies. Several survey/focus group comments shared instances where students approached SROs with safety and welfare concern rather than calling 911 or informing parents, because there was a relationship and sense of trust.

Staff Recommendation Regarding WLWV SRO Program

Recommendation to Retain and Improve WLWV SRO Program

The West Linn-Wilsonville School District Superintendent, upon:

- review of the West Linn and Wilsonville SRO program descriptions;
- review of input from stakeholders including students, parents, staff and community;
- review of the research and literature submitted; and
- in consultation with District Office Leaders, High School Principals, Students, West Linn and Wilsonville Police Departments, and District Legal Counsel

makes the recommendation to the School Board to retain the SRO Program and implement improvements identified in Finding 1 (The WLWV SRO Program Needs Additional Definition and Clarity) and Finding 4 (Some Model SRO Programs May Contribute to Student Success in School and Life).

Recommended Improvements

- I. Draft new Memoranda of Understanding using the *ACLU of California Model Memorandum (2016)* and other equity-based SRO Program exemplars as guides for the City-District SRO Program that includes the following areas to ensure student safety and support the positive development of our young people.
 - a. Shared Philosophy of Restorative Justice (“Guardians versus Warriors”)
 - b. Collaborative Approach to the Program’s Goals and Action Plan (Using NASRO Triad Model)
 - c. Collaborative Identification of Qualifications for Job Description and Officer Selection
 - d. Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities (Using *Model Memorandum* as guide)
 - e. Description of Information Exchange (process for gathering and sharing information)
 - f. Scope of Involvement (Using *Model Memorandum* as guide)
 - g. Student Rights (related to safe and positive school environment)
 - h. Range of Multifaceted Trainings (e.g. implicit bias, cultural competence, restorative practices, mental health)
 - i. Annual Review of Referral Data; 3-Year Review of Program Effectiveness (including students’ input)
 - j. Communication to Stakeholders (students/parents/staff; district and school websites)
- II. Hire an additional social worker in the district to expand hours of support at our three high schools. The 1.0 FTE would be funded by the Student Investment Account (SIA) Grant in 2021-2022 and onwards. The district already employs 3.0 FTE Social Workers. This additional staff member would allow for .8 FTE Social Worker at each high school with the remaining time to support the other schools or district-wide programs. Cost = Approximately \$125,000.

Each High School-assigned Social Worker would work with the school leadership team, school counselors and site-assigned psychologist to provide support to students, particularly when it involves social, emotional and mental health situations. The Social Workers and SROs would be provided time to jointly establish systems for collaboratively supporting students and distinguishing carefully between each other's roles (per MOU).

- III. To further the district's Goal #1 of "disrupting systems of racism":
 - a. Continue inclusion of both cities' Police Department involvement in any or all West Linn-Wilsonville equity summits, equity trainings and cultural events.
 - b. Expand and support SRO's relationship-building opportunities, particularly with historically marginalized groups of students and families, by invitation to be guest teacher; participating in classroom Circles; engaging in a variety of school and district events (e.g. Day of the Dead Event; school equity team meetings; student affinity group meetings; Unity Day).
 - c. Continue inclusion of both cities' Police Department (and SRO) involvement in the quarterly WLWV-First Responder Safety Meetings and monthly District Safety Committee Meetings which support the district mission and goals, emphasize a student-first approach to safety and wellness, and integrate an equity lens with decision-making and actions.

A Model SRO Program in West Linn-Wilsonville

It is our belief as District Leaders that West Linn-Wilsonville School District can provide a model SRO Program which contributes to student safety *and* student success in life. We are mindful of the heightened concern surrounding law enforcement involvement in schools, particularly the concern regarding the "school-to-prison pipeline". We are committed to a program that supports the positive development of all students and a shared philosophy of restorative practices and restorative justice.

Our review of the best practices (standards) and practices that mitigate disproportionate referrals and harmful effects on students, provide us with an equity-based philosophy, framework, structure, strategies, and confidence to implement a model SRO Program for our students and school community.

We already have a strong SRO program with many positive experiences reported by our students, staff and families. We already have a strong collaborative partnership with our city police departments, including a shared philosophy of restorative justice and a commitment to equity and anti-racism. There is a commitment by both the district staff and the cities' police chiefs and SROs to strengthen our program; and there is a commitment to make improvements based on the key findings of this review including the comments and recommendations provided by our students, staff, parents and community members.

"If students and educators are to achieve their full potential, schools must *be* safe and *feel* safe."

J. Rosiak, 2015