



## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee**

Champlain Elementary School

6:00-8:00 pm, 20 March 2018

Approved by the Board June 12, 2018

Present: Commissioners Susanmarie Harrington (chair), Liz Curry, Ryan McLaren, Kathy Olwell, and Stephanie Seguino, Jeff Wick;

Administration: Superintendent Yaw Obeng; Director of Equity and Safe & Inclusive Schools Henri Sparks; Shelley Mathias, Edmunds Elementary School Principal and PBIS leader;

Guests: Cpl. Brian DiFranco (BHS School Resource Officer--finishing his 11th year as SRO); Cpl. Jessica Norris (SRO, primarily School Resource Officer Edmunds and Hunt); Lt. Jason Lawson (supervisor of the school resource program); Lisa Bedinger (South Burlington Community Justice Center), Rachel Jolley (Burlington Peace and Justice Center); Lance Smith, UVM Restorative Practice Team

1. Call to Order
2. Agenda approved by consensus
3. Public Comment : none
4. SROs in the Schools

### *Meeting overview*

Susanmarie Harrington explained the three-meeting arc that concludes tonight: In January, we reviewed, with BPD guests, the Burlington Police Department (BPD) report on 2017 SRO activities; in February, the committee continued the conversation and identified points to follow up on with BPD, and tonight we have SROs with us to provide a more personal view of the roles and functions of SROs. Commissioner Harrington met with BPD Chief del Pozo, Cpl. Norris, Lt. Lawson, and Cpl. DiFranco in order to follow up on the committee's February meeting. There is enormous overlap of BPD and committee priorities, and as indicated in the committee's February minutes, a shared sense that the report is most useful when its filtering is improved. BPD will take steps to further filter out irrelevant data (such as traffic stops or events with people on the sidewalk). Committee is also interested in filtering by more demographics than race: also need to filter by more demographics than race--how are students with disabilities faring in encounters with SROs? Does student disability play a role in underlying incidents? District administrators will need to evaluate this.

*Recommended changes for next year:*

- BPD will change aspects of report to permit distinction of Edmunds Middle and Elementary Schools.
- If District provides the police department with student rosters, BPD could compare rosters with arrest reports. Also, police wonder how the schools validate their own disciplinary reports? Any arrests on school property should generate a report and school administrators should be noting the incident number. Any police contacts with students should be mirrored in school reporting of behavioral incidents. Also, any student arrested at school b/c of a warrant (a situation the police try to avoid) should have that fact noted in the report. School administration can be tracking encounters with SROs via internal systems for recording disciplinary matters.
- Central administration could look at data regarding special education status and encounters with SROs.
- Board can review police reports for more insight into narratives.
- It would be useful to have an SRO visit the committee, separate from the presentation of the yearly report, to permit a conversation about the experience in the schools. General agreement that the board should be informed about the kinds of situations police encounter in the schools.
- General agreement that consistent training/orientation around the role of SROs is important—SROs should not be involved in regular matters of school/classroom management. An SRO will be invited to the committee's March 20 meeting in order to have a conversation about what the experience of an SRO is in the schools—we have reviewed the report, and discussion with an SRO will let us get at some of the stories. General sense of police today is that SROs are taking the least punitive approaches possible; general concern among committee is that there may not be enough restorative practices in action. More conversation is needed to share perspectives, so that SROs feel supported in their roles.
- Police department notes that arrests always have stories behind them. Police aim to use the least intrusive means possible to interact with youth. Majority of the time police are fortunate to make the diversion referral and sometimes things escalate. Some youth are no longer eligible for diversion. Diversion process can come through many paths: police, State's Attorney, or hearing. It is not always up to the police officer to make that call. Board is probably not aware of the system's complexities.
- BPD recommends additional training for administrators/school staff, regarding how they make calls or reports to BPD (staff may unintentionally escalate incidents by calling SROs). BPD appreciates SRO invitations to participate in district restorative practice training.

### *District Overview*

Director Sparks introduced a summary of the BPD/central office latest thinking about SROs (see **Appendix A** in these minutes). This is a working document, written by Director Sparks in collaboration with the Burlington Police Department. How do we conceive of a relationship that prioritizes safety for all in the community, how do we develop procedures that we can implement district-wide, and how do we think about community issues--many things happen in the community that cross over into schools. We have to think about the role of school resource officers in light of the whole community.

SRO/district review of the data suggests that in the last year, much of the incidents involving contact between students and SROs were initiated by the schools. How can we limit that contact? We need to define what those contacts should look like so that the SROs are used as envisioned, as a support for the schools.

Commissioner Seguino noted that the MOU between the district is inconsistent with this document: there are some things on it that are inconsistent with the MOU. Need to recommend that the full board review MOU and current perspectives on role of SRO. **(The MOU is included as Appendix B in these minutes)**. From the police perspective, the district should have been taking the lead on certain kind of complaints. Police should not be put in the position of making administrative decisions in the schools. SROs should not be in situations with defiant students, for example, where there is no relationship-building possibility for the SRO and there is no legal reason to be involved. Staff need solid guidelines to go by.

Commissioner McLaren: notes that staff/student requests for SRO will trigger involvement means that we need to be very clear for staff when those requests are appropriate. Lt. Lawson explained that the language is intended to mean when teacher fears for safety or student/family requests involvement in a situation. Will look at clarification.

Commissioner Curry: overall exercise is to distinguish a set of activities that are related to the policies and procedures that are designed to foster a restorative environment, and people need training in those. But there are other situations where there is no choice--everyone needs to accept them.

Commissioner Seguino: discretion on the part of individuals creates the opportunity for bias to affect decisions (regardless of individual good intentions). MOU was set up to circumscribe actions, and commissioner is concerned that some language here moves backwards. District has to be careful about the line between physical

disputes that are appropriately covered by school discipline. Lt. Lawson notes that police department concurs: they don't want to be drawn into issues that should be handled by the schools.

Right now staff are contacting SROs whenever there is any conflict.

Commissioner Curry: notes that administrators are just as susceptible to bias, and it's important to check that. Training needed.

Cpl. Norris: when she first started the connections she was making were negative. Positive interactions--in the gym, at lunch--helps build relationships. Disorderlies can be handled by the school administration. She wants a positive influence. On the same sheet and table.

Director Sparks noted that when the original MOU was signed, the district didn't have a commitment to restorative practices or trauma-informed decisions. Dilemma: need ongoing training for administrators, teacher. But we are in a very different place as we think about school violence. We are all in favor of minimizing SRO contact, but how do we look at this work through the lens of a safe teaching and safe learning environment. The work we are doing with mental health, with teachers, with the police, is so important. We also need to look at decisions that don't have anything to do with SROs to make sure that the whole system is working well. And it's not: we suspend students with disabilities at an alarming rate, and we suspend black boys at alarming rates. How do we start to look at students with disabilities in ways that support their needs, and support teachers to do the same? Also need to help everyone in the district revisit their own biases.

Cpl. DiFranco: items on list don't necessarily lead to arrest, and items on the list are a very small fraction of the SRO's work. They mentor, have positive interactions with students. This list is a small proportion of contacts from the year. Most emphasis is on safety, education, relationships.

Director Sparks: also need to make sure that administrators are clear on when notification of SRO is informed--sometimes we do not follow through as needed.

Principal Mathias noted that weekend activities (parent arrested, child witnessed domestic violence, child removed from home) can affect student experience. SRO can provide information to the school that permits a smooth transition and support--child may be more fragile. Commissioner Curry noted that such a protocol could be included in the MOU because it's a great way to support restorative practices and useful information flow.

Lisa Bedinger wondered whether MOU can be explicit about the role of SROs in a restorative practice environment. Lt. Lawson noted that the department is trying to do a better job of tracking proactive work (creating incidents would be unduly burdensome). Looking to expand role of SROs in larger safety planning in the schools and coordinating integration of SROs with training.

Commissioner Seguino commended the way that the SROs and BPD work as a team--collectively addressing these issues.

Discussion of referrals to criminal justice system (referral to alternative justice; invitation to appear in court; flash citation for more immediate appearance; full custody). Language of *arrest* may be confusing as one word covers many meanings. Cpl. DiFranco explained that all arrests are made mindfully; sometimes people are kicked out of diversion, or have refused to go to diversion. Commissioner Olwell noted that students don't have the chance to make mistakes that we did as children. Lt. Lawson noted that individual perspectives may vary, and the school environment is part of the community. There have been some severe injuries in school. Lt. Lawson says most of the 35 incidents in the last report were undercharged. Communication piece is key. Principal Mathias has had two arrests in elementary school in 7 years: one an assault that was very dangerous, the other a student selling marijuana. Students needed to understand how serious these behaviors were.

Commissioner Curry asked about data presentation: Lt. Lawson noted report can be configured for the district's needs. Commissioner Harrington noted that we have a plan for next year which will be in the minutes (above). We need to have good dovetailing of information with the schools--if there is arrests there may also be school decisions such as suspension. State is also tracking this data. How many types of interventions have high flyers had and when do we see them becoming successful? What worked and what didn't? How can we make more kids fall off the high flyer list? Need to look at the process that has worked.

Commissioner McLaren: would love to see a better understanding of what district procedures look like, and how they align with the MOU and the BSD SRO Update presented tonight. He seconded Commissioner Seguino's point about the importance of the district/BPD relationship. He had a great relationship with law enforcement as a child, which isn't the case for every student in the district, and it is so important to eliminate negative referrals. It's not just an equity issue; it is a

community issue. He expressed his gratitude to Director Sparks and the SROs for their work in their respective roles.

Action steps:

- Review MOU in light of this conversation/tonight's document.
- District should be involved in tracking incident numbers and should have many more incident reports than those of the SROs.
- In revision of the working document on SROs and/or the MOU, need to revisit the categories of action described. We should distinguish what is legally required vs. what is our aspiration for how to work within our restorative framework for school policies.

This portion of the agenda ended with the committee expressing thanks to Cpl DiFranco, who will be leaving the SRO position at the end of the school year. Search is currently underway for his replacement (BPD only places SROs who wish to serve in that role). Committee offered a round of applause to Cpl DiFranco for his work.

5. History of the district's restorative practices. Presentation by a team representing the district's restorative justice work includes consultants from South Burlington and Burlington's Community Justice Centers and UVM (Bedinger, Jolley, Smith) and administrators (Mathias, Sparks)

District is interested in restorative practices for many reasons:

- Close achievement gap
- Eliminate discipline disparities
- Improve culture and climate

Why is anyone doing RP? It has many benefits: reduces suspensions, expulsions, behavioral referrals, racial disparities in exclusionary discipline. It increases academic performance, teacher/parent satisfaction; social emotional capacity. It is a holistic way of approaching community behavior issues.

Vision for restorative practices in BSD: Restorative practices are rooted in relationship building and rebuilding to create a culture of equity and belonging that results in healing and learning. The Burlington School District, in partnership with the Burlington community, embraces Restorative Practices ensuring that all, including those who have been harmed, will have their needs and experiences

recognized and acted upon. Board Docs contains a more complete record of the material presented.

Restorative Practices fit into the district's strategic plan. They are a foundation for being able to close the achievement gap. Students need to be in school to learn. Everything we do should be looked at through the lens of restorative practices.

What will indicators of success be?

- Focus on relationships (when people care about relationships they want to repair them after something happens)
- Sense of belonging
- Diminishment and eventual elimination of academic and discipline disparities
- Exclusionary discipline practices are eliminated.

We want to see that all students needs are met. The academic literature is clear that exclusionary practices do not change behavior. UVM team has been collecting data from BHS, IAA, and EMS. Even kids at BHS realize that exclusionary practices don't affect peers' behavior. Restorative practices are embedded in all professional development now--currently the restorative practice collaborative is working on Tier 1 training, which is intentional community building. Principal Mathias reports seeing effects already.

Currently, elementary schools have an overall decrease of office referrals of 18% compared to 2015-16--this is remarkable given that the restorative practice work hasn't even begun to address the discipline process yet. But already, because of the early work, students are experiencing hearing their peers talk about their own experiences; restorative practices are improving communication and listening. Principal Mathias also noticed that faculty absenteeism is down. This is anecdotal evidence from one school, but it is encouraging.

What are desired outcomes? In four years:

- Improve school culture and climate
- Reduce educational services lost due to suspension and expulsion
- Improve academic outcomes and narrow achievement gap
- Improve outcomes for historical disenfranchised students.

Leadership team has shifted. Current team is very productive. Currently there is a Restorative Practices plan for the district--it is an evolving document. Work has included community conversations, variety of inservice work, all focused on getting a restorative lens for everything that we do. Focus on training para-educators as

well as teaching staff; also focus on training systems leaders. About to work on district-wide climate survey (parents, staff, and students). This will give us baseline data for the district, and each school will have individual data to work with as well. Collaboration with UVM researchers will help the district make data-driven decisions and systemic change.

#### Outcomes and Changes

- RP team at each school (right now elementary schools are ahead; summer 2018 institute will fold in middle/high school as well as after school and pre-K)
- Teachers are facilitating circles; much tier 1 work happens in the classroom
- Good working relationships with community partners: South Burlington and Burlington Community Justice Centers, Green Omega, Burlington Police Department
- Consultants support teams in buildings
- Restorative practice materials are distributed across the district
- MOU with the UVM COLLEGE of Education and Social Services for data and evaluation team

Teachers are growing in confidence about restorative practices because of the district commitment. Teachers feel permission to take the time to do restorative practices; it has academic benefits so in the end it works. There is confidence that there really is long-term support for this practice. The summer institute seems to have been a tipping point. There is a more participatory stance--counselors and teachers are asking for what they need. So how do we take it to the next level? Who are the right people in the room to have the conversation? Future trainings will deepen work (tier 2 incident happens; tier 3 re-entry)

Commissioner Olwell: do you do circles in classrooms each day? Yes, although not in every classroom every day. It is important for restorative practices to become part of the conversation about school safety.

Commissioner Curry offered thanks for the systemic and dedicated work of the group. She wondered what feedback the district had gotten from BHS students--how is implementation handled in an age-appropriate manner? Lisa Bedinger noted that a mistake in the pilot at BHS involved addressing tier 2 work which just pissed students off but will restart with tier 1.

6. Meeting adjourned at 8:02. Next meeting to be set after Board reorganizes.





Respectfully submitted,

*Susanmarie Harrington*