

City of Piedmont  
COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

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DATE: January 7, 2019

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Paul Benoit, City Administrator

SUBJECT: Report on the Opportunity to Establish a Grant Funded Police School Resource Officer in Cooperation with the Piedmont Unified School District and Possible Direction to Staff

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RECOMMENDATION

Provide comment and direction to staff regarding the public outreach plan for the concept of a School Resource Officer position in cooperation with the Piedmont Unified School District.

BACKGROUND

During the 2017-18 school year, Superintendent Randall Booker and Police Chief Jeremy Bowers initiated monthly meetings to enhance information sharing and seek opportunities for improvement not just from a safety standpoint, but also from a relational perspective. It was through those meetings, along with the professional experiences at other school districts and municipalities, whereby the consideration of a School Resource Officer (SRO) was discussed. The School District has a long-held distinguished reputation and year after year is recognized as one of the best school districts in the state. The City of Piedmont and the District are safe environments where residents and students thrive due to the support of an engaged, civic minded populous and dedicated professional staff.

The Police Department and School District have enjoyed a high-level of communication and collaboration. This relationship has aided in the Department's response to critical incidents at the schools, and has afforded an opportunity for police department staff to address the student body on topics such as drugged and drunk driving, sexual assault and harassment and responsible/safe social media use by youth. While we can point to the success of these efforts, the reality is that without a reliable and consistent presence in the schools, our intermittent contact will not elicit substantive improvements in behavior or foster the building of true and trusted relationships.

The SRO position is unique and distinct from the school counselor, the teacher, the social worker and the traditional role of a police officer. It is a specially trained law enforcement professional who is focused on the health, care and safety of the campus population from a community oriented perspective. In essence, the SRO combines aspects of the four disciplines noted above to help promote and enhance a safe and healthy learning environment.

The role of an SRO is to assist in building a positive school culture by implementing the main duties of the position, working closely with school leadership teams and making a positive impact on the school community while focusing on school safety. In this way the SRO would add value and support to those professionals within the district who work every day to support the social, emotional and behavioral health of students.

The four main duties of an SRO are:

- Serving as counselor, by interacting with students and staff and offering guidance and assistance;
- Serving as teacher, providing classroom presentations, supporting on-campus intervention through discussions and lessons, staff development and informational sessions for parents;
- Serving as social worker, linking students, parents and staff with resources and services; and, lastly
- Serving as a traditional law enforcement professional.

The emphasis will be on the SRO/student contacts to be positive in nature and serve to connect the student with another caring adult on campus, providing mentoring, guidance and connections to needed services.

The first SRO program was established in the late 1950's in Flint, Michigan. The goal was to improve the relationship between local police and youth. Officers were placed, full-time, into local schools to serve as teachers and counselors. The program was a success and became the model for future programs across the nation. The SRO concept has now been around for more than 50 years.

A significant amount of research has been conducted over the years concerning SRO programs. Like any program, an SRO program poorly implemented can have negative outcomes and in some instances, the research has shown these negative outcomes can include racial and ethnic disproportionality in school arrests, and the criminalization of school misbehavior. Should an SRO position be approved by the PUSD and City Council, logic dictates that there will likely be more student misconduct and illegal behavior detected and reported. For these reasons, the Department recommends continuing an approach to student misconduct and illegal activity which generally focuses the disciplinary response along school administrative processes. Unless there is a real and immediate threat to student, teacher, or public safety, incidents involving public order offenses and disorderly conduct should generally be considered school discipline issues to be handled by school officials, rather than criminal law issues warranting formal law enforcement intervention (e.g., issuance of a criminal citation, referral to a probation officer, or actual arrest). If the SRO program is approved, this approach should be adopted in detail and codified in any governance document or joint memorandum of understanding.

### Program Goals and Outcomes

- Redefine perceptions of local law enforcement (from negative) to understand PPD's progressive focus.
  - Strengthening transparency, partnership and trust with the police that go beyond the school environment.
- Provide education and serve as a resource for students, families, staff and administrators.
  - Conduct workshops and/or classroom “push-in” in the following areas:
    - Substance abuse (vaping, alcohol, marijuana)
    - Social Media Use
    - Traffic Safety
    - Civics, Law & Society, Social Psychology
    - Teach faculty and staff on drug recognition, signs of being under the influence, and current trends and laws
    - Counsel students on life-related issues such as, family, suicide, mental health, relationship problems, sexual abuse/harassment, drugs, tobacco and alcohol abuse
- Support the faculty and staff in developing and implementing the Safe Schools Plan.
  - Campus Supervision
  - Emergency Preparedness Planning and Implementation
    - Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery
  - Student/Staff/Family Counseling and Outreach
  - Restorative Justice
  - Hate-Motivated Incidents
  - Athletics Supervision

### Effective SRO's have:

- A genuine interest in working with youth
- An understanding of the school community
- Daily contact and involvement with the staff and students
- Shared interest with the community in maintaining a safe school environment

### Effective SRO programs have:

- Memorandum of Understanding
- Clearly defined role of the SRO, including differentiating student misbehavior and criminal offenses
- Method of data collection for activities and deliverables of the SRO, including education programs delivered, classes provided and on the interactions with students broken down by demographics
- An emphasis on training with a focus on de-escalation techniques, positive behavior reinforcements, child and adolescent psychology, special education interventions and equity and race discussions

### Districts Across the Bay Area with SRO Programs (partial list)

- Acalanes Union High School District
- Dublin Unified School District
- El Cerrito Unified School District
- Fremont Unified School District
- Los Gatos-Saratoga Union High School District
- Mt. Diablo Unified School District
- New Haven Unified School District
- Palo Alto Unified School District
- Pleasanton Unified School District
- San Francisco Unified School District
- San Jose Unified School District
- San Ramon Valley Unified School District
- Tamalpais Unified School District
- West Contra Costa County Unified School District

### FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS

As reported to both the School Board and City Council, the Piedmont Police Department applied for a grant that would fund three years of a School Resource Officer (SRO) position. On December 4, 2018, the Piedmont Police Department was notified by the State of California Department of Justice that the grant application for funds authorized under the California Healthcare, Research and Prevention Tobacco Tax Act of 2016 had been approved in the amount of \$391,599. The State grant team will begin working to send the Police Department a draft Memorandum of Understanding with further instructions and timelines.

If, at the expiration of the initial three year period, the City of Piedmont and the Piedmont Unified School District choose to extend the program, the two parties would need to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding that outlines a structure for addressing associated costs. It would be my suggestion that any consideration of a future beyond the first three years be addressed only after both the City and District have accumulated significant experience with having an SRO on campus and are thus able to fairly assess impact and outcomes.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Recognizing that an SRO program would be a new initiative for PUSD and the Piedmont Police Department, Superintendent Booker and Chief Bowers are committed to public engagement. The goal of the public engagement process is to provide an overview of a Piedmont specific SRO program, answer questions and seek feedback. What follows are the dates, times and bodies that have been identified for outreach.

Community Engagement Opportunities:

Board of Education	November 14, 2018 – 7:00 p.m.
Piedmont City Council	January 7, 2019 – 7:30 p.m.
Piedmont Appreciating Diversity Committee	January 10, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.
Millennium High School Parent Club	January 17, 2019 – 6:30 p.m.
Piedmont High School Parent Club	January 24, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.
Tri-School Elementary Parent Club	February 5, 2019 – 6:30 p.m.
Piedmont Middle School Parent Club	February 8, 2019 – 8:30 a.m.
Board of Education	February 27, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.

PUSD Staff Engagement Opportunities:

Beach Elementary	January 22, 2019
Havens Elementary	January 22, 2019
Wildwood Elementary	January 22, 2019
Piedmont Middle school	January 22, 2019
Piedmont High School	January 22, 2019
Millennium High School	TBD

PHS/MHS Student Engagement Opportunities:

Piedmont High School	January 11, 2019
Piedmont Middle School	January 10, 2019 – 12:50 p.m.
Millennium High School	TBD

PUSD staff will return to the PUSD Board of Education on February 27, 2019, to share details, questions and feedback learned from the various stakeholder meetings. Likewise, City Staff will also return to Council on February 19, 2019, to share details learned from the meetings. The decision to implement an SRO program will be determined jointly by the PUSD Board of Education and the Piedmont City Council.

By: Jeremy Bowers, Chief of Police

**Item #3 – School Resource Officer**  
**Correspondence received before Monday, January 7<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m.**

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Dear School Board members, City Council members, Police Chief Bowers, and Superintendent Booker,

The Piedmont Appreciating Diversity Committee (PADC) has been following the proposal for a School Resource Officer (SRO) with a great deal of attention and interest. We have researched the possible impact of an SRO on our schools and community, now that Piedmont has been awarded a [CA Department of Justice Tobacco Grant](#) for this purpose. Some of our members have pulled together various evidence-based articles regarding School Resource Officer implementation, and we wanted to share those articles and our concerns with you. [Here is a link](#) with those resources.

The Piedmont Appreciating Diversity Committee is proud of its collaboration with the school district and the City of Piedmont to ensure that our schools provide a safe, nurturing and inclusive environment for all students and staff and our City is viewed as a model of inclusion in all its practices, including policing. We appreciate the school and City's efforts to ensure safety for all our community members and the strides our community has made in equitable and impartial policing. Based on the research shared here, we have serious questions whether installing a School Resource Officer is the ideal solution for our community at this time. We have a number of specific concerns that are highlighted in these articles, but two of the main concerns are listed here, followed by suggestions for a more effective and transparent public engagement/outreach plan.

**1) It is not clear that inserting police officers into schools is a good way to improve school safety or that our schools will benefit by having one.** What danger is an SRO intended to prevent? Statistically, the odds of a given child getting killed in a mass school shooting — or any school shooting — are less than 1 in a million. On the other hand, arrest rates for disorderly conduct and low-level assault substantially increase when SROs are assigned to schools. In addition, studies indicate that the presence of SROs leads school administrators to defer to the police on issues of appropriate punishment, and increases the number of students involved in the justice system.

The staff report that accompanies the City Council agenda item suggests a strong and thriving partnership between the schools and police department. We also recognize the physical proximity of the Police Department to the Middle and High Schools' campus. Given this strong and close partnership, it is not clear why Piedmont in particular needs a law enforcement officer, who will likely carry a firearm, to be on campus.

**2) The data indicates a differential impact of SROs on students of color and other minorities, which has a negative impact on us all.** For example, an analysis by the Austin-based public-interest law center Texas Appleseed found that police officers assigned to McKinney, Texas schools had arrested and ticketed black students at an “extremely high and unequal” rate. And SROs' presence in the schools led to an increase in the citation of black students, and a decrease in the citation of white students. Given our schools recent work to

increase inclusiveness and diversity we are very concerned that this could have the effect of undoing that work, and inadvertently creating more problems within the schools - especially for students of color. Given the reality of implicit bias, even a well-intentioned SRO is likely to over identify students of color for disciplinary issues.

**Our suggestion:** Increase Public Engagement/Outreach Processes to determine if an SRO is necessary.

It is not clear how and why the decision was made to explore an SRO position through the CA DOJ Tobacco Grant Program in the first place. It seems that neither the school board nor the city council voted to make this a strategic priority, and there has been no public discussion about the issue beyond one school board meeting when the issue was introduced (to a limited audience). We applaud the city and school district for undertaking a public engagement/outreach plan to *“provide an overview of a Piedmont specific SRO program, answer questions and seek feedback”* and strongly encourage this in order to get input. Ideally, this would go beyond the small proportion of stakeholders who are able to attend in person meetings or feel comfortable voicing their concerns over this complex issue in a public setting. To ensure an effective and transparent public engagement/outreach effort we recommend that the school district follow processes it has used in the recent past including:

1. In addition to scheduled meetings seeking community input, conduct a brief online survey to elicit input from a broader group of students, staff and parents than are likely to attend in person meetings.
2. Consider convening a time-bound taskforce of students, staff, parents, school board members, police department and city leaders to determine (a) IF an SRO program is what our community needs; (b) identify lessons from the implementation of SRO programs in similar districts; and make recommendations on IF and how Piedmont should move forward with implementing the California Department of Justice Tobacco Grant.

While we understand and agree that building a positive school culture is crucial, given the research to date, we do not believe that an SRO is the best method of achieving this in our schools. There are numerous paths forward that could be more effective in this regard, we believe, including the district’s recent commitment to restorative justice practices in the schools and offering enhanced student counseling services and groups that serve to educate and support everyone. Furthermore, we are concerned that the implementation of an SRO could have unintended negative consequences on all our students, especially students of color and contribute to perpetuating systems of privilege and oppression, the exact opposite of what is ideal to model for the next generation.

We are looking forward to meeting with Chief Bowers & Superintendent Booker at our January 10th meeting, including a discussion of these concerns and of the key motivations and goals around the possible implementation of an SRO. All are welcome to join this meeting.

Thank you all in advance for considering these resources.

Best regards,

David Gard - Co-president PADC  
Tonda Case - Co-president PADC  
PADC Executive Board