

Neighbors for a Safer Saint Albans

www.staneighbors.org/

July 2, 2020

Dr. Kevin Dirth, Superintendent
Maple Run Unified School District
28 Catherine Street
St. Albans, VT 05478

Re: Questions about Maple Run School Resource Officer Program

Dear Dr. Dirth,

We are writing to address the use of School Resource Officers (SROs) in the Maple Run Unified School District. It is our understanding that this topic will be addressed at the next school board meeting on July 15th. We have a number of questions about this program that we are hoping you can answer in advance of that meeting. In light of recent calls to defund or reform police, as well as a lack of evidence to support the effectiveness of SROs, we are wondering what the administration sees as the role of SROs in our schools?¹ More specifically:

- How is the presence of an SRO beneficial to students?
- What local level data are available to support that at Maple Run?
- What data are available to show demographics of students who have interacted with SROs?

According to budget records, a total of \$264,456 is currently spent on SROs across the district.

- How are these contracts negotiated and where are we in the current contract cycle?
- What are the specific sources of funding?
- What are the reporting requirements of the above funding sources and how are the reports used?
- How can we access these reports?
- Which of the above funding sources could have the flexibility to be allocated to other programs or line items?
- Who provides supervision to SROs and how often are performance evaluations conducted?
- Who has access to performance evaluations?
- Does the district collect data on the efficacy of the officers?

One of our concerns is that - in contrast to making schools safer - research indicates that SROs make some students feel less safe and therefore have a negative impact on student achievement. A 2013 finding by the Congressional Research Service states that this impact falls disproportionately on low-income and students of color.² This suggests that the safety and comfort of white students is privileged at the expense of others. This is contrary to the mission of the district which seeks to create a community where “all can learn, achieve, and succeed”.

¹ Duffort, Lola. “Amid Policing Debate, School Resource Officers under Scrutiny.” *VTDigger*, 27 June 2020, vtdigger.org/2020/06/26/amid-policing-debate-school-resource-officers-under-scrutiny/.

² Congressional Research Service. (2013, June 26). School Resource Officers: Law Enforcement Officers in Schools. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43126.pdf>.

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On June 5th, the district released a Solidarity Statement in response to the protests evoked by the murder of George Floyd and years of unanswered cries for change. The statement recommitted to “anti-bias and anti-racism”. Our hope is that these funds will be redistributed to fund evidence-based alternatives that more equitably meet student needs and honor these commitments (which might include restorative justice models or the hiring of additional personnel such as social workers or school counselors).

Our intention in asking these questions is to become better informed as community members, and to spark conversation around the topic so that we can work together towards these commitments.

We look forward to your response to help us best prepare for the upcoming school board meeting.

On behalf of Neighbors for a Safer Saint Albans,

Reier Erickson

Katherine Hutchinson

Kate Larose

Cheryl Malkin

Mareesa Miles

Jennifer Williamson

Zach Scheffler

Tanner McCuin

Katie McCuin

Reese Kelly

Lauren Dees-Erickson

Angela H Sturm

Mary Johnson

Sarah E. Auer

Marianne Hunkin

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Rachael Sherman

CC: Jeff Morrill, Board Chair
Michelle Monroe, St. Albans Messenger
Cate Chant, Vermont Digger
Derek Brouwer, Seven Days