

TASK FORCE ON SCHOOL AND CAMPUS SECURITY

Minutes of the Second Meeting of the 2023 Interim

August 1, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The second meeting of the Task Force on School and Campus Security was held on August 1, 2023, at 2:00 p.m. in Room 131 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Scott Lewis, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Max Wise, Co-Chair; Representative Scott Lewis, Co-Chair; Senators Matthew Deneen, Michael J. Nemes, Reginald Thomas, and Stephen West, Representatives Savannah Maddox, Scott Sharp, James Tipton, and Lisa Willner.

Guests: Jon Akers, Executive Director, Kentucky Center for School Safety; Ben Wilcox, State School Security Marshal, Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet; Matthew Courtney, Policy Advisor, Office of Continuous Improvement, Kentucky Department of Education.

LRC Staff: Jo Carole Ellis, Yvette Perry, and Maurya Allen.

Approval of Minutes - July 18, 2023

Senator Deneen made a motion, seconded by Representative Tipton to approve the minutes of the July 18, 2023, meeting of the task force. The motion passed by voice vote.

Kentucky Center for School Safety & Office of the State School Security Marshal

Mr. Akers shared his concern that the reporting on school resource officers (SROs) across the nation does not accurately reflect the experiences of SROs in Kentucky. To better illustrate what the SROs do, he shared a video produced by the Department of Criminal Justice Training. The video is available to view as a link in the task force meeting materials on the LRC website.

Mr. Wilcox spoke at length about the training requirements for SROs and the 120 hours of training provided. As a specialized unit, a special kind of person is required to become an effective SRO. A significant portion of the training is devoted to diversity issues, special needs concerns, cyber bullying, and trauma informed care. Threat assessment and mental health first aid are critical elements of SRO training and are more useful to them than the training on active shooter situations.

Senator Thomas said he has heard nothing but good things about Marshal Wilcox and the positive impact of SROs in Kentucky schools.

SRO training will soon be absorbed into the DOJ training and utilize regional staff to offer training during the summer to prevent pulling SROs from their home districts for training during the school year. The department is in the midst of their fifth assessment of school safety. The data will be available soon, but trends have been very positive. Schools and administration have been proactive in achieving the goals set forth in the School Safety and Resiliency Act (SSRA) with many schools reaching full compliance. One issue that continues is the need to recruit more SROs to meet the staffing goals defined in the SSRA. Other states look to Kentucky as a model for school safety legislation. Of note is the Handle With Care program, as Kentucky is the only state that integrates it throughout all school districts which helps to address mental and emotional health before problems become crises.

Responding to a question from Senator Wise, Marshal Wilcox said Kentucky needs approximately \$25-50 million to fully fund all school SROs as required by statute. Mr. Akers said SROs have increased the number of qualified SROs, but there is a shortage due to strict screening and intensive training.

Mr. Akers said there is also an SRO mentorship program to help rookie SROs get the training they need. There is extensive collaboration between SROs, principals, and the Center for School Safety to bring in the right people. Marshal Wilcox said he is not opposed to former law enforcement, as long as they can still meet the POP certification standards. There would be more difficulties taking former military personnel into the program as it is very different training and very specialized. He would never want to reduce the amount of training received by SROs just to increase the number of applicants.

Additionally, counselors are brought in to lead the training on trauma informed care and mental health. There has been collaboration between the school counselors' association to develop a training to inform new school counselors of the mental first aid and trauma informed care training received by SROs and how to work as a team in schools.

Representative Willner said she is very impressed by the training received by SROs and the creation of an interdisciplinary team that combines the SROs, school psychologists, and counselors. National concerns about SROs highlight that there are over 2000 interactions between SROs and students, which resulted in approximately 150 arrests. This represents a very small percentage of incidents that result in arrest. The SROs strive to work with students and parents to reduce the risk of students entering the juvenile justice system. SROs are not disciplinarians; they are more like counselors who want to see students succeed.

Responding to a question from Senator Thomas, Marshal Wilcox said average pay is \$38,000 annually. Any increase in pay would be an incentive and would recognize the challenge of taking on this specialized branch of law enforcement.

Responding to a question from Senator Deneen, Marshal Wilcox said there is a portion of training in which compliance officers go into schools and work to help improve district assessments by training the SROs in how to communicate more effectively with teachers and staff.

In response to a question from Representative Sharp, Marshal Wilcox said the biggest need is to increase funding for schools to implement police departments and hire SROs. All schools he has worked with want to implement the statute, but have roadblocks of funding and getting qualified applicants.

Responding to a question from Representative Maddox, Mr. Akers said there are a large number of districts that have SROs for their middle and high schools, but there is a greater need for elementary schools.

In response to a question from Representative Tipton, Marshal Wilcox said there is a wide range in schools regarding compliance and improvements of school security. Differences in funding are an issue, but the office connects schools in order to share best practices. Innovation improves the school facilities, and schools are making the best of their resources. Mr. Akers said that target hardening is good, but addressing school culture and training for principals is just as important. High turnover in school administration and staff is a struggle. Professional development models are being created to help address these issues. Saturating the schools with the tip line is important which makes it easier for students to ask for help. Private schools have been invited to participate in trainings so that all students in the Commonwealth benefit from the resources available from the Center for School Safety.

In response to a question from Senator Wise, Marshal Wilcox said there are no specifics on the assessment. All school districts have signed up for Handle With Care, but if there are any individuals not participating or struggling to participate. They are encouraged to reach out to address any issues.

Student Mental Health

Mr. Courtney talked about the development of the Trauma-Informed Toolkit available on the KDE website. Links to all the resources were provided to the members. Local boards of education were required to develop trauma-informed plans. KDE does not review or receive the

plans, but they partnered with CTAC for a voluntary review of plans. Approximately 60 percent of the plans were copied from templates, and 40 percent were able to identify policies that needed to be reviewed or revised to develop trauma-informed policies. About 54 percent reported collaboration with the Handle with Care program. Mr. Courtney said there is some flexibility with how schools code mental health staff which could be impacting the reported mental health provider to student ratio. The Department will continue to work with schools to reach the ratios set forth in the SSRA.

In response to a question from Representative Tipton, Mr. Courtney said there may be a shortage in school psychologists and social workers due to recruitment and retention.

Responding to a question from Senator Wise, Mr. Courtney said school nurses are not included in the numbers presented, because they are primarily considered physical health workers not mental health workers. He can provide those numbers, but they would not count toward the goal of a mental health staff for every 250 students.

Returning to his presentation, Mr. Courtney presented the breakdown of how grant funding was used. Medicaid Expanded Access allows school districts to access funds beyond an IEP for other medically necessary services and for students who do not qualify for an IEP based on a disability. School districts can access individual and group therapy and counseling, which qualify under expanded Medicaid access. KDE cannot ensure compliance of the trauma-informed plans as they are not required to be submitted to the department. Also, because of the delay of having to coordinate through CTAC, there is not a way to provide immediate technical assistance. There is also not a required revision cycle for trauma-informed plans, and that is something that should be considered.

In response to a question from Representative Willner, Mr. Courtney said because KDE does not have the authority to collect and review the plans, there is very limited data on the plans. One of KDE's goals for the upcoming school year is communicating how important the plans are and ways to review their plans. Starting with a template serves as a starting point for districts to move forward to creating stronger customized plans. A requirement for periodic review is a good idea for legislation.

Training is provided by KDE regarding what trauma-informed plans should be. Funding is an issue, because many sources of funding that can be somewhat obscure. The state could access some funding from a state or federal level and create a consistent training program across the state.

In response to a question from Representative Tipton, Mr. Courtney said the industry has moved away from adverse childhood events (ACES) to trauma-informed as it is a wider umbrella and there is less data on which specific ACES lead to the most trauma. Mr. Courtney

said he would consult with staff and get further information on the differences and which is more appropriate for further consideration.

Adjournment

With no further business to come before the task force, the meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m. The next meeting of the task force will be September 19, 2023, at 2 p.m.