



MOUNTAIN VIEW LOS ALTOS HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Phil Faillace, Ph.D.
Debbie Torok
Catherine Vonnegut
Fiona Walter

SUPERINTENDENT

Dr. Nellie Meyer

November 8, 2021

The Honorable Ellen Kamei
Mayor of Mountain View
Mountain View City Hall
500 Castro Street
Mountain View, CA 94041

CC: The Honorable Lucas Ramirez, Vice Mayor
The Honorable Margaret Abe-Koga,
Councilmember
The Honorable Alison Hicks, Councilmember
The Honorable Sally Lieber, Councilmember
The Honorable Lisa Matichak, Councilmember
The Honorable Pat Showalter, Councilmember

Dear Mayor Kamei and Members of the City Council:

This letter is a continuation and reaffirmation of the letter we sent to you on June 6, 2021, in which we expressed our gratitude for your provision of MVPD's Youth Services Unit ("YSU") and, in particular, School Resource Officers ("SROs") at Mountain View High School ("MVHS"). Since then, the SROs' actions during a recent active shooter threat at MVHS and a bomb threat at Los Altos High School ("LAHS"), both in the midst of a busy schooldays, have made us even more grateful.

MVHS received an anonymous tip about a shooting to occur imminently at school. Hoping to keep the threat safely unrealized in a way that minimally traumatized students, administrators familiar with MVPD's SROs called for their help and they responded instantly. On the SROs' way to campus, they communicated continuously with school personnel to learn all that was known about the threat, and to use their knowledge of the school's culture to advise its staff on how to keep everyone safe while avoiding disruption and escalation.

Shortly after the SROs' arrival, they and administrators identified a suspect. It was someone with whose family the SROs had already established a good relationship during the student's sometimes troubled years in middle school. An inconspicuous message to the teacher of the suspect's class then in progress led to the student's being detained on a schoolwork pretext after other students' scheduled dismissal. The SROs entered the room, spoke gently and non-confrontationally to the student, ascertained that the student had no weapons, and then had school personnel walk the student away from the classrooms to a place where the student's mom joined them while the SROs interviewed the student, with the student's dad participating by teleconference.

The three-hour interview revealed not only that the student had made the threat, but also what was happening in the student's life that caused such troublesome acting out. The discussion with the student and the parents convinced the SROs and the school staff that the student posed no real threat to safety. The SROs decided to file a report, but not to arrest the student, thereby leaving to the school the determination of appropriate care and constructive discipline, and saving the student from further entanglement in the criminal justice system.

Unlike the shooting threat at MVHS, the bomb threat at LAHS struck a campus that is not in Mountain View and has no SROs, although it draws about half of its student population from Mountain View.

If ever a task required both sympathetic understanding of teenagers' tendencies in anxious circumstances and knowledge of counter-terrorism safety measures, the task of managing the evacuation of a high school under a terrorist threat is it. The rapid response of MVPD's SROs to our November 8, 2021, call for help brought their specialized skills and experience to bear on that task for us. Their expertise arrived "in the nick of time," just as 2,100 students had finished scrambling to get away from buildings and were beginning to show confusion and anxiety, which could have devolved into panic if left unchecked.

The SROs, by virtue of their unique familiarity with both the good and bad behaviors of our community's adolescents in and out of school, and their know-how in communicating in a friendly, non-threatening manner with high school students, provided the necessary check. They exuded a calming, confident, non-militaristic authority while expertly deploying large numbers of youngsters to scattered safer places on campus. They worked with our educators to keep the students rational and safe while the bomb squad evaluated the seriousness of the threat, and other first responders prepared to deal with the worst possible outcome. This time, we were lucky—there was no bomb, and bad outcomes never materialized.

Out of respect and high esteem for the MVPD, especially its YSU and SROs, and our gratitude for the cooperation we have long enjoyed with city government, we have granted Chief Hsiung's request to disseminate the Public Safety Advisory Board's SRO questionnaire among MVHS's stakeholders. We have done so despite grave concerns about its applicability to MVPD's SROs, and the likelihood that answers will reflect respondents' disgust at atrocious police behavior elsewhere, not their experience with our SROs.

These concerns would not have arisen if the questionnaire had been faithful to its only stated purpose, which appears in its introductory paragraph and which we endorse:

to learn about the **experiences** of current and recent former students, parents of such students, and faculty members/administrators **with Mountain View Police Department's School Resource Officers.**

Unfortunately, the questionnaire deviates from this worthy purpose by having every student, parent, and teacher who responds—regardless of their experience (or lack thereof) with MVPD's SROs—start by answering generic questions that are not specifically about MVPD's SROs. The questions include descriptions of controversial services SROs elsewhere provide, but MVPD's do not; and they omit highly valued services that only SROs can provide and MVPD's do provide, as our previous letter described.

Specifically, the first generic SRO question asks respondents to select from a menu of pre-formulated "purposes of having SROs on campus" those they think are primary. Among the choices are "To discipline or punish students for non-criminal violations of the school rules," and "To enforce traffic laws around the school campus." The former does not describe what MVPD SROs do on campus, and the latter occurs only coincidentally, not purposefully; but either could very easily evoke graphic memories of widely propagated accounts of awful SRO behavior elsewhere.

Simply google "school resource officer body-slams student" or "school resource officer shoots at car leaving school parking lot" to see some of those accounts, all in this year. Those SROs' actions are unquestionably disgusting, outrageous and tragic. Next, imagine how memories of those accounts can affect respondents' answers, not just to these generic questions, but to successive questions as well.

The same media that propagate horrifying but factual videographic depictions and verbal accounts of such incidents also propagate opinion-editorials ("op-eds") that argue for defunding the police or, at least, eliminating SROs. They use arguments tantamount to profiling SROs while contending that purposes served by having SROs are better served by non-police personnel. The overall effect is prejudicial against good SRO programs such as MVPD's. (Since Oct. 16, the Voice has had just such a guest op-ed online, while the questionnaire was circulating among the school districts' students, parents and educators.)

The second generic question asks whether respondents "believe" those "services" (the previous question's "purposes") "are best provided by police officers." Introducing the idea of using those police who, unlike our SROs, do not have a passion for helping youngsters, and lack the training to do so, to perform those services unfairly increases the likelihood of "No" answers. It also adds memories of widespread accounts of terrible behavior toward children by non-SRO police elsewhere to the prejudicial memories this questionnaire could easily recall. (Googling "cops beat teenagers" in a search for videos yields examples.) And there would be more "Yes" answers if the menu had included the vital services that only SROs can perform and MVPD's do.

The questionnaire's generic portion is essentially a survey of what respondents think and believe about having seven specific functions performed by what they conceptualize on campus SROs to be. It would be a misuse of that survey's results to allow conceptualizations in the minds of persons having scant familiarity with MVPD's SROs to be a basis for judgments about them. Unfortunately, it will be difficult to consider the data gathered from answers to questions by persons having actual experience with MVPD's SROs without wondering whether they, too, have been prejudiced by their encounter with the generic portion.

Nevertheless, our intent is to find use for the questionnaire's results as we continue working with our SRO partners to make disaffected students and parents feel justifiably confident that our SROs will serve them well and keep them safe. We hope you will continue to allow us to do so.


Gratefully,



Fiona Walter,
President, Governing Board



Nellie Meyer, Superintendent
for the Administration



Catherine Vonnegut
Vice President, Governing Board



Debbie Torok
Clerk, Governing Board



Sanjay Dave
Trustee, Governing Board



Phil Faillace
Trustee, Governing Board