



District Office
T 650.526.3500
1400 Montecito Ave.
Mountain View, CA 94043

Nov. 17, 2021

Dear Honorable Public Safety Advisory Board and City Council Members,

As superintendent of Mountain View Whisman Schools, a resident of Mountain View, and an educator with more than two decades of experience, I feel that my observations, perception and interactions with Mountain View Police Department School Resource Officers (SROs) are unique, illuminative and hopefully insightful to your deliberations.

Just last week I was interviewed by a Doctoral student who was looking to understand the role of community policing in schools. I shared with her that one of my earliest memories of interacting with police occurred right in front of my house. On this day two police officers stopped their patrol car in front of my house and began to frisk me, without providing cause. I was an elementary school student who was locked out of the house, completing my homework and waiting for my mother to arrive. My belongings were “tossed,” and I was left feeling violated. The police left at the exact time that my mother was pulling up.

This was not the seminal event in my life that shaped my perception of police officers. Instead it was the African American SRO from my high school. He was more than a mentor. He served as a lighthouse for what I could achieve as a young black man. He was God-fearing, kind, supportive, and firm. He was my “brother, father figure and protector.” He taught me, without ever having to develop a lesson plan.

He and the countless other police officers, including the MVPD Youth Services Department, with whom I have had the privilege of working are the epitome of community policing. They serve as much needed role models for our students; ones that our students can personally identify with. They are relationship builders, advocates, mentors and coaches. They are caring men and women who share my belief that the best way to change a community's perception of police is through kindness, laughter and smiles.

Recent events have led to a call to action for the removal of police in schools. Officers all over the country, including our SROs, have been unjustly painted with a broad brush. Even worse, members of our own community have called for their removal without any data, conversations with our staff / Board, or observations of their work. While I appreciate the allyship, I was always taught that “the road to perdition is paved with good intentions.”

MVWSD understands the role of SROs in our school community. We seek their assistance with safety drills, which have helped save our students' lives in active shooting events; Gilroy and Six Flags. We rely on them to work with our at-risk students after school and during the summer. We ask for their assistance in keeping our students and staff safe. They talk to our students about bike safety, online bullying and the dangers of using drugs. They participate in our parent education events. In short, we ask them to do more than police, we ask them to serve as the glue for our community.

While having the honor of participating with Chief Max Bosel in the city's Human Rights Commission "Community Forum: Affirming Mountain View Values" on Feb. 11, 2017, I spoke about the roles of the police and the community. The death of George Floyd is a tragic stain on the fabric of American history, but it should have never been used as a referendum to remove police officers from our schools or reduce their presence in our community. Instead, it was a moment to begin to understand that the path forward will require all of us to listen more, set aside our differences and suspend our judgement of others. May 25 should not only serve as a moment of remembrance, but also as the moment when we realize that each of us plays a vital role in creating a safe environment for our kids.

Our schools need our SROs. Our kids need to see strong men and women who are not only service oriented but also vested in their success. We should be highlighting their work and applauding their efforts and kindness. If there are any changes needed, it should be finding ways to help them achieve their professional aspirations while staying within the Youth Services Department. These men and women, and MVPD's approach to community policing, should not only be lauded, but be recognized as a critical aspect of the work to create positive change in every community; especially those that are composed of low-income and minority families.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AR', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Ayindé Rudolph, Ed.D.
Superintendent