

Staff Report

**FUTURE STATUS OF THE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAM IN THE AMES COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

December 14, 2021

**BACKGROUND:**

The City has partnered with the Ames Community School District (ACSD) to provide a School Resource Officer (SRO) program since FY 1995/96. Originally, the program included one full-time officer assigned to the Ames High School. However, in response to a request made by the ACSD administrators, a second SRO was approved in May 2019 for the Ames Middle School.

When the second SRO was added, a formalized agreement was approved between the City and the ACSD for the first time since the program's inception. The new agreement highlighted a number of important issues, including: selection, supervision, responsibilities, rights & duties, financial obligations, termination, and insurance and indemnity.

In accordance with the agreement, the City and the ACSD split the cost of the two officers and associated expenses for the nine months of the year; during the three months that the schools are not in session, the City pays 100% of the cost for these two officers.

The agreement calls for the SRO program to begin on July 1, 2019 and expire on June 30, 2024 unless renewed in writing by agreement of both parties, or written notice of its intent not to renew the existing agreement is provided to the other party by January 1<sup>st</sup> of the year prior to that start of the academic year in which the termination may occur.

**GOALS OF THE SRO PROGRAM:**

From the City's perspective, the goals of the SRO program are consistent with philosophies espoused by the National Association of School Resource Officers: to provide valuable resources to school staff members, to foster positive relationships with youth, to develop strategies to resolve problems affecting youth, and to protect all students so that they can reach their fullest potentials.

As emphasized in the May 28, 2019, Council Action Form regarding the expansion of the SRO program, "The School Resource Officer is not a security officer for the schools." This point is highlighted in the current agreement where it states that the SROs are not meant to be used for lunchroom duty, hall monitors, bus duties, or other monitoring duties.

City staff believes the primary goal of the SRO program is to establish positive relationships between the Ames Police Department and the City's youth so that they can feel comfortable to come to a Police Officer seeking help if, for example, a student is being bullied at school or is subject to abusive behavior outside of school.

The SROs provide the following additional services as outlined in the agreement:

- Assist ACSD officials in emergency situations, assist with the preparation of emergency safety plans, and perform emergency assessments.
- Assist in educating the students with classroom presentations regarding relevant safety topics.
- Engage in effective problem solving for issues that involve students, ACSD staff, and surrounding neighbors.
- Share with school officials when an SRO becomes aware that a student has experienced a traumatic event that could negatively impact the student's behavior in school.
- Assist in law enforcement investigations involving victims, witnesses, and suspects associated with schools. However, the SROs will assist in providing effective alternatives to the court system whenever possible.

### **THE TRANSITION OF THE SRO PROGRAM:**

With the return to full-time, in-house classes in August, the ACSD has faced challenges in maintaining a stable and safe learning environment for all of its students. It should be emphasized that these challenges are not unique to the ACSD and are being experienced by many school districts throughout the country. **As a result, at the request of the ACSD administrators our SROs have spent more time during the recent months helping to restore order and enforcing ACSD rules than interacting with students in more positive ways to create trusting relationships.**

Realizing that this change in focus might not be meeting the needs of both parties, administrators from the City and ACSD have been discussing the future vision for the SROs. **It has become apparent from our discussions that the primary goals for the SRO program for each party are diverging. The ACSD administrators believe that they have made the necessary changes in staffing and procedures to re-establish a stable learning environment and have reached the point where they would like to try other techniques and resources in lieu of the utilizing Police Officers in the schools to serve the emotional and safety needs of the students.**

### **STAFF COMMENTS:**

As a follow-up to our discussions, the City Manager has received a letter from the ACSD Superintendent, Paula Vincent, notifying the City that she intends to recommend to the ACSD School Board on December 13<sup>th</sup> that our agreement to provide SROs not be renewed after June 30, 2022. If the School Board approves her recommendation, no further action is required on your part since the agreement will automatically terminate. The two authorized SRO FTEs will be reassigned to fill police patrol positions that are currently vacant.

**Given the lack of a shared vision for the primary goal of the SRO program at this time and an indication that the ACSD officials would like to pursue a different service delivery model, the ACSD Superintendent and Ames City Manager are jointly recommending that the 28E Agreement related to the SRO program not be renewed after June 30, 2022.**

### **WHAT IS NEXT?**

**Even with the elimination of the SROs in the schools on a daily basis, the City Manager and ACSD Superintendent intend to continue the partnership with a goal of school safety in the following ways:**

- The Ames Police Department will continue to provide Police Officers to make periodic school and classroom visits to proactively build positive relationships with the students and to provide relevant safety training;
- The Ames Police Department will continue to provide emergency assessments and assist the ACSD in developing its emergency plans for each school; and
- The Ames Police Department, of course, will continue to respond to emergency calls from the various schools.

**It should be emphasized that although we are making progress in filling the numerous vacancies in our Police Officer positions, we believe there will only be sufficient staff to provide one SRO to the ACSD through the June 30, 2022.**