

New Bedford Public Schools seeks community input on School Resource Officer program

Review of School Resource Officer program at New Bedford Public Schools seeks community input through virtual meetings, working groups and online surveys

New Bedford Public Schools' series of 'Community Conversations' begun in October has focused on the mission and efficacy of the district's longstanding School Resource Officer Program. Virtual discussions have taken place for students (Oct. 7), staff (Oct. 13), and the public (Oct. 14) to gather feedback, personal experience and public perceptions of the SRO program.

The series of discussions continued on November 17 with a virtual public share-out session and on "Next Steps" in the process. This will include the establishment of two working Groups. Group 1 will review existing SRO models operating in other districts, (including districts that have removed SRO programs). Group 2 will examine "baseline data" and information collected throughout the review process, which includes input gathered in the Community Conversations, surveys and focus groups.

In welcoming participants to the Tuesday evening discussion, Superintendent Thomas Anderson stated, "The intent is to insure this is a very inclusive process... to allow all the thoughts and focal points to be addressed. This is a very sensitive topic to me in my role as superintendent and personally. The focus on bringing people together that can offer varying perspectives is how we maximize our value as

individuals and how we grow as a community in New Bedford and across our country.”

Noting that data analysis will be the primary work of Group 2, Jarriel Vergne, NBPS District Wraparound Manager, explained that it will “look at the baseline data, past data and what are the trends. Each group will work to create a final report that looks at all the pieces – that would go to Superintendent Anderson, which would inform his final decision regarding police officer programs in NBPS and our future trajectory.”

Stakeholder organizations participated in the share-out portion of the meeting. These included representatives of the NAACP New Bedford Branch, New Bedford Coalition to Save Our Schools (NBCSOS) and United Interfaith Action of Southeastern Massachusetts (UIA). Attendees also heard from parents, educators, members of the New Bedford School Committee and New Bedford Police Department.

Charlemya Erasme, speaking on behalf of the NAACP New Bedford Branch, stated “The National NAACP stance on school resource officers is that they do not support having police officers in schools; and then, more in the context of New Bedford, we also do not support having police officers in schools but we do look forward to receiving the data...”

Ricardo Rosa, NBCSOS Co-Chair stated his organization “is against the use of school resource officers in our schools”, noting “the real experts of any educational, social or public policy are those on the other end and young people of color have been speaking out about this issue for a very long time, they are the experts.”

Rhoda Purcell noted, “UIA is not universally aligned in how we view SROs, but, we all agree that the program needs evaluation and re-consideration.”

New Bedford residents interested in joining a working group should indicate their interest by visiting

www.newbedfordschools.org and completing the SR0 Working Groups Sign-Up Form by November 30, 2020, which is available in four languages: