



MINUTES
SPECIAL COMMISSION FOR SAFE COMMUNITIES - REGULAR SESSION
THURSDAY, September 26, 2024, 1:00 PM.

The Special Commission for Safe Communities convened in regular session in the Government Center Boardroom at 1:00 PM, on September 26, 2024. Chairperson Denton called the meeting to order.

Roll Call

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Scott Denton	Chairperson	Present
Elizabeth German	Vice Chairperson	Present
Cathy Lust	Commissioner	Present
Kaitlyn Selman	Commissioner	Present
Ryan Bertrand	Commissioner	Present
Timothy Harris	Commissioner	Present
Aron Klein	Commissioner	Absent
Christopher Cashen	Commissioner	Absent

Staff Advisors Present:

Kiel Nowers, Staff Liaison

Public Comment

No public comment was received.

Approval of Minutes

The following item was presented:

Item 4.A. Consideration and action to approve the Minutes of the August 22, 2024, Regular Special Commission for Safe Communities Meeting.

Commissioner Bertrand made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Selman, to approve the Item as presented.

Chairperson Denton directed the Staff Liaison to call roll:

AYES: German; Lust; Selman; Bertrand; Harris

Motion carried.

Regular Agenda

The following item was presented:

Item 5.A. Presentation and discussion by Sgt. Kiel Nowers on the current status of gun violence in the Bloomington-Normal area.

Assistant Chief Veerman shared the following information provided by Bloomington Police Department (BPD) Crime Intelligence & Analysis Unit Supervisor Jack McQueen:

- Since the August 22, 2024, commission meeting, BPD has documented four incidents of gunfire:

- August 30th: Rounds were fired in the area of Mason/Empire Streets. There were no reported injuries; however, there was property damage to one home. BPD executed a search warrant on a home in that area and recovered items believed to be related to the shooting. That investigation continues.
- September 2nd: Youth seen in the same area of Washington/Howard were suspected of firing a pistol. No injuries or property damage were reported.
- September 5th: Officers responded to the area of Washington/Howard for report of a shooting. Video evidence of the shooting was located, and BPD conducted a search of a nearby home. BPD seized one Polymer 80 ("ghost gun") and evidence of an additional gun. The evidence linked the shooting to two juveniles, aged 15 and 16 years old. Additional evidence showed the juveniles were using a stop sign as practice, and part of the sign hit a home downrange.
- September 6th: An unknown party fired two rounds through the front of the Starbucks shop near the intersection of Veterans Parkway/Washington. It appears to have been random gunfire and the investigation continues.

Item 5.B. Presentation and discussion by Leslie Blockman, LCSW, Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning and Engagement, with School District 87.

Leslie Blockman, LCSW, is a school social worker and the Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Engagement for School District 87 (D87). Ms. Blockman provided an overview of District 87's enrollment, their SEL program, the needs of the students, and what District 87 has implemented.

This school year (2023-2024), D87 has an enrollment of 4,866 students. Of those 4,866, 66% are classified as being from low-income families and 3% are homeless. For the 2023-2024 school year, there was a 34% absenteeism rate among students. During that same school year, 66% of the students were on a free/reduced lunch cost plan. Ms. Blockman shared that D87 is the second-most diverse school district in Illinois.

The SEL program has been in place within D87 for four years and encompasses grades Pre-K through Grade 12. There are multiple tiers of support for students:

1. Tier 1 includes all students within the school district, from grades Pre-K through 12th. This is called the Core SEL Instruction tier. The SEL curriculum includes the 7 Mindsets program, which teaches students life skills including empathy, anger management, accountability and more. An assessment is done of students to determine if any may need additional support.
2. Tier 2 is called the Supplemental SEL Instruction tier. This tier is for students in Grades 1 through Grade 12 and provides more in-depth support for students experience mental health struggles.
3. Tier 3 is called the Intensive SEL Instruction tier. This tier is for students who have been identified for small group and individual support.

For the students who have been identified for individual support, schools collaborate with additional social workers and mental health services as needed for what is referred to as "internal wraparound". District-wide, 220 students were referred for "internal wraparound" services during the 2023-2024 school year. This is down from 240 referrals during the 2022-2023 school year, and 290 students during the 2021-2022 school year. A few of the

organizations that collaborate with D87 are Project Oz, The Center for Youth and Family Services, and the Department of Human Services.

To support staff and teachers with student needs, D87 provides wellness coaches and events, and training opportunities such as: Social/Emotional Learning; Conscious Discipline; Trauma and the Brain; classroom management strategies; coaching and more. Teachers also receive resources for their classrooms, including calming corners, different seating options, fidget devices, etc.

Ms. Blockman mentioned internalizing and externalizing behaviors in students. Internalizing behaviors can include withdrawing socially, self-harm, depression, and anxiety. Externalizing behaviors can include acting aggressively toward others, including being verbally abusive, hyperactivity, and vandalism. She noted that the majority of resources focus on internalizing behaviors and more resources are needed to help address externalizing behaviors. One factor Ms. Blockman believes is detrimental is the density of housing for low-income families and students. Density in housing can mean conflicts in the home environment between students whose families are neighbors, can lead into conflict at school between the students.

The last areas Ms. Blockman touched on during her presentation was the need for earlier intervention in children's lives and the role of exposure to social media at a young age. She posited that children would benefit from learning skills at as early an age as possible for handling conflict they may be exposed to within their homes and neighborhoods. Ms. Blockman pointed out that by the time some children reach school age, they have already learned behaviors from their families and environments. Ms. Blockman mentioned that often adults become addicted to social media and constantly scrolling through their phones, and children model the behaviors they see from adults. It was mentioned by a member of the commission that a previous presenter to the group brought up the role social media and "diss" videos play in interpersonal conflicts between students outside of school.

Commissioner German asked if the SEL assessment tool is the only way for students to move from Tier 1 to Tier 2 resources. Ms. Blockman replied that to get to Tier 2, there are tools like mySaebre, which measures a student's risk for having social, emotional or behavior issues, data from nurses, and teachers can also make referrals.

Commissioner German also inquired what D87 needs as far as additional resources. Ms. Blockman reiterated the need for early intervention and support of families. She mentioned many families have a distrust of schools. She believes earlier intervention, from the time a child is an infant, and keeping the families involved through working with them in their homes as well as working with the children at schools, it would make a difference.

Commissioner Bertrand asked if there were any resources already available that currently are not being used. Ms. Blockman reported that 90% of families are agreeing to social services when recommended, but that some families with children who need services don't meet the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) threshold to receive that help. She also noted there are currently less services available for children under the age of 5 years and there is a need for more, particularly for the Pre-K age range of 3-5 years. Ms. Blockman mentioned that there is also a stigma in having DCFS involved with a family, so work needs to be done to remove that stigmatization of having an agency help families.

Commissioner Lust inquired if family facilitators can meet and work with families in their homes. Ms. Blockman replied that they can assist families in their homes but to the extent of

having parents engage with their children involving school events. She stated the facilitators do not have the skill sets at this time to do parental training within homes.

Commissioner Denton mentioned there has been an increase in the number of gun incidents involving youth, and he asked what Ms. Blockman would suggest to help address that. Ms. Blockman replied that there is a need for teaching conflict resolution and expanding students' world exposure. She said the SEL curriculum tries to provide some different exposures. Currently, there is no specific gun safety training in the schools. Commissioner Bertrand asked if there were opportunities for BeSmart presentations at school and Commissioner Lust indicated an interest in having a BeSmart presentation would be good to have at a future commission meeting. Staff Liaison Nowers mentioned he gives some gun safety presentations out in the community. Ms. Blockman also suggested taking a tiered approach to gun safety training. Some students have not been exposed to guns, while others have already had personal experience with guns and gunfire.

Commissioner German asked if there is anything else outside of the school setting that the commission should look at besides student illness. Ms. Blockman struggles with depression and anxiety are strong reasons the absenteeism rate is so high. Additionally, students stay up late at night playing video games and engaging in social media, resulting in less sleep and affecting how they feel the following day at school. They mimic the behaviors they see in adults and many parents are modeling the behavior of being addicted to their smartphones. She stated that people, including children, are frequently exposed online to unrealistic things and that conflicts happen online that would not happen if people were face-to-face.

New Business

Commissioner Denton will send an email to Staff Liaison Veerman regarding Project Oz's interest in having another member of their organization become a commissioner. He stated he believes the mayor would need to appoint a new commissioner but will find out.

Commissioner Lust suggested Kevin Jones, a Restorative Practice Consultant with the Regional Office of Education, speak at the October commission meeting about restorative justice and reform. Dr. Dawn Beichner-Thomas, a professor with the Illinois State University Criminal Justice program, may also present at the October meeting.

Commissioner Denton will see if the November and December commission meetings can be rescheduled due to the original dates' proximity to nationally recognized holidays.

Commissioner Member Comments

To address the idea of early intervention, Commissioner Selman brought up exploring the possibility of having hospitals offer parenting classes when babies are born. She also mentioned social media has played a part in the "death of third spaces", like parks, malls and other places children can go to have community but also adult eyes on them, which could be a contributing factor to a rise in gun violence events happening in the space of time between the end of the school day and when parents return home from work. She mentioned after school events have become very expensive and out of reach for many families. She suggested the possibility of seeing if representatives from Bloomington Revivalists and the Bloomington-Normal Community Land Trust could speak to the commission.

Commissioner Selman also brought forward the need for conflict resolution skills to be taught at a younger age. Commissioner German added there is a need for social media and conflict resolution training community wide.

Commissioner German raised the point that after age 12, DCFS bows out of events for children. She pointed out the need for safe third spaces for children older than 12 years.

Commissioner Harris suggested seeing if the YMCA could get involved with adding more programs for children.

Commissioner Denton asked Staff Liaison Nowers for his thoughts on what programs are needed. He replied that children at high school age need a safe space for everyone, not just those at higher risk. He stated that shootings are feeding off social media and mentioned social media continues to evolve and new apps are appearing that parents do not know about and/or do not understand how to use to monitor their children's activity on them. Commissioner Selman mentioned the fact that social media monitoring apps can be breached fairly easily as well.

Commissioner Harris stated there is a need to set a concrete, consistent, steady template for what the commission eventually recommends to the city council. He commented that it should be stressed to the council that any actions taken as a result of the commission's recommendations be viewed by council as an investment toward a safer community, not simply a cost.

Adjournment

Commissioner Bertrand made a motion, seconded by Commissioner German, to adjourn.

Motion carried (viva voce).

The Meeting Adjourned at 2:06 PM.

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON



Scott Denton, Chairperson

ATTEST



Kiel Nowers, Staff Liaison