Superintendent Noreen Bush

President Nancy Humbles

Board of Education

Cedar Rapids Community School District

Dear Superintendent Noreen Bush, President Nancy Humbles, and Board of Directors,

I am writing as a community member to tell how very concerned I am about the School Resource Officer (SRO) program recommendations presented at the August 23, 2021 School Board Meeting. I care deeply about the needs of our community’s most vulnerable people, and their ability to have a fair chance for success and happiness—and it starts with our children. With the right tools, access, and resources, the kids in our district have an amazing opportunity to become successful adults upon graduation. Having police officers with guns in our schools is not the appropriate resource.

I want to be clear that this issue is not about the individual officers. I believe from what I have learned through various channels that they are great officers and great human beings. My concern is it is not the job of a police officer to develop students in schools. While I am sure they are building good relationships with some students, there are plenty of other options to build relationships and trust outside of the walls of a school all day.

There is also no data to demonstrate that schools are any safer with a police officer on campus than just responding to incidents upon call as they do for the rest of the community. On the contrary, there is a plethora of quantitative and qualitative data to show that placing SROs in places where kids are supposed to learn is a harmful mistake. The results of research presented about SROs in schools and their impact on students, particularly Black and Brown students, is very alarming. Examples:

* Police in schools increase the number of suspensions and arrests while decreasing graduation rates and even academic performance.
* Black and Brown students are being arrested locally at a significantly inequitable rate that has exploded since the addition of SRO’s.
* Arrests for common youth misbehavior like being disruptive make kids more likely to drop out of school and enter the criminal justice system as adults.
* Students stopped by SROs more than once “experience higher rates of mental health problems” such as posttraumatic stress and emotional distress
* There has been no data-driven or clear historical explanation for why SROs were placed in the two middle schools with by far the highest percentage of Black and Brown students. Furthermore, there is no data-driven or logical explanation for why the entire program started.

We are spending over $900,000 per year of our taxpayer dollars to supplement an SRO program that has produced no impactful results that I have learned, yet this is money that could be used for more therapists, mental health professionals, child advocacy programs, higher paraprofessional pay, and other resources. These professionals and community leaders who are trained and educated ***specifically*** to work with children. Developing children is the career path they have chosen and invested their lives in, just as police officers invested their lives into their true job, which is to protect and serve the citizens of our community through law enforcement.

Students have expressed feeling unsafe in school spaces due to the presence of armed police officers. Countless studies show that students feel safe when they have access to needed resources, community and mental health supports, and restorative approaches to discipline, from force and legal authority.

This is not a political issue. Rather, this is a social issue. It is an opportunity for you as leaders of education—an institution that is supposed to be guided by data-based results—to advocate for children by supporting decisions rooted in research and evidence. If you as leaders are truly guided by quantitative and qualitative evidence, then you must concur that we need a new direction. There is no need to wait any longer and compound what we already know are negative outcomes; and these outcomes cannot be outweighed by whatever good work you feel the SROs are doing.

I know you have a decision to make that will be unpopular no matter what. But with all due respect, that is your role as our board members—to help make the tough calls in the name of what is best for our students. So, I thank you for your work, and for putting students first. I hope that you will continue to do so by voting to remove SROs from our schools, and using those funds to support the aforementioned needs. I encourage you to continue working closely with the CRPD on other strategies to build relationships and trust with our students.

This is the right thing to do.

Thank you for your time,

YOUR NAME

YOUR HOME CITY

YOUR PROFESSIONAL ROLE (OPTIONAL)