

**Policy #2478 Armed Security Officers  
Questions and Answers**

**Monday, October 01, 2018 Board of Education Meeting**

Q. I am somewhat outraged that while citizens are allowed to make statements, we are not allowed to ask questions or have them answered.

***A. Board of Education meetings are not a meeting with the public, but a meeting of the Board held in Public. As such the meeting allows for public comment limited to the topics on the agenda but not a dialogue with the audience. Any discussions of the Board regarding agenda items can constitute an illegal meeting if five or more members are involved in the conversation.***

Q. No one has explained what has been done to date to make our schools safe outside of guards and now guns. A board member mentioned talking to the Newtown school district. I wonder if you've consulted with any of the organizations that came out of the tragedy there, such as Sandy Hook Promise, Safe and Sound Schools, or the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Foundation.

***A. Over the past several years our schools have implemented a variety of programs and initiatives connected to the lessons learned from the tragedy next door. RMS received a commendation for their participation in "Start with Hello". We have also had schools participate in the "Sandy Hook Promise" and "No one eats Alone".***

***Currently we have a variety of related programs and initiatives taking place in our schools. Some of those examples include: TRACKS, Kindness Coins, Dylan's Wings of Change, Ally Training (a focus on being an UpStander), Mix it up day, and the CARES program. Additionally there are several other programs in discussion that will compliment those listed above such as "Names Can Really Hurt"***

Q. There was a lot of talk about social and emotional learning earlier in the meeting, but not how it relates to school safety. Rather than assuming the fatalistic stance that these events are unavoidable, might we focus our funding and efforts on things that have been proven to stop children from feeling isolated to the point where they would contemplate something like this?

***A. The district believes in a comprehensive approach to supporting the social and emotional health and wellbeing of students. As such we have, School Psychologists, School Counselors, a Board Certified Behaviorist, and a program in partnership with the Wheeler Clinic. We have a Developmental Guidance Curriculum as well as a School Assistance Program (PHS) and a Spectrum SAP counselor in the district. We have staff that are participating in a program through Yale University the looks to improve school climate through and initiative called RULER( <http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/>) and are implementing Restorative Practices in our schools. The Policy and Curriculum meeting last month there was a presentation that covered some of these initiatives:  
[http://www.region15.org/filestorage/158/2563/2266/2408/24318/2018-9-17\\_P%26C\\_Special\\_Education\\_Update.pdf](http://www.region15.org/filestorage/158/2563/2266/2408/24318/2018-9-17_P%26C_Special_Education_Update.pdf)***

Q. I also wonder why, as was pointed out by the selectman who spoke, no one bothered asking the town about having actual police officers fill these positions prior to making the assumption that it wasn't affordable. If this board is to push forward with the idea that we must militarize our schools, perhaps at least consider having active duty police rather than retirees.

***A. The district works with safety and security professionals from both Southbury and Middlebury as well as consultants with regional and international experience. Throughout the process both towns have been included in the conversation and been included in the process. During the planning and development of the policy they have been supportive of the direction that the school board has moved in. When making decisions about school safety the district reviews current practices in comparison to***

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*recommendations and emerging best practice. We work to balance security measures and the financial realities towns and schools must work within. Being a regional school district there are additional complexities when working with multiple police departments and staffing schools in different towns. The school district continues to have a collaborative relationship with the municipal leaders in the participating communities and is always available to discuss shared services should the communities wish to explore additional options in the future.*

Q. The retirees may be fit, mentally and physically, but I would find it hard to believe any of them have a faster response time than a curious kindergartner who wants to look at his/her gun. There is also no mention of what education based training “these guys” (do I understand that women aren’t considered for the job as per FAQ #11?) are given.

***A. The position is not gender specific and any person who meets both state and district criteria may apply. The training of all police officers includes protection and securing the issued firearm.***

***The ASOs will have training on procedures within the district, expectations when addressing students, staff and parents. As police officers all are aware of the jurisdictions between the schools and criminal laws, however only the SRO has any authority under criminal law. The school administrators and certified staff are the primary participants in any issue involving students. The ASO will not be involved in any student issue unless it escalates to a life threatening event.***

Q. We have heard lots about their firearm capabilities, but nothing about their training in dealing with troubled adolescents or active young children. I would also like to know whether you intend to give the children any information about this before armed guards descend on the school.

***A. The security personnel have been in our high school for five years and our other schools since the beginning of the year. Students are familiar with them and have been introduced in age appropriate ways. They have been integrated into the schools and should the Board adopt the policy to arm the officers, any change will be managed in the same way.***

Q. The FAQ did not explain why this is necessary or even a justifiable expense given that all statistics indicate these events are extremely rare, and the numbers show that the reality is in direct opposition to what was described at the meeting. NPR reported earlier this year that, “First, while multiple-victim shootings in general are on the rise, that’s not the case in schools. There’s an average of about one a year — in a country with more than 100,000 schools.”

“Second, the overall number of gunshot victims at schools is also down. According to Fox’s numbers, back in the 1992-93 school year, about 0.55 students per million were shot and killed; in 2014-15, that rate was closer to 0.15 per million.” See <https://www.npr.org/2018/03/15/593831564/the-disconnect-between-perceived-danger-in-u-s-schools-and-reality>.

***A. Securing our schools is a complicated and ongoing conversation. There are no absolute measures to prevent violence occurring and no universally adopted predictors as to where or when violence can occur. We do know that mass shootings have occurred more frequently and that the current recommendations evolving from recent events suggest adaptable, personnel based measures should be part of a comprehensive strategy that includes social emotional supports, education, outreach and structural enhancements.***

Q. Further, no one has addressed the fact that none of the school shootings referenced at the meeting where armed guards were present were stopped by the guards. I was really disappointed by the fear mongering that went on. There was a lot of talk about the number of people killed in school shootings

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last year, but no mention of how many were saved or shootings stopped by an armed guard, I suspect because there were none. I recommend this article in the Washington Post that points out armed guards actually are more likely to attract a shooter because most of them expect to die as part of their plan. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/03/01/for-many-mass-shooters-armed-guards-arent-a-deterrent-theyre-part-of-the-fantasy/?utm\\_term=.6863af2417bf](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/03/01/for-many-mass-shooters-armed-guards-arent-a-deterrent-theyre-part-of-the-fantasy/?utm_term=.6863af2417bf). There are many other articles that concur.

This article from politifact points out that security starts long before the person with a gun shows up at the school <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/feb/15/how-do-we-prevent-school-shootings/>. It encourages schools to have a **low counselor to student ratio** and a threat assessment team. I would like to know what our ratio is, and whether we have a threat assessment team.

***A. As stated earlier, school security is fluid and responds to current research and practices. The measures we are considering are not unique to Region 15 and have been part of a more regional conversation that has been informed by security professionals. As a district we do not look toward any one solution but a comprehensive approach. That approach includes mental health supports and an investment in mental health professionals throughout the district. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250-1 and while their data shows most states are higher than this, regionally we are better. The State of Connecticut collects the information in a more combined mental health services model. The information below includes the grouping of Counselors, Social Workers and School Psychologists. <http://edsight.ct.gov> (2017-18 numbers referenced)***

District	Enrollment	Assignment Category:	2017-18 Full Time Staff	Staff/ Student Ratio
Avon	3221	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	16	201
Bethany	365	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	2.5	146
Brookfield	2639	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	17	155
Cheshire	4296	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	23.8	180
Fairfield	9976	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	64.9	153
Farmington	4112	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	23.3	176
Glastonbury	5919	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	30	197
Granby	1874	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	14	134
Greenwich	9042	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	65.2	139
Guilford	3388	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	22.4	151
Madison	2835	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	19.2	148
Monroe	3149	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	18.4	171
New Fairfield	2308	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	15.8	146
Newtown School	4407	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	30.1	146
Orange	1175	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	5	235
Region 15	3631	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	19.4	187
Simsbury School	4098	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	24.5	167
South Windsor	4259	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	23.8	179
Trumbull School	6740	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	50.6	133
West Hartford	9738	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	64.5	151
Woodbridge	836	Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	2.5	334
<b>Average</b>				<b>173</b>

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Q. The same article notes that 68% of kids who perpetrate school shootings get the guns from home. Have you considered offering community programs or education nights that talk about safe gun storage and its impact on reducing suicide rates and mass shootings?

**A. Currently this type of educational program is offered through private organizations or law enforcement. The school district has not offered these types of programs, but would be happy to partnership with the communities and law enforcement to host such an event.**

Q. I was also troubled that a lot of the language in the presentation talked about this policy made it seem as though it were already implemented. It sounded as though candidates were chosen and interviewed before the board even voted on it. For instance, #19, "Who hired the ASOs? ...they were vetted..." Is this the case? And is this normal practice?

**A. The district has had security officers in the district for the past 5 years. All current officers have had to meet the higher state standard before being hired. The policy being reviewed by the Board currently is not to create the positions or to approve the hiring in of them, but to create a policy under which certain law enforcement professionals would be permitted to be armed while on school groups.**

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1. How frequently are the ASO's re-evaluated against the standards under which they were hired?

**Response:** The ASO's will be re-evaluated 2x a year.

2. What types of training, if any, do the ASO's have beyond "firearm certification"?

**Response:** The ASO's will be trained in Shooting Decisions, Use of Force, Building Searches, Armed School Security, School Based Policing, Relevant Juvenile Laws, Current Drugs and Firearm Training.

3. Is there any type of psychiatric evaluation?

**Response:** Each ASO will be required to participate in such an evaluation 2 X year, initially.

4. Why do we need a policy? Do other districts have a similar policy?

**Response:** A Policy should be in place to govern the ASO's within the District. Yes, other Districts have policies on this topic.

5. What is POSTC?

**Response:** Police Office Standards and Training Council.

6. What training is involved exactly regarding shooting?

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**Response:** The training is in compliance with all applicable laws. In addition to the certification that will take place 2 X a year, additional range time will be arranged.

7. How many are we hiring?

**Response:** We are hiring five (5) additional guards to the current staffing we have in place today. The District already had five (5) on staff prior to the decision to hire additional guards.

8. Who owns the firearms and where are they stored?

**Response:** The firearms are property of the District and will be stored in accordance with all federal and state laws.

9. What are the required background checks? Who does them?

**Response:** Complete background checks will be performed on each ASO prior to being employed as an ASO in the District. The Southbury PD will conduct the background checks to the same standards and level they do for newly hired officers for any local department.

10. Part of what comforts me is that these people are former law enforcement. Can we build that requirement or preference in? I would not want "mall security" cops.

**Response:** The law requires that the individuals have law enforcement experience and backgrounds and retired in good standing. All ASO's are current, or recently retired, or retired certified law enforcement officers who have over 15 years experience, were certified police officers in the state, and left on good standing from either the state or local agency. All are in accordance with P.A. No. 13-188.

11. Will these guys be used to handle disciplinary issues? What if a student is acting dangerously or gets in a fight with another student? Do these guys get involved with that?

**Response:** The ASO's primary role is to provide safety and security for the students and staff. The extent they get involved in discipline will vary depending on the action of the student. If the actions are creating a risk to students and staff, the ASO might get involved, and only to protect the student from themselves or from harming others. Other regular day to day discipline will not be part of the ASO's normal duties and responsibilities.

12. What is the recommendation of the town law enforcement professionals?

**Response:** Both the Middlebury Chief of Police, and the Southbury Resident Trooper both support moving to armed security officers in Region 15. As well, both First Selectmen endorse the measure as well.

13. Does either Town have to approve this measure?

**Response:** While the District does not require the permission nor the approval of either Board of Selectmen, or either First Selectmen, the District did communicate with each of the First Selectmen

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given it was a step the Board of Education was taking within the two towns. To be clear the First Selectmen are not making the decision, they are supporting it.

14. Will this cut down on response time?

**Response:** Yes. Having ASO's in the district will reduce the response time for a responder and supplement the response time for each local law enforcement agency.

15. What continued training do they get? Who pays for that? Is it part of their job description and yearly evaluation that they provide proof of continued firearm practice?

**Response:** As with any and all certified personnel, the continuous training they receive will be paid for by the District. All continuous training will be in the areas their initial training was in, and will be signed off by the appropriate agency.

16. How are we paying for this?

**Response:** The District is not cutting, nor reducing funds allocated for instruction to provide the funding for the ASO's. The funds for the ASO's are coming from areas that are not instruction related. We feel the ASO's are a priority, and therefore made adjustments in the areas of custodial staffing by not filling vacancies and associated medical expense (\$90k + \$22k), utilizing funds that were in the budgets for security expenses (\$55k), additional revenue from the sale of parking spaces (\$20k), savings from replacing employees who left with new employees lower on the salary schedule (\$12k).

17. Who trains the ASO's on procedures and drills at the schools? Are they all trained at every school?

**Response:** The ASO's will be trained by local law enforcement, Region 15 personnel, and building administrators. The frequency of the training will be ongoing.

18. Who do the ASO's report to? Who does that person report to?

**Response:** The ASO is an employee of the Board and shall support school administration and staff in maintaining a safe and positive school environment. They report to the ASO Supervisor for security functions, who reports to the Director of Finance/Operations, and ultimately the Superintendent. The Chief of Police of Middlebury and/or the Resident Trooper in Southbury shall be responsible for training, and firearm certification.

19. Who hired the ASO's? What was process? Was there a committee? Who was on the committee?

**Response:** The ASO's are hired by the District; they were vetted by a process that included recommendation/reference by a Chief of Police and or the State police. They completed a thorough application process, comprehensive reference checks, were interviewed by the District, and passed a complete background check conducted by the Southbury PD.

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20. Is our plan modeled on experience of other towns, which ones and what they have done? What research was done on our part? Who did we consult?

**Response:** While we have developed and continue to revisit our plans on a regular basis, we did reference other district's who currently have, or will be having ASO's in their Districts. We utilize best practices and utilized other professionals in vetting the implementation of ASO's in our District.

**NOTE: Many of the details in the questions and responses above may be reflected in the regulations and/or job description once the policy is adopted.**