

Local schools continue agreements to provide School Resource Officers

BY JONATHAN RYAN
HERALD REVIEW

During the 2023 state legislative session that concluded this past May, Minnesota lawmakers amended their use of force policy in schools that limits certain holds and restraints a responding officer or other staff member may use on students, causing some police departments to discontinue School Resource Officer (SRO) contracts in some districts around the state.

The amendment to the use-of-force policy has become a growing concern as the new school year begins and schools begin looking for alternatives to no longer having an SRO present at school.

SROs are licensed law enforcement officers whose primary responsibility is maintaining the safety and security of the school they are assigned to.

SROs not only help many students and staff feel safe but act as a deterrent to disruptions throughout the school year.

The state does not require districts to have an SRO present, but districts do have the option to contract with a local law agency to provide SROs and determine the scope of their responsibilities within the school, and many schools do.

Locally, ISD 318 and the Grand Rapids Police Department (GRPD) will continue with their formal agreement that has existed for many years to provide SROs to the local schools in the area, and Cohasset and Bigfork schools will continue to have the Itasca County Sheriff as their law enforcement presence. ISD 318 Superintendent



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

School Resource Officers Norris and Scott's department pictures.

of Schools Matt Grose said that the long-going partnership with GRPD led to some early conversations that kept the SRO agreement in place and GRPD Police Chief, Andy Morgan, told the Herald Review that his

department prioritizes the safety of our schools, and the decision was not difficult to continue the SRO agreement with ISI 318.

SEE SRO, PAGE 4

SRO, FROM PAGE 1

"The safety of our children is paramount. The 25-year successful partnership between your Grand Rapids Police Department and ISD 318 is greatly valued."

Asked about any concerns Morgan may have regarding the safety of his officers under this new law and their ability to protect themselves and others, Morgan said he was confident in his officer's ability to respond professionally.

"Two of our SROs are some of our most senior members of your Grand Rapids Police Department. Each of them brings over 15 years of law enforcement experience with them each day they enter our schools, totally committed to keeping our kids safe. Each has had vast training in regard to use of force and have consistently shown a great understanding of appropriate use of force."

As far as use of force, Morgan also said, "When circumstances rise to that level, we are extremely confident that their actions are both just and necessary in protecting the safety of the involved student, other students, and school staff members. That fact does not change with the varying interpretations of the recent legislation.

The amendments to the law on the use of "corporate punishment" in schools are as follows:

"An employee or agent of a district, including a school resource officer, security personnel, or police officer contracted with a district, shall not use prone restraint."

Additionally, "An employee or agent of a district, including a school resource officer, security person-

nel, or police officer contracted with a district, shall not inflict any form of physical holding that restricts or impairs a pupil's ability to breathe; restricts or impairs a pupil's ability to communicate distress; places pressure or weight on a pupil's head, throat, neck, chest, lungs, sternum, diaphragm, back, or abdomen; or results in straddling a pupil's torso."

State Representative Ben Davis (R, 06A) released a statement on the issue saying state Democrats pushed through a "haphazard" law that forces SROs out of schools:

"The change in state law—which Democrats rushed into enactment earlier this year with no regard for how it would impact school safety—prevents SROs from physically restraining a student in order to protect other students and staff. School districts and law enforcement have raised concerns with the new law, saying it would result in many districts pulling their SROs."

In response to the media attention the new law has garnered, Grose released a statement clarifying the new law and how it will be applied here in our local schools: "In essence, the law restricts an SRO's ability to use force and/or certain types of physical restraints unless an individual is an imminent threat to themselves or others. Going hands-on with a student is the last

resort for officers and only happens once in a great while, so this type of activity is a very small part of what SROs do. However, the law change does restrict an SRO's options when responding to some situations. The law change only impacts SROs, but not county deputies or other police patrol officers that may respond to

our schools. As a result, some local law enforcement agencies have suspended their existing school resource officer agreements with their local school district, while others have raised their concern about the impact that the law will have on the future role of resource officers in our schools across the state."

ISD 316 in Coleraine and Bovey will also continue their partnership with the Coleraine Police Department, as confirmed by Greenway Principal Jeff Britten.



GREENWAY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

