

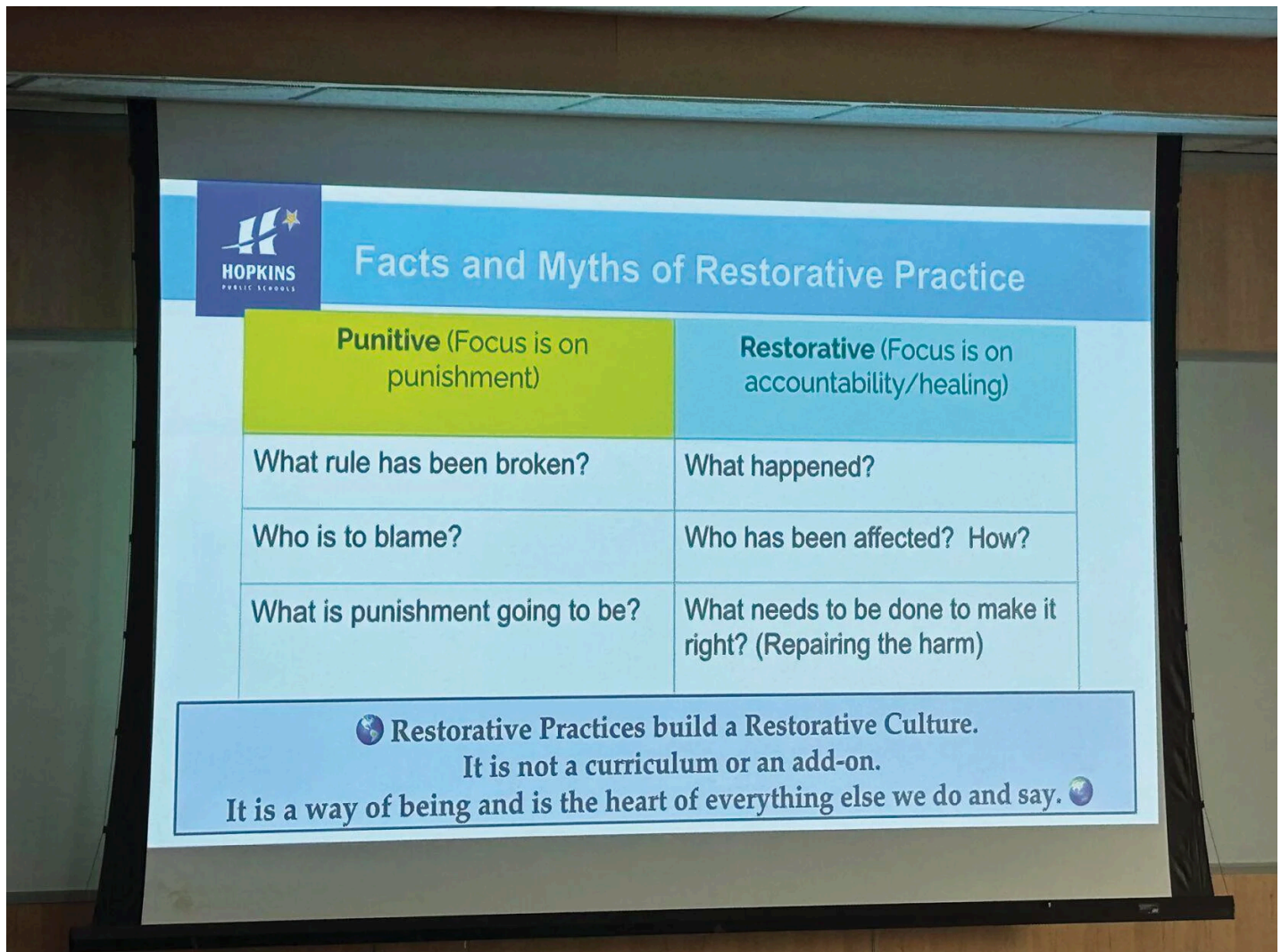
https://www.hometownsource.com/sun_sailor/community/eden_prairie/hopkins-schools-safety-meeting-leaves-some-unanswered-questions/article_3ee242b4-79fa-11ef-a76c-63af9d9bbedc.html



FEATURED

Hopkins Schools safety meeting leaves some unanswered questions

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Hopkins staff that specialize in restorative practice share some of the myth of restorative practice at the Safety Conversation and Learning event at Eisenhower Community Center in Hopkins on Sept. 23.

(Sun photo by Natalie Cierzan)

The Hopkins School District held a safety meeting on Sept. 23 at Eisenhower Community Center, inviting community members alongside staff and first-responders to hear more about their safety protocols and ask questions. However, some community members were left looking for more.

In attendance included district staff like Superintendent Rhoda Mhiripiri-Reed; Hopkins school board members; Hopkins Police Chief Brent Johnson; Hopkins Fire Chief Dale Specken; Deputy Fire Chief Mike Wenshaw; Minnetonka Police captain of patrol services Rachel Meehan and captain of investigations Tim Olson; Minnetonka Fire Chief Kevin Fox as well as parents, staff and even a couple students.



Hopkins Superintendent Rhoda Mhiripiri-Reed speaks Sept. 23 to a crowd of Hopkins Schools staff and community members at the Safety Conversation and Learning event at Eisenhower Community Center in Hopkins.

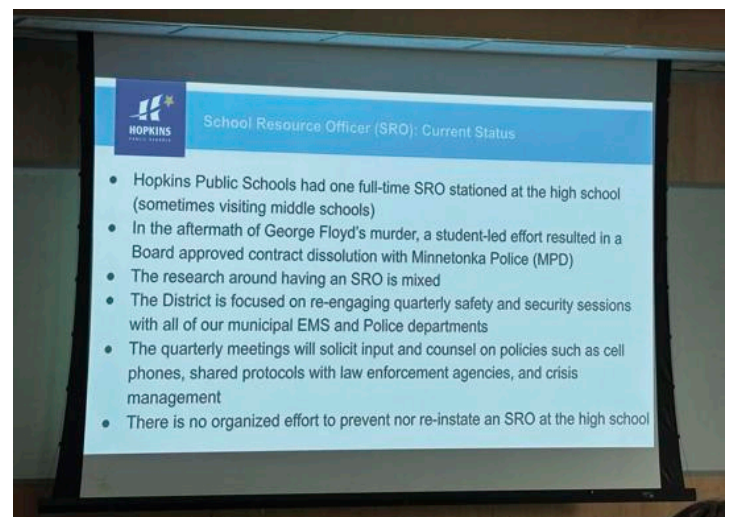
(Sun photo by Natalie Cierzan)



The meeting allowed time for introductions from attendees, a presentation, small group discussion at round tables and a short period for audience questions at the end.

Safety has been at the forefront of everybody's minds in light of the recent school shooting in Apalachee High School in Winder, Georgia, leaving many asking more questions about their school district safety protocols. The district presented on things like holistic safety, restorative practices, the state of a student resource officer in the Hopkins School District and more. Some presentation slides were presented previously at school board meetings, and some of information was already accessible on the Hopkins Schools website.

"Student safety is our top priority. Students do not learn at high levels if they don't feel safe in our schools and when we talk about holistic safety, we're talking about physical, social and emotional safety and really thinking about our students as holistic beings," Mhiripiri-Reed said.



Meeting topics

First up on the agenda was chatting about the current state of holistic school safety in Hopkins. Mhiripiri-

Reed shared that the alleged assault at

Hopkins High School on a transgender student led to many parents and caregivers following up about the school's current safety measures. In turn, the district audited their safety measures over the last few months and later sent out a memo to community members at the beginning of September about their safety protocols.

An outline of the history of student resource officers presented at the Safety Conversation and Learning event at Eisenhower Community Center in Hopkins on Sept. 23. Hopkins Schools does not currently use a student resource officer at any of their schools.

(Sun photo by Natalie Cierzan)

"Hopkins is a district where we definitely prioritize relationships. We believe that if we build positive and productive and caring relationships with each and every one of our students, and also with our staff, then we can create the conditions for people to feel safe and valued, and for our students to learn," Mhiripiri-Reed said.

The presentation included references to Panorama, a metric districts use to measure the sense of belonging among students as well as social-emotional learning, school climate, family engagement and more. Other mentions included regular student exposure to a social-emotional learning curriculum, district staff set aside to help support different subsets of students like Spanish-speakers or American Indian students and a district safety team that meets weekly.

Chris Carr, a holistic safety consultant, highlighted the "I Love U Guys" safety protocol the district uses and the four components of an effective security model: deterrents, detection, prevention and response. Carr said the key was to detect any issues early on to reduce crises, and to do that they utilize training people on behavioral threat assessments and monitoring.

“We have opportunities if we are aware of what to look for, we have opportunities to interrupt that cycle and that escalation,” he said.

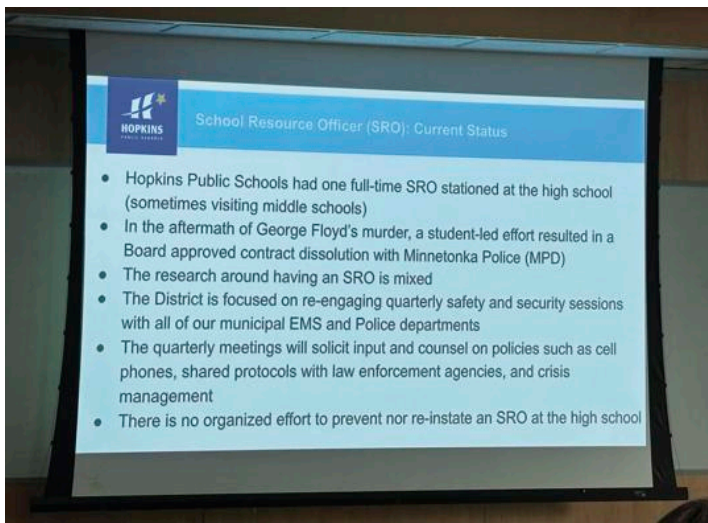
Another area touched on was the district's work with restorative practices and the school's current student resource officer status. Hopkins Schools had an SRO at the high school until a student-led effort resulted in the district dissolving the partnership with an SRO from Minnetonka Police Department.

As of right now, Mhiripiri-Reed said there is not an organized effort to reinstate an SRO at the high school. However, over 230 community members signed a petition presented to the Hopkins School Board on June 11 about school safety, security and anti-bullying measures. One of the potential reasons for the increase in violence, the petition suggested, is due to the non-renewal of the school's SRO contract.



Chris Carr, a holistic safety consultant, speaks to a crowd of Hopkins Schools staff and community members at the Safety Conversation and Learning event Sept. 23 at Eisenhower Community Center in Hopkins.

(Sun photo by Natalie Cierzan)



An outline of the history of student resource officers presented at the Safety Conversation and Learning event at Eisenhower Community Center in Hopkins on Sept. 23. Hopkins Schools does not currently use a student resource officer at any of their schools.

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The petition also suggested the product of that decision has caused “a significant weakening of behavior management practices and a disturbing lack of appropriate consequences for student misconduct,” and “a lack of formal partnership with the Minnetonka Police has left a significant gap in our school’s holistic safety plan.” Among the asks on the petition included one to reestablish an SRO partnership.

According to one of the petition signers, Rachael Bauleke, and an attendee of the safety meeting, there has been no response to the petition, even after follow-up emails from community members.

Audience response

Toward the end of the meeting, Bauleke asked Mhiripiri-Reed if the district's answers to questions would be released publicly. Mhiripiri-Reed said that the district would look at the questions, but due to the fact other community members were not represented at the meeting, she was unsure how much information to put out.

"What we're hesitant on doing is putting a subset of questions and answers to a small subset of people without being inclusive to all of our audiences. So we'll take a look at the questions," she said.

Bauleke also asked if the next safety meeting would include more time for participants to ask the questions they submitted themselves. At the end of the first meeting, only approximately 10 minutes remained for questions. Mhiripiri-Reed said she thought they could make that adjustment at the next event.

Bauleke shared a summary letter of the event sent to over 80 concerned Hopkins community members and encouraged them to attend the next safety meeting on Oct. 7.

"The first hour and 10 minutes consisted of presentations on holistic school safety and restorative practices, similar to what was shared during the 8/20 board workshop, the 6/11 board meeting, and the winter 2023/24 holistic school safety/restorative practices update. As usual, important topics weren't covered and there were many unanswered questions, but attendees were asked to hold their questions until after the presentations concluded," she wrote in the email.

Among some of the questions she submitted included: "If a serious crime occurs on school grounds, will the district call the police or file a report? How can parents be sure the district will call for an ambulance if a student is injured beyond the

capability of school health staff?

She continued: "How can there be 'holistic' school safety without a trained school resource officer? Most west metro districts, many of them with diverse student bodies, have SROs, yet this remains a gap in Hopkins. In 2020, only 183 students responded to the SRO survey out of 1,600. Given that the survey heavily influenced the decision to end the SRO contract, when will teachers and parents have the chance to provide input?"

When asked what she would like to see from the district, Bauleke said, "Based on how the first session went, the district needs to be more transparent about the purpose of these events. The title, 'Hopkins Safety Conversation and Learning Event,' was misleading. Attendees were under the impression it would be an open forum for discussion with district leaders and law enforcement/EMS partners, particularly given the unresolved concerns from last year's incidents at the high school. In reality, the event was more of a 'safety presentation to the community,' with the district presenting for 70 out of the 90 minutes without taking difficult questions or allowing meaningful dialogue."

Lisa Erickson, another Hopkins parent with a student at the high school, had similar concerns. She wanted to know exactly what the district was planning on doing if something happened at the school and what the proper protocol is for parents.

"I feel supportive of Hopkins and the administration. I don't know if I know anything more than when I walked in just based on reading the website and that's kind of what I came in for, more details, more protocols and their processes. This was good information, but very high level. I know they're working really hard and it looks like they're going in the right direction, and they did some workshops like a few in the past couple of months, but what have they been doing in the last three years, knowing COVID has been very hard?" she said.

To avoid potential chaos in from a safety incident, she wanted more communication with parents. She was unsure if the district was not sharing specifics due to safety reasons.

"As a parent, last year the email about the incident at the end of the school year came out really late, it was like two or three days later," Erickson said. "I think the trust of what is going to be communicated in a timely fashion just isn't kind of there yet."

Another safety meeting will be held virtually at 5:30 p.m. Monday, Oct. 7.

RELATED LINKS

- [Hopkins Schools outlines school safety, restorative practices](#)
- [Petition about safety presented to Hopkins School Board](#)
- [Hopkins Schools will eliminate student resource officers](#)
- [Protest held for Hopkins High transgender student following alleged attack](#)

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