

**Town Hall Meeting
Safety and Security
Feb. 25, 2019**

The following are questions were asked at the Feb. 25, 2019 Town Hall meeting. ***This is not a transcript, this is a summary of questions and answers.***

Present at the meeting to answer questions were representatives of the City School District of New Rochelle, Altaris Consulting Group, the New Rochelle Police Department and the New Rochelle Fire Department.

QUESTIONS

Will someone from Altaris stay on after the assessment as a liaison? If so, what is the role of that person as well as their qualifications?

Altaris will be working with the District over the next 12 months on assessment, prioritization of improvement opportunities to implement, creation of a project timeline, training of personnel within buildings, making any revisions to plans, collaboration with emergency service agencies, and guiding the process. Interventions will be done over the next 12 months and then, if the District continues its relationship with Altaris, there would be measures such as training to maintain the level of proficiency.

The District needed someone to implement the recommendations that were provided in the Guidepost Solutions assessment with a K-12 security expert.

What school districts has Altaris worked with locally?

White Plains, Rye, Scarsdale, Bronxville, Irvington, Tarrytown, Croton, Lakeland, Somers, Peekskill, Hendrick Hudson, among others.

What has Altaris done at other schools with similar ethnic diversity, size and behaviors as ours? What changes did they recommend/implement and how successful have they been?

The diversity, behaviors, ethnicity don't factor into the decisions that Altaris makes for a district. Its recommendations are based upon best practices, based on the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies that have specific guidelines for schools, taking into account circumstances within a district. It is unique for each district. Emergency plans need to be tailored to the district.

What is Altaris's measure of success?

Using School Resource Officers (SRO) as an example, it is difficult to quantify when you prevent something from happening because it never happened. But, when you look at an SRO they are counselors first, educators second and law enforcement third. The goal is to prevent things from happening before they escalate. So, it is difficult to quantify - The safer your school is, if there is a lack of incidents, do people feel safe in the buildings? The objective is to make everyone – students and staff – feel comfortable in their buildings so parents feel comfortable sending their kids to school every day.

Over the past year, the District has hired three different security firms (Guidepost, T&M, and Altaris) none of which was a budgeted expense. What is the actual or projected cost for each and what line item in the budget is being used to pay for each of them?

The District paid Guidepost Solutions \$70,110

The Altaris contract is \$104,000 for six months, of which 52% is reimbursable by New York State. The preliminary 2019-2020 budget will include \$208,000 for Altaris.

The T&M report was not related to security. The firm was paid through the District's previous law firm, which has not yet billed the District for it.

What line items?

Altaris had been in 1623.200. It is being moved to 1620.490 – "BOCES Services" – in the preliminary 2019-20 budget.

What kind of training do security guards (and monitors in the elementary schools) receive in terms of handling conflict within the student body? What has been implemented or will be implemented to improve security guards' training?

Security guards go through non-crisis intervention training to de-escalate situations. They also go through evacuation training for students in wheelchairs to help them exit the building safely in a crisis. The District will seek guidance from Altaris on other types of training moving forward.

Both middle schools have a Safe Ambassadors program, where Safe School Ambassadors may get involved to de-escalate a situation quickly.

During lockdown drills, will there be a police presence? (What is the difference between a lockdown and a lockout?)

The police department will notify the district if there is a perceived threat in the area of a school. The school will then determine if there will be a lockdown or a lock out.

The district will contact the police when personnel become aware of a perceived threat. A lockout means there is an external threat, someone we want to keep out of our schools. A lockdown means there is an internal threat we are trying to prevent.

How are we going to address a perceived informal friends and family hiring for security and janitorial staff in the District?

Everyone who works or volunteers in the District goes through a thorough background check. There is no formal or informal policy of hiring family and friends. There is a District policy against nepotism. If there is a relationship that is expressed to the District, the Board of Education is notified to develop a further understanding of the relationship. When two family members are employed by the District, one cannot report to the other. Every job is posted and then a director conducts interviews.

What are we doing to review our staff to make sure there are no inappropriate interactions between staff and students?

Everyone in the District has a thorough background check before they are hired or volunteer.

Will Altaris' findings and suggestions be published well before the school board election on May 21? When will be the next update from Altaris?

Altaris is conducting site assessment work and an offsite document review of emergency plans. The next step is an organizational meeting with District administration to review and prioritize improvement opportunities. Because of the nature of safety and security in a school district, many of the improvement opportunities will not be released publicly because doing so would undermine the safety and security of the District. The District will attempt to disseminate as much information as possible, but some information legally cannot be disclosed because of state requirements. The District wants this to be a community process and will keep everyone informed as much as legally possible.

What authority does the police department have if an officer on patrol or just as a practice observes a minor walking our streets during the school day? Do you have the authority to go up to a child and ask him or her if they have to go to school or do you have to wait for the

school to call you? What is your understanding of the rule in terms of security if children are roaming the streets during the school day?

The police have no authority to police attendance at schools. If an officer comes upon a student engaged in misconduct, the officer would take the student into custody and the Police Department would notify the school.

What steps are being taken to improve communication with parents regarding incidents, especially when reported in the media?

The District has tried to improve communication with parents and to be more transparent about what is going on. As far as informing the entire school community, it depends on the situation and on whether it is a matter of public safety. For example, an altercation between two students would not typically be an occasion to inform the entire school community.

There are incidents in the buildings that are reported by the media. I understand there are privacy concerns and there is due process. However, as a parent, when you read these reports, they are alarming and when we get no information from the School District it is concerning.

The District's goal is to provide information when possible. Sometimes, depending on the situation, a student is identifiable. We cannot volunteer information that puts a student or family's privacy at risk. The goal is to inform parents.

The District needs a standard policy as to how we handle communications issues in schools. Anytime an incident occurs that has an impact on the whole student body, it should be addressed to the whole community. The District is working on developing some standards for an across-the-board approach to how we handle situations.

We had several questions regarding school resource officers (SROs). Can you address what is going on with that?

The Task Force and the security audit from last year both recommended SROs. The Board of Education has taken those recommendations and is having the administration look at them. That is what the Culture and Climate Committee is doing. The goal is to determine what makes sense for the District by the end of the school year. Altaris will be helpful as well in giving its recommendation. We want to develop a culture that makes sense with the way we operate within our School District.

Would the District consider truant officers?

It's a matter of resources. The District works in partnership with the Youth Bureau, whose staff members are out on the streets talking with students, looking at what's happening and talking with the District. Truant officers are not necessarily being considered, but the District does partner with the City to build a holistic village approach because the District can't do it alone. It takes a community approach and the City has helped with that.

The partnership with the Youth Bureau is mostly high school students. The bureau has hired some people who now approach kids rather than a police officer in uniform. The city is looking at different approaches than having police round up kids who are not in school, which would not be the best use of resources.

How will we evaluate the satisfaction or feeling of safety among faculty? Will there be a survey?

The District is developing a survey focusing on safety and security. It will conduct regular culture and climate surveys.

When you develop your timeline, will it be published or shared with the community, or kept private?

Certain items that will be on there cannot be discussed or released publicly, but many of the items can be shared. That will be done after the District has had the opportunity to review the suggested timeline and work collaboratively with committees and staff to prioritize the recommendations. The matter can then be discussed conceptually, but not the specifics. Altaris will incorporate the input from the security audit, add its own input and implement as quickly as possible.

Will the security force grow over the next year or is that being evaluated?

Altaris is in the middle of the process of looking at that now. Staffing, technology and infrastructure changes will all have their place. Altaris does not come into a district to spend money. The firm will be looking at the District to make wise investments that prevent having to do something else. Safety and security is a top priority but money must be spent wisely.

Will Altaris be working with the Safety Committee in our schools?

Altaris spent a great deal of time with each of the school's emergency response teams. The firm works with each individual building because each school has its own unique challenges and we want to build that training around their specific buildings.

Will Altaris meet with the committee first, before training happens?

It is a planning and training meeting. The meeting is focused on discussing the planning steps, the condition of the building and getting feedback from them to refine building-level plans. So, it is a collaborative effort to hear their concerns about what is going on. The District only has access to Altaris for consulting work. If there is a condition or issue, the building will be responsible.

It's a very collaborative effort when Altaris gets to those teams. If anything occurs, the District has unlimited access to us for consulting. If there's a condition, if there's an issue, Altaris will be responsive to that particular issue going forward.

If the District goes the route of SROs, will they go through implicit bias training?

If the Culture and Climate Committee makes the recommendation to go forward with SROs and the Board of Education approves that recommendation, the District would ask the police department for personnel that have been trained as SROs.

The Police Department has five officers trained as SROs.

It would be up to the District to quantify what a School Resource Officer is – what their role is supposed to be, what training is required in order for them to fill that role in the way the District defines it.

If the District does move forward, there should be another Town Hall to deal exclusively with SROs.

Does New Rochelle currently have threat assessment teams in the schools, specifically at NRHS.

Yes, the District has a threat assessment team, a response team. Whenever there's a major problem, the security department gets together with the principal to assess what the situation is. If it's a situation that requires the need to get the police involved right away, the school does so.

A lot of times, teachers and social workers know what's going on. Do we have teams that include social workers, etc.

New Rochelle High School has five psychologists and four social workers along with guidance staff, so depending upon whether there is a situation that students might be sensitive about – anything from an illness to something written on a wall – the school gets a team together, with a lead psychologist. The school then makes a determination whether to make the House offices aware that students might stop by, or, if it's a larger situation, a special room can be designated to manage the situation.

The school can also hold assemblies if it is a situation that requires apprising everyone of what's going on.

Are any women or people of color in positions making decisions in the organizations represented here (Altaris, New Rochelle police and fire departments)?

The Police Department has a female patrol lieutenant and one black male lieutenant in charge of internal affairs. Most of the positions are determined by Civil Service organizations. There is not a lot of flexibility at the command level. There is a very low turnover for captain positions (above lieutenant).

On Altaris' staff of about a dozen employees, the vice president of operations is a woman.

How are security staff trained for a post? Are there standards, and is Altaris part of any sort of evaluation to make sure they stay on task?

Training starts in the planning process. Altaris looks at security staffing to determine whether they are being utilized in the most effective way. The intent is to make sure that the District is getting the best return for the investment. Altaris has a partnership with BOCES and works collaboratively with them to provide various types of training, including an eight-hour staff training program, conflict resolution and threat assessment.

Are security personnel supposed to be sitting or standing? Is there a best practice for security staff?

Each building and each situation is going to be different. It depends on what role their filling. If they are a security greeter doing visitor management, they very well may be sitting. If they're on patrol, then the they should be roaming about the building.

Are the security personnel supposed to be reading newspapers and sitting?

Altaris will look at those situations and make recommendations on how to deal with them.

If Altaris and Guidepost recommend SROs, why is the Culture and Climate Committee making the decision?

The Culture and Climate Committee makes recommendations; the Board of Education makes final decisions on policies. The Committee and Board members know the District's culture and climate, and we know the students. The District will take any input from Altaris, but at the end of the day, it is the members' responsibility as board members and members of the community to determine what the community's needs and wants are.

There is a need for more afterschool activities as we talk about keeping students off the streets. What is the District doing to provide more afterschool activities to meet the needs in particular for our middle and high school students?

That is a work in progress, but it is a need the District recognizes. The District is working with community partners and faith-based organizations to see what is possible for our schools.

An example is the New Roads program on Saturdays. It started last year. The idea is to get a police officer in the middle schools who are at risk to act as a mentor. They would guide the students around, give them benchmarks to meet. The idea is to incentivize good behaviors, to get the bad behaviors out, to increase the connection between the students, the police officers and the community of New Rochelle.

New Rochelle Fire Department: There have been a lot of false alarms. Can you review some of the causes and what happened?

Smoking, vaping in stairwells and bathrooms and typical workplace mishaps: Microwave cooking incidents, dust from contractors. Some are pulled intentionally. It is up to the schools and police address it. The Fire Department is working with the school District. In certain areas, the Department is working to replace smoke alarms with heat detectors. That has to be cleared through the state Education Department.

In handling an alarm, once the event is mitigated, the Department tries to get things back to normal as possible once the event is mitigated.

What is the burden on the system with these false alarms?

Every time the Fire Department has to respond to a false alarm, that's four or five fire companies involved because the Department treats every false alarm as if it's a fire. Now you have all these rigs on the roads with lights and sirens while there are other alarms going on.

The number of alarms is not unusual for a building the size of New Rochelle High School.

It is a disruption to the school and there has been a tremendous level of concern in particular when the building has to be evacuated on cold or bad weather. The Department is looking at ways to minimize them and allow the students back into the building as soon as possible once it's determined to be safe.

All alarms are inspected annually to ensure that they are functioning properly.

Was there a component of fire safety included in \$106.5 million construction bond?

There was no direct work on fire or alarm systems in the bond work.

This (Altaris) is the third consultant that we're hiring. How much is it going to cost us this year, and since Altaris plans on staying longer, but how much can it cost us going forward?

(See answer to earlier question on cost.)

The Board decided to use Altaris because the District did not have the expertise to implement recommendations received in the past. Altaris does project management. That's what they do in other districts and that's what is needed in New Rochelle.

There are about 125 planning steps that must be taken for each building. (A progressive district like New Rochelle has likely gone through a lot of them already.) Then there are a number of districtwide programs, such as the establishment of a formal threat assessment team districtwide, that go through a structured process of analyzing threats. There are systematic proven models that work as far as identifying threats and vetting to determine what type of threat a specific person may cause to the district.

All the protocols – lockout, lockdown, evacuation, shelter in place and many others – all have planning steps that must be followed to be executed effectively.

What are some of the recommendations they have made already that we don't think we can do on our own?

There are certain recommendations on the building level that can't be made public for security reasons. Altaris will help the District understand how to better implement various

recommendations and what it would cost. Then the Board and community can determine whether it's something that the District will do.

What is the timeframe?

After a presentation in executive session, the District will redact what is inappropriate to release to the public and we will release the rest.

What happens if Altaris makes recommendations that its experts feel are necessary but that the School District is hesitant to implement?

Typically, upwards of 95% of the things Altaris recommends to school districts are implemented because they are not only best practices but they make sense. The other 5 percent may not be right for the culture and climate of the particular district. (One example: A suggestion that anyone outside a school can visit the school only by appointment.)

Will the City School District of New Rochelle be the only client Altaris is serving?

No, but Altaris would not take on the work if it could not provide high-quality service. This is a relationship business. The vast majority, if not all, of Altaris's work comes from a referral base and is repeat business.

Did the District speak to other districts in choosing Altaris?

The District visited White Plains after hearing about work Altaris had been doing there. The Superintendent of White Plains had been in touch with Mr. Hastie and praised Altaris highly.

What's the timeline for the Board to decide on any recommendation? What is the turnaround time to vote on a recommendation?

The District is going to turn around the recommendations quickly. It's going to be done as quickly as possible. Some of them won't have to come to the board.

Additional Questions and Answers

The following are questions that were submitted for the meeting but not addressed at the time because of time constraints.

What is the relationship between the school and police and fire department? How and when do they work together?

A: The District and the City's first responders enjoy a cooperative relationship. District security personnel speak frequently with the Police and Fire Departments, including a conversation with police every Monday to discuss anything of note that happened over the weekend. The Police Department alerts the District when a security concern in the community arises. Police and fire officials serve on the District's SAVE Team, which discusses safety issues.

Please explain what student behavior/actions would require the school to alert parents of an incident?

A: The parents of a student involved in an incident such as a fight are immediately notified. The school and/or District sends notice more broadly to the school community, or the entire District, when an incident is believed to present a potential threat to the general school population or to the surrounding area.

During lockdown drills, will there be a police presence? (What is the difference between a lockdown and a lockout?)

A: Police are invited to lockdown drills, and will be on site if an actual lockdown ever becomes necessary.

A **lockdown** is called when there is an active danger inside a school. In a lockdown, students and faculty are held in place until the threat is cleared.

A **lockout** is called when there is a potential danger in the area of a school such as a suspect being pursued by police or a wounded animal spotted in nearby yards or woods. In a lockout, no one is allowed in or out of a school building, but operations within the school proceed as usual.

What is being done to address overcrowding at New Rochelle High School?

New Rochelle High School meets all state codes for occupancy. The school operates three cafeterias during three lunch periods to provide enough space for students to enjoy lunch. While the school operates a closed campus, students are permitted in the library and several outside areas on school grounds during lunch and free periods. In cold or inclement weather, students are permitted in the Whitney M. Young Jr. Auditorium and the library during free periods.

Interim Principal Joseph Starvaggi is planning to initiate activities to engage students during free periods.