CULTURE AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE MEETING 4-24-2019

Alisse Waterston-guest speaker, a professor and department chair at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York (previously part of the Task Force). Before giving her presentation, Dr. Waterston said that the Task Force did not base its recommendations on evidence-based policies although that was the agreed-upon norm for the Task Force's process; instead the Task Force chair generated opinions from members of the Task Force. Dr. Waterston stressed the importance of developing policies and practices that are based on "what the data say," which is the title of her presentation, and she offered a three-page, single spaced bibliography of sources that she used as the basis of her presentation. She expressed that we need to put aside what we think we know and what we believe is true and listen with an open heart and an open mind to findings from rigorously produced research and analysis.

We should listen to the data as well as ask ourselves: what are the implications of what the data say? All the data presented here is from peer-reviewed scholarly articles and government research reports. Dr. Waterston noted that given the name of the task force--The Task Force on Reducing Violence in the Lives of Children and Youth in New Rochelle, it is important to understand what "violence" is. Violence comes in many forms including interpersonal (direct action) or person-to-person (visible-like a punch) violence, and structural violence – which refers to systemic violence -we cannot always "see" it and it is rooted in resource and social inequities.

Moving on from there, Dr. Waterston presented data on numbers of mass school shootings, the greatest predictor of mass school shootings (access to guns), and the demographic profile of mass school shooters (white males). With respect to mass school shootings, the data indicate that "hardening" of schools is a questionable endeavor: there is no empirical evidence these methods actually diminish firearm violence in schools; they do create a false sense of security.

Turning to the data on SROs, the topics covered included: defining what an SRO is; identifying the primary responsibility of SROs, which is law enforcement (it's a policing assignment), and clarifying that "SRO" is an armed police officer.

Dr. Waterston asked, "Do people know that SROs are armed police officers?" Since she could not locate data that documents what people know about SROs, she offered her speculation that people do *not* know that a "School Resource Officer/SRO" is an armed police officer. The term "school" "resource" officer (SRO) masks the fact that the duty of an SRO is law enforcement. This is unfair to police officers—it places an unfair burden of misrepresentation on them. In terms of efficacy (effectiveness of having SROs in schools), Dr. Waterston cited findings from the literature that concludes, "There is no evidence that the presence of SROs results in a decrease in crime." The data say that adults PERCEIVE improved safety. Students do not perceive improved safety; for them, the presence of SROs increases anxiety.

SRO training: What does it entail? Is the 40 hours of training an adequate amount of time particularly when SROs are purportedly serving in a "counseling" role in addition to their law

enforcement duties? The research documents that schools with SROs result in an increase in the number of arrests of students for minor infractions, with Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic and students with disabilities disproportionately funneled into the criminal justice system.

Thoughts/Comments
Are some schools "over-utilizing" the SRO for disciplinary issues that should be addressed otherwise?

Questions/Concerns:
Money should not be the reason to go in a certain direction -it should be the NEED and safety of the school and students.

Dr. Waterston urged administrators to study best practices and what works to ensure students' needs are served and schools can provide the best learning environment for students.

What direction do we want to take? We do not have to do what other districts have done. We can implement evidence-based, best practices.

Dr. Waterston concluded by suggesting the committee read the 2019 article on trends, consequences, and future directions in school security published in the *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*.

Discussion portion of the meeting:
Dr. Waterston's presentation connected us with many things we have discussed. We need to know what the data say and what we consider our presenting problems to be and what the perceived issues are.

The New Rochelle Schools are safe. There is no crime reduction in relation to SROs - it is the perception ONLY that their presence decreases crime (that there is greater safety with them).

How do we get the community to acknowledge, understand, and respect the data?
- In terms of improved communication to the community, one suggestion offered by Dr. Waterston was a speaker series to discuss important issues in the schools, which is a public space.

- Waterston suggested inviting New Rochelle Danielle Sered of Common Justice, a successful, restorative justice, alternative to prison program in New York City (Sered is author of *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and A Road to Repair*).

- The Culture and Climate Committee could present to the board the idea of community outreach, such as a speaker series. Need to cultivate a dialogue among the community.

- We can set up a calendar on the District page to include community related events and speakers on both pro-SRO and anti-SRO, etc.

- Restorative Circle without judgment.

- Voices need to be heard from the whole community and we need to look at our own data and come up with programs to address the needs students.

- An appreciation of implications of armed SRO when making decisions -who will be impacted the most by the decisions we make?

More…
- Most of our kids are amazing students. There is a small number of students who are especially vulnerable. Generally, the teachers, counselors and school administrators know who the "at risk," troubled or traumatized children are, and therefore we need to address the needs of these specific students. According to the American Bar Association study, there is disproportionality-so whatever we do must consider this!

- Needs to be clear and objective and not just based on perception.

- What exactly do people believe the purpose of an SRO is? To keep kids safe or make adults feel at ease-what is the exact purpose of what we want to achieve here?

- There are many examples of best practices; for one example, at Manhattan's West Side High School (where there are no armed police officers), counselors, administrators and support staff are at the doors when students enter in the morning so that many issues get addressed from the very beginning of the day.

- New Ro Security-do we need more staff or training? The idea of a police officer sounds appealing to some; unfortunately the security personnel have gotten a raw deal. There seems to be a gap in security and we want to move toward resolving these gaps.

- On May 7th, there will be a presentation including data of our schools. Many school buildings have a whole new level of security at main doors.

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- It is not so much about individuals but about a pattern that creates the data.

- The model is not punishment but needs to be what strategies are in place or programs to help the kids.

- Racialization and social inequity and lack of access and resources where many kids go in one direction and many in another.

What are the alternative solutions/best practices/programs that can be implemented?
Other questions we need to get more data on?

- At John Jay, is there any talk of some sort of hybrid position that crosses over a mental health counselor and security?
- Let's be creative- and we need to look at the literature. There is a colleague doing research on intervention programs between kids and cops - outside of the school day- get the data and synthesize the key points.
- *Have we exhausted resources for best practices and other programs?*
- *Have all schools fully implemented programs that we DO have access to?*
- *If not working, what else is there?* We need to be mindful when we make recommendations.
- Data on suspension, absences, failures and graduation rate- socioeconomic class, race, gender, etc.
- Conflict resolution in the classroom needs to take place.
- There is a significant number of students that withdrew from Albert Leonard between last year and this year- there is fear in the community- how do we convey that a solution may not be with policing but with social/mental/literacy issues, etc. - need to provide the community w data.
- Acknowledge that there is a fear and seek out the most appropriate solution.
- Issues may be that people have a distorted sense of safety vs. *safety of child-* and that each child needs to be nurtured in order to reach their full potential and not take away that opportunity to make a better choice.
- A need for more support for certain programs - can be costly/ taxes but "it takes a village"- for all of us to be safe, we must take care of ALL of our kids.
- City of New Rochelle does not pay for the SRO- it would have to be a budgetary line within schools. Is it irresponsible to take a free resource- if New Ro city wanted to allocate 5 SROs for our district at no cost to the district?
- ***Police officer as SRO - "their beat IS their school" -*** this is concerning
- How we frame our discussions- should not be *not anti-SRO but PRO-safety-* since not all people know that SRO= GUN- beyond pro-safety = pro-potential and pro-opportunity
- Richard St. Paul (civil rights lawyer with NAACP. - informed opinion - over policing and over criminalization issue in America
- There is a case TKO vs Jersey where kids have limited 4th amendment rights and can be searched with reasonable suspicion- adding in SRO increases police interaction with our kids which may have a negative connotation. There is a stigma of being addressed at schools- checked, searched, and surrounded by law enforcement