

APPROVED

## **Orange County Schools Safety Task Force**

### **Meeting Summary**

**Thursday, May 25, 2023 at 5:30 PM**

**Donna S. Baker Meeting Room  
Whitted Human Services Center  
300 West Tryon Street, Hillsborough, NC**

Members Present: Ari Schein, Cassie Rice, Kate O'Boyle, Richard Bradford, Evan Sredzienski, Jean Hamilton, Tina Sykes, Andy Simmons

Alternates Present: Andre Stewart, Andrew Poole

Members Absent: Evelyn Estrada Hernandez, Earl McKee, Rani Dasi, Nyah Hamlett, Andre Richmond, Monique Felder, Chris Atack, Paul Bell

Alternates Absent: George Griffin, Tracy Holloway, Jonathan McVey, Lee Williams II

(Note: Student members from Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools had not yet been determined.)

Facilitator: Jay Bryan, Retired District Court Judge

Staff Present: Greg Wilder from the Orange County Manager's Office

There were also approximately ten members of the public present at the meeting.

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Commissioner and Task Force Co-Chair Jean Hamilton welcomed everyone to the meeting. Co-Chair Hamilton noted that Commissioner and Co-Chair Earl McKee had work responsibilities and may or may not be at the meeting. Co-Chair Hamilton then gave a brief overview of the meeting agenda.

#### **2. Approval of April 27, 2023 Meeting Summary**

Co-Chair Hamilton asked if there were any changes to the April 27, 2023 Meeting Summary that was distributed with the meeting agenda materials. Task Force member Richard Bradford inquired regarding comments attributed to County Attorney John Roberts in the Summary and expressed some uncertainty whether they appropriately reflected Mr. Roberts' comments at the meeting. After a brief discussion, Co-Chair

Hamilton stated that follow-up would occur with Mr. Roberts and the Meeting Summary would be brought back to the next Task Force meeting for further consideration.

### **3. Discussion in Small Groups – Where Do We Go from Here?**

Co-Chair Hamilton shared a set of four questions with Task Force members, and facilitated Task Force members numbering themselves from 1 to 3 for convening into small groups at individual group tables. Co-Chair Hamilton asked each group to review and discuss the four questions and take notes as appropriate, in preparation for everyone coming back together to share and discuss their conversations and conclusions.

The four questions for the small groups to discuss were:

1. What have we learned about external public school safety issues in Orange County?
2. Is there more information that we need to gather? Are there clarifications needed?
3. Are there ways that we can improve the safety of public school students and staff from external threats?
4. Are there any recommendations to the BOCC for changes in policies or practices?

The three small groups consisted of:

- Ari Schein, Richard Bradford, and Tina Sykes
- Andre Stewart, Cassie Rice, and Evan Sredzienski
- Jean Hamilton, Kate O'Boyle, Andrew Poole, and Andy Simmons

The members of the public at the meeting also joined the three small groups to listen to the discussion on the four questions. The small groups met until 6:15 pm.

### **4. Small Group Reports & Full Group Discussion**

Co-Chair Hamilton reconvened the Task Force members and solicited feedback from the groups on Question #1 – What have we learned about external public school safety issues in Orange County? Task Force member Andy Simmons commented that collaboration was key and that all stakeholders needed to have input. He stated that it was good to hear from County Attorney John Roberts, and UNC Law Professor Mary-Rose Papandrea, and that Mr. Roberts' comments about school property lines and boundaries was particularly interesting. He noted acknowledging the philosophical differences related to school resource officers (SROs) for Orange County Schools in comparison to Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools. Task Force member Simmons also noted the historical designs for schools with lots of doors, which make them "soft" targets in modern society.

Task Force member Ari Schein added that best practices were already being used in the schools and that standard response protocols were already in place. He also referenced the value of SROs.

Task Force member Cassie Rice commented that it was good to hear that there were already state and county guidelines in place for external threat issues. She added that it was worthwhile to hear about the partnerships already in place, and to understand that there were protective activities and plans – some which could be discussed in public and others that could not be discussed publically for obvious safety purposes.

Co-Chair Hamilton moved the discussion forward to Question #2 – Is there more information that we need to gather? Are there clarifications needed? Task Force member Bradford shared that his group did not think so. There was always the opportunity for clarity, but that Task Force members had the necessary information at this point.

Task Force member Simmons referenced the comments from the County Attorney regarding the property lines/boundaries for Orange High School and noted that he was kind of flabbergasted to learn that information.

Task Force member Andre Stewart commented on the need for dissemination of information and making sure all stakeholders understand the property lines/boundaries. He noted the significant differences between schools and the need for regulatory provisions to be specific enough to understand, but also vague enough to be made applicable to diverse schools. Task Force member Stewart also noted the need for common language.

Co-Chair Hamilton commented that she wished the Task Force had more input from students, and referenced the potential benefit having student survey information. She expressed appreciation to Task Force member Evan Sredzienski for his involvement and input. Co-Chair Hamilton referenced his question about the meaning of “disruption”, and the discussion related to disruption of school operations versus the disruption of one student or a limited number of students.

In follow-up, Task Force member Stewart noted that the implementation of a holding pattern under the standard response protocols may bother or disrupt some students, but not others. He referenced an event in Greenville that did not involve a school, but necessitated implementation of standard response protocols that restricted the movement of students. He also commented that a disruption at Estes Hill Elementary, with its hotel type design, was different from a disruption at Carrboro High with its design. Task Force member Simmons echoed that architecture plays a role. Co-Chair Hamilton observed that a disruption could evoke differing law enforcement involvement depending on the school.

Task Force member Schein observed that a disruption can affect students coming, going and traveling between school campuses, sometimes not being allowed to leave a school or enter onto a school property. He also referenced training, and Task Force member Stewart noted that training would need to be school-specific. Co-Chair Hamilton added that training would be under the school districts’ purview, and not the County’s. Task Force member Bradford commented that the Board of Commissioners should likely not

consider or adopt anything related to “disruption” based on potential overreach, or the appearance of overreach.

Co-Chair Hamilton moved the group on to Question #3 – Are there ways that we can improve the safety of public school students and staff from external threats? Task Force member Sredzienski referenced the need to develop common language. Task Force member Simmons shared that law enforcement utilizes codes to refer to events, and that different jurisdictions use different codes for the same type of event. He noted a code conflict between law enforcement and the National Guard at an airport after the September 11, 2001 attacks and the need for more common language. Task Force member Kate O’Boyle commented that everyone might should use common terms like “bomb threat” as opposed to potentially conflicting codes.

Co-Chair Hamilton then referred to Question #4 – Are there any recommendations to the BOCC for changes in policies or practices? Task Force member Simmons responded that, if he had to answer now, he did not see anything from his perspective to recommend.

Co-Chair Hamilton commented that a potential idea might be to convene an annual meeting of some type just to provide the opportunity for discussion and assessment of the current status.

Task Force member Stewart shared that creating common communication capabilities in all school buildings was effective to enhance school safety. He noted that the need to think about and address social and emotional concerns and mental health issues was also a significant area to address. Co-Chair Hamilton noted that the Board of Commissioners was well aware of the mental health concerns throughout the County and schools and that a majority of County funding was going to the schools and for services to those in need.

Task Force member Simmons shared that all four law enforcement agencies in the County had social workers joining their staffs. While law enforcement officers could direct people to resources, the social workers would actually be able to help.

Co-Chair Hamilton reiterated to possibility of an annual community-wide discussion, perhaps a “summit” that involved the Board of Commissioners and other stakeholders. Task Force member Simmons responded that once a year could be a good thing, and maybe more often if necessary. It was noted that quarterly meetings were already occurring involving school staffs, law enforcement, emergency management and other stakeholders.

Task Force member Stewart shared that school staff thought about safety all day/every day for all school activities, and that a meeting semi-annually or other schedule might be worthwhile as long as the timing was considered to avoid activities like budget season and end of the school year.

Task Force member Bradford added, referencing a previous comment about student surveys, that student survey feedback might be good to have for an annual meeting, and that a meeting and the survey information might increase public understanding.

Co-Chair Hamilton noted a time check of 6:55 pm. She reiterated the Task Force's conversation related to information, education and common language, and the potential for an annual meeting. She noted the need to include emergency management colleagues in future discussions, and the need to consider the timing of a potential meeting with other activities occurring. Task Force member O'Boyle added that meeting to see how people were faring could save a lot of hassle later. Task Force member Stewart commented that schools should be able to provide survey data, with the questions developed and framed around school safety.

Co-Chair Hamilton brought the conversation to a conclusion, noting that Judge Bryan and the Co-Chairs would work on draft recommendations, and asked if the Task Force wanted to meet on June 8, 2023 and then again on June 22, 2023. After discussion, it was determined that the Task Force would not meet on June 8<sup>th</sup>, making the next Task Force meeting on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Judge Bryan and the Co-Chairs would develop a draft recommendations document, and perhaps also in the near-term a document outline. They would share the documents with and request individual feedback from all the Task Force participants in preparation for the June 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

## **5. Other Issues**

There was no discussion on this item.

## **6. Meeting Evaluation**

There was no discussion on this item.

## **Adjourn**

With no further items to discuss, the Task Force adjourned at 7:08 pm.

This Meeting Summary was approved at the June 22, 2023 Schools Safety Task Force meeting.