

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
PENNSYLVANIA COMMISSION ON CRIME AND DELINQUENCY
3101 North Front Street, Harrisburg, PA

School Safety and Security Committee Skype Meeting

February 24, 2021

MINUTES

Members/Designees:

Mr. Derin Myers, Designee for Chairman Ramsey
Ms. Janice Bart, Member
Representative Donna Bullock, Member
Ms. Nikki Bricker Cameron, Member
Colonel Robert Evanchick, Member
Mr. David Hein, Member
Mr. Mike Hurley, Member
Dr. Scott Kuren, Designee for Secretary Rivera
Mr. Joseph Regan Member
Ms. Wendy Robison, Member
Mr. Jonathan Ross, Member
Mr. Jeffrey Thomas, Designee for Director Padfield
Dr. Helena Tuleya-Payne, Member
Mr. Mike Vereb, Designee for Josh Shapiro

Staff:

Pamela Bennett
Lindsay Busko
Leslie Cesari
Rolanda Chung
Christina Cosgrove-Rooks
Chris Epoca
Lynn Fidler
Kirsten Kenyon
Rebecca Kiehl
Samantha Koch
Geoffrey Kolchin
Carol Kuntz
Crystal Lauver
Roi Ligon
Maddy Roman-Scott
Debra Sandifer
Shaun White

Guests:

Jonathan Berger, PA School Board Association (PSBA)
Sean Brandon, PA House Democrats
Mike Deery, PA Senate
Maj. Sean Jennings, PA State Police
Heather Masshardt, PA School Board Association (PSBA)
Lisa Seilhammer, PA House of Representatives
Christine Seitz, PA House of Representatives
Jason Stephen, PA Department of Education
Vicki Wilken, PA Senate

I. Call to Order and Adoption of Minutes

Mr. Myers called the meeting to order at 1:03 PM and welcomed participants. A quorum of members was established. Mr. Myers noted that the minutes from the October 27, 2020 meeting were posted on the private side of the website prior to the meeting.

Motion to approve the minutes from the October 27, 2020 meeting as submitted

Motion: Bullock. **Seconded:** Hein & Hurley. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** None. **Aye Votes:** 13, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

II. Status Update on COVID-19 School Health and Safety Grants

Mr. Myers updated Committee members on the \$50 million in federal Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Grants. He shared that PCCD received 499 applications from the 500 school districts, noting that Bryn Athyn did not submit as they do not offer classes to students. All the applications have been initially reviewed and have either been approved or returned for correction, edits, or clarification. Mr. Myers stated that as of this morning, 66 applications have been through the entire review process and are ready to be awarded. He emphasized the significance of fully executing the awarded grants by May 5, as any funds not in an official awarded status by that date must be returned to the federal government.

Mr. Myers stated that PCCD has been working on the details of getting those funds transferred over from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). He said there has been good cooperation in working through some technical issues, which he believes have now all been resolved/ He anticipates awards will start being made this week and is optimistic that all awards will be made by May 5.

Mr. Myers also apprised Committee members on the status of the \$150 million in federal COVID-19 School Health and Safety Grants awarded to the 26 Intermediate Units for nonpublic school entities. He stated that \$149.5 million has been awarded, and that the vast majority of grant recipients have completed their purchases and closed out their grant awards. He noted that a few schools are still awaiting delivery of equipment (e.g. backordered laptops and Chromebooks). Mr. Myers anticipated that will be done without further delay, as projects have to be completed by the end of October 2021, reiterating that most of the awards have been executed and are nearly finished.

III. Action on Community Violence Prevention/Reduction Grants FY20-21

Stating this as the main action item for the Committee's consideration, Mr. Myers referenced the description of the application and review process and the grant request summaries that were provided in advance as part of the meeting materials and highlighted a few significant details. He noted that the Funding Announcement was released in September and closed in November of 2020, and PCCD received 89 applications requesting a little over \$21 million, commenting that there is only \$7.5 million available for distribution. While this number is an increase over last year's rate of 59 applications, it remains less than the 123 applications received in year one.

Mr. Myers provided an overview of the review process, describing the establishment of regional target award amounts as a guide to ensure geographic distribution, as was done for the previous two iterations of this program. He then reviewed the targeted amount and total recommended today for each region, as follows:

- Southeast: Targeted allocation was \$3 million, recommending \$3.1 million
- Central: Targeted allocation was \$1.7 million, recommending \$1.6 million
- Northeast: Targeted allocation was \$1 million, recommending \$1 million
- West: Targeted allocation was \$1.8 million, recommending \$1.8 million

Mr. Myers referenced the Committee's previous decision to prioritize applications for seeking to address gun-related and gang violence, noting that just over a third (11) of the recommended applications are designated for those types of projects, for a total of \$3.2 million.

Mr. Myers described the significant review process for these applications, including the use of four external review teams as well as several staff reviews and two Community Violence Prevention/Reduction Workgroup meetings. He noted that PCCD staff went back to some applicants for clarification, and the net result can be seen in the summary document.

As there were no questions or comments raised about the process or recommendations, Mr. Myers requested the Committee's action to approve 30 applications as presented, representing a total of \$7.5 million in state School Safety and Security Grant Program funds to support these Community Violence Prevention/Reduction Grant recommendations.

Motion to adopt the 2020-2021 Community Violence Prevention/Reduction Grant recommendations, pending the resolution of any outstanding programmatic and/or fiscal concerns

Motion: Tuleya-Payne. **Seconded:** Evanchick. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** None. **Aye Votes:** 13, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

Before moving off of this agenda item, Mr. Myers informed Committee members that PCCD looked at previous year projects and anecdotally have seen some good results from those. That being said, PCCD does want to develop an overview of the results on how implementation of these projects has gone to present to the Committee at a future meeting.

IV. Baseline Criteria Review

Mr. Myers provided the context of this project, referencing the request from Senator Brewster for the Committee to consider developing and adopting guidance information on baseline safety issues and criteria. A group comprised of key stakeholders from across the state met and worked together to develop baseline criteria on physical, environmental, and behavioral health matters. The baseline criteria documents were provided in the meeting materials for Committee members' review.

Mr. Myers asked Carol Kuntz to give an overview of these materials before discussing next steps. Ms. Kuntz identified the three groups of key stakeholders who met, based on their scope of expertise and knowledge. The groups considered the varying levels of assets of schools across the state, including how they function and what their various priorities are. Given this diversity, Ms. Kuntz described the tiered approach to the criteria, with the first level being the basics, and tier 2 and tier 3 being more advanced.

Ms. Kuntz noted that for the physical areas, the workgroup began with state and federal guidance (as well as what other states had to offer) along with our physical assessment criteria and what is in statute. The workgroup then approached the physical criteria by following a student to and from school and class and considering what they might encounter, reflected in the order of items in the criteria. Ms. Kuntz reviewed the criteria, highlighting some items to show the safety aspects considered in their development. She noted that PCCD saw a lot of these items in the grant applications received, reflecting that schools are at different stages and there are different things that they need.

Ms. Kuntz similarly reviewed the areas covered by the Behavioral Health Baseline Criteria and Environmental Baseline Criteria documents, noting the rationale for the tiered recommendations and the opportunity for schools to build on what they have. She also acknowledged the inclusion of information and resources from the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and written guidance from the PA Department of Health in addition to stakeholder input in the development of the Environmental Baseline Criteria.

At the conclusion of her presentation Committee members provided their feedback, which was overwhelmingly positive. Committee members were impressed by the amount of work that was done, noting its comprehensiveness and organization, and appreciating the inclusion of links to reference materials supporting the recommendations. One member asked for clarification about the tiers and advised including an explanation of their use in these criteria. She also

suggested prompting schools to also consider the impact and utilization of data (e.g., in making decisions, outcome measures, etc.) for criteria referencing data collection.

Mr. Myers noted that the physical and behavioral health baseline criteria relate most directly to the Committee's purview. He asked members to review the information and provide any further feedback for staff to incorporate, stating that the documents would then be posted on the PCCD website. Mr. Myers recognized the opportunity for this to be considered as part of the funding process but need to wait and see what the funding situation looks like after the state budget passes before moving forward with discussing how to apply these criteria to those decisions. Regarding the Environmental Baseline Criteria, while available for consideration, Mr. Myers stated that PCCD will hold off on posting or otherwise moving forward with those for now, as it's up to the Legislature to determine how to proceed, whether to revise the powers and duties of this Committee to take on those items or pursue another avenue that's appropriate.

Mr. Myers responded to a question regarding next steps for these criteria after finalization. He stated that there have been internal discussions of the roll-out. If it's connected to funding, that would bring it to the forefront and take on a different meaning as part of that process. If not, PCCD would push it out, communicating to schools that these are recommendations established by the Committee, include the explanation of the tiered levels, and provide it as a resource for making decisions about their safety and security issues.

V. Overview of Update to Assessment Criteria

Mr. Myers reminded members that the Committee is required to do a periodic review of the assessment criteria at least once every 3 years. Workgroups met to review the criteria and made some updates. The revised Assessment Criteria was provided to Committee members as part of the meeting materials.

Mr. Myers noted that Assessment Criteria focuses on three main areas: physical environment, behavioral health/school climate and SAP, and policy and training. While there were minor changes primarily centered around statutory updates, three major changes were made:

- The criteria were put into the tiered model to complement the Baseline Criteria;
- The components were reformatted to align areas of concentration; and
- It will be made into a downloadable form for assessors and schools to input directly or print for use.

While there were no questions regarding the revised Assessment Criteria, a Committee member stated that the new format is very helpful, commenting that she thinks it will encourage more people to be interested in becoming registered assessors. Mr. Myers requested the Committee take action to approve the Assessment Criteria.

Motion to approve the Assessment Criteria as presented

Motion: Thomas. **Seconded:** Hein. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** None. **Aye Votes:** 13, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

VI. Adoption of School Survey

Mr. Myers referenced §1305-B of the PA Public School Code, in which the Committee is required to review and administer a School Safety and Security Survey at least every two years. He reminded members that at the July 2020 meeting, the Committee agreed to delay administering the Survey until the winter of 2021, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school operations. In the meantime, the School Survey Workgroup reconvened, reviewed the survey and made some mostly minor changes. Mr. Myers noted that the revised version was provided to members as part of the packet of meeting materials.

Mr. Myers stated that the Workgroup wanted to ensure that continuity was maintained in the Survey's iteration from year to year to facilitate tracking trends, so there are not many changes to the questions being asked or their wording, other than some tweaking to clarify the

requested information and/or to reflect changes made to the law since 2018. He reviewed the recommendation for one significant change, to no longer request that the schools provide their actual vulnerability and risk assessments to PCCD as part of the survey. While acknowledging that was required during the first release of the survey, the new recommendation is that the Survey ask questions regarding the school's assessment, including the type of assessment that was completed (physical or behavioral); where it was held; who conducted it and when; did they use the provider listing on PCCD's assessor registry website to select their assessor; what action did they take in response to the assessment; and did the assessment follow the PCCD School Safety and Security Criteria.

Mr. Myers was confident that these questions would provide good information rather than requiring review of each assessment provided, and that more could be learned from the questions asked – particularly in the aggregate – than from individualized security assessments. This change would also serve to alleviate schools' concern of the security and confidentiality of their assessments in providing them to PCCD.

Mr. Myers and staff responded to Committee members' questions and comments. He clarified the timeline for releasing the Survey, stating that PCCD hopes to release it on March 8, leave it open for 4 weeks, and close it on April 2. A member noted the need to recognize the variations of school operations which will likely continue through the remainder of the school year due to the pandemic, and that the responses might be difficult, given the extenuating circumstances. Mr. Myers agreed and confirmed the need to consider the responses in context.

Regarding the School Safety Assessments, staff clarified that schools are not required to use someone from the PCCD Provider Registry, but if they do, it's mandatory that they use the PCCD Assessment Criteria. Staff said that both the Registry and Assessment Criteria are being used, as evidenced by feedback from assessors and schools.

A member noted the challenge of conducting assessment this year while students are present due to all the changes that have taken place, stating that it does not make sense to do a risk and vulnerability assessment when only half of the students are in school a few days a week. He suggested that a future review of the School Safety and Security Criteria may be needed, as schools are making long-term or permanent changes in areas such as student movement, classroom setup, etc. and some situations may not revert back to what were normal school safety and security precautions and vulnerabilities prior to the pandemic. While it may take a year or two, once schools return to more normal daily operations, he anticipated that there will be some work to do again around the risk and vulnerability assessments. Another member concurred, giving the example that as a health precaution schools currently are not locking doors so that students are not touching handles repetitively, and are also leaving windows open to allow for cross-ventilation

In the absence of further questions or discussion, Mr. Myers requested action to adopt the School Safety and Security Survey. Following the vote, Mr. Myers confirmed PCCD's intention to move forward with the plan to release the Survey on Monday, March 8, 2021 and leave it open for 4 weeks, until Friday, April 2, 2021.

Motion to approve the School Safety and Security Survey as presented

Motion: Tuleya-Payne. **Seconded:** Ross. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** None. **Aye Votes:** 13, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

VII. General Updates

Mr. Myers invited PCCD staff Carol Kuntz and Samantha Koch to provide their updates. Ms. Kuntz shared that there are now 114 approved assessors in the Provider Registry, including three new assessors recommended in the meeting materials. There are 86 physical/security assessors, 20 behavioral health/school climate assessors, and 8 assessors qualifying for both categories.

In the area of School Security Personnel, Ms. Kuntz informed the Committee that there are now 15 Third-Party Security Vendors that are approved to provide security services to schools. In the area of the NASRO-equivalent school security personnel training, there are six providers, though with COVID, most have moved to offering coursework using a video conferencing format. In addition, three providers have developed an online curriculum, in which participants read or hear content and participate in cohort discussion, which seems to be going well. Several colleges, both within and outside of Pennsylvania, are working with vendors to provide the online curriculum. One college is working with a vendor to offer security personnel college credit for this course.

Following Ms. Kuntz's report, Ms. Koch provided an update on the status of the threat assessment team training project. PCCD and the project's partners continue to make good progress with the deliverables associated with the Pennsylvania K-12 Threat Assessment Technical Assistance and Training Network, funded through a federal BJA STOP School Violence Threat Assessment Grant.

Ms. Koch stated that the Network is on track to formally launch at the end of April 2021 to provide comprehensive training and technical assistance at no cost to help school entities successfully implement the new threat assessment requirements that go into effect at the start of the 2021-22 school year. As part of the April launch, school entities will be able to register for a new online training program at no cost.

To help inform the design of this training curricula, a confidential Threat Assessment Needs Survey was developed and circulated in January to administrators, school safety and security coordinators, and other personnel who will be involved in a school entity's Threat Assessment Team. Ms. Koch reported that over 700 responses were received from school entities.

Preliminary analysis of the responses suggests some key findings, including:

- 50% of school entities have full Threat Assessment Teams established and operating
- 57% of school entities self-assess as being either fully or substantively aligned with the scope of statutory Threat Assessment and Case Management requirements established under Act 18 of 2019, with little or no external support required
- 16% self-assess as being either not yet aligned and with many major requirements unfulfilled or having not yet moved beyond the planning stage of the process of establishing their school entity's Team
- The most frequently identified capability gaps across Threat Assessments Teams are associated with re-entry and safety planning, information sharing, the development and implementation of practical actions in support of trauma-informed school approaches, the development of information and awareness materials for the wider school community and launching awareness campaigns, and the development of a documented systems for case handling and management

Ms. Koch stated that a more detailed analysis will be provided to Committee members in the near future. She also noted that more information on the training program, including some topics covered in the curriculum, is available on the [PCCD website](#).

At the conclusion of her presentation, Ms. Koch responded to questions and comments by Committee members. Regarding those who did not respond to the survey or take much action, Ms. Koch stated that it was anonymous so there's not specific information, but they did ask for the respondent's type and IU region. She noted that this type of analysis is part of the more detailed documentation. Ms. Koch anticipated that it will be ready in the next month and will be made available to members once it's finalized by their partners.

A member asked how the roll-out would occur and how schools would get this assistance. Ms. Koch acknowledged that with COVID-19 it has become more of a moving target than originally envisioned. Instead of starting with in-person training, they decided to flip the order and so prioritized online learning to roll out first. She expressed appreciation for a great group of stakeholders and partners, particularly the PA Department of Education, which has helped to

disseminate the survey and roll-out information to schools. Ms. Koch stated that schools will be able to register and access the self-paced training through our website, once the platform is up and running.

VIII. Member Updates/Comments/Questions

Mr. Myers invited members to bring any business they might have to share before the Committee. Referencing the general updates, one member observed that, looking at the 2020-21 school term, there has been a lot of conversation in the schools about the mental health aspects of student and staff returning to school. He expressed concern that the behavioral health assessor group seems very limited compared to the physical assessment provider group and asked if there is a need to promote the behavioral health aspect and reach out to potential assessors. Mr. Myers agreed with the concerns, stating that PCCD is open to ideas and staff has had active conversation about that.

Another member asked if behavioral health assessors would also potentially be considered as consultants to the school. The other member replied that he believes that is a real possibility, based on the number of counselors available in the schools at this point and he has heard anecdotally, and he anticipates that school districts will be reaching out for help on behavioral health issues. He is concerned that there have not been any new behavioral health assessment providers approved for the last 2 meetings and think will be extremely important to have assessment providers who are knowledgeable on the behavioral health side. Staff agreed and will pursue opportunities for promoting the Registry to state associations. A member commented that the revised school behavioral health assessment criteria may also prove helpful in recruiting, as it looks more like an assessment tool that a psychologist would use.

A member with behavioral health expertise shared some of the current challenges in the field, noting that it's systematic. While families and children are reaching out for assistance, there are long wait lists as there are not enough providers to treat the overwhelming number of referrals. She noted the other barrier of insurance coverage, with many families being unable or unwilling to pay the additional costs of deductibles and co-pays. She also acknowledged that providers are becoming burnt out, as they have been doing this since March and with the additional challenges of telehealth, which is very difficult to use with children.

Discussion continued with hopes that schools are currently working on re-entry plans, noting that Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) can be a buffer and help ameliorate those challenges, along with resources from the PA Department of Education. There was consensus on the importance of supporting plans and efforts to address mental/behavioral health, such as training for school personnel, now to avoid a dilemma in the near future, despite the dearth of potential staff or community resources. PCCD staff noted that training, including on trauma-informed approaches and social emotional learning, was part of the grant funding for a number of districts. Observing that the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) will be administered again this coming fall, Mr. Myers said it will be interesting to see how the responses have changed since the last time. He concluded by stating that PCCD will be diligent in making recommendations that reflect and respond to what is going on.

IX. Public Comment

There was no public comment offered.

X. Adjournment

Mr. Myers noted that the next meeting is anticipated to be sometime in July, though PCCD may send out an informational update if warranted. Mr. Myers thanked everyone for their time and contribution to the discussion. Following the vote, the meeting adjourned at 2:25 PM.

Motion to adjourn

Motion: Vereb. **Seconded:** Hein. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** Ross & Thomas. **Aye Votes:** 11; **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**