

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

School Safety and Security Committee Meeting

April 27, 2022

MINUTES

Members/Designees: Mr. Derin Myers, Designee for Chairman Ramsey
Senator James Brewster, Member
Representative Donna Bullock, Member
Ms. Nikki Bricker Cameron, Member
Col. Robert Evanchick, Member
Ms. Tanoa Fagan, Designee for Acting Secretary Snead
Mr. David Hein, Member
Mr. Mike Hurley, Member
Mr. Mike Kelly, Member
Dr. Scott Kuren, Designee for Secretary Ortega
Mr. Randy Padfield, Member
Dr. Jamie Piraino, Member
Dr. Kathleen Reeves, Member
Ms. Wendy Robison, Member
Dr. Helena Tuleya-Payne, Member
Mr. Mike Vereb, Designee for Josh Shapiro

Staff:

Sally Barry	Geoff Kolchin
Pamela Bennett	Carol Kuntz
Lindsay Busko	Crystal Lauver
Chris Epoca	Roi Ligon
Heather Hewitt	Mike Pennington
Kirsten Kenyon	Debra Sandifer
Samantha Koch	Alyssa Subsinsky

Guests:

Sgt. Meghan Barbour, PA State Police (PSP)
Hannah Barrick, PA Assn. of School Business Officials (PASBO)
Jonathan Berger, PA School Board Association (PSBA)
Gwenn Dando, PA Senate
Mike Deery, PA Senate
Jacob Derrick, Governor's Office
Gerry Huesken, Pa Department of Education
Bradley Keen, PA House Democrats
Westburn Majors, PA Emergency Management Agency (PEMA)
Heather Masshardt, PA School Board Association (PSBA)
Stephen St. Vincent, PA Office of Attorney General
Vicki Wilken, PA Senate

I. Call to Order of the April 27, 2022 Meeting and Adoption of Minutes

Mr. Myers called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM and welcomed participants. A quorum of members was established. Mr. Myers noted that the minutes from the January 26, 2022 meeting were part of the packet of materials made available prior to today's meeting.

Motion to approve the minutes from the January 26, 2022 meeting as submitted

Motion: Brewster. **Seconded:** Bullock. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** None.
Aye Votes: 15, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

Before moving on with the agenda, Mr. Myers shared some updates of interest to the Committee. He thanked everyone who participated in the process of revising the School Safety and Security Personnel Training Standards to address the NASRO-equivalent training requirement. He was pleased to report that the Commission unanimously adopted these proposed modifications to the standards at their meeting on March 9, and they have been posted on the PCCD website. The updated standards were also shared with all currently approved vendors and a webinar was held to discuss the changes and the rationale behind them. Vendors now have until December 9, 2022 to revise their curriculum accordingly.

Mr. Myers shared the latest information on state funding for school safety and security. He noted that the Governor's budget proposal calls for \$45 million in new school safety and security funding as well as \$35 million in Violence Intervention & Prevention (VIP) funding, which has also been the responsibility of this Committee. Mr. Myers referenced several recently introduced bills that focus on student mental and behavioral health needs, noting that should any of these activities and funding be realized, this Committee will have much to consider in the upcoming summer and fall months.

II. Violence Intervention and Prevention (VIP) Grants Technical Assistance Award

Mr. Myers invited Ms. Samantha Koch to present information on the VIP Technical Assistance Award. Ms. Koch reviewed a PowerPoint presentation of the funding recommendation for this project and thanked those who have contributed. Ms. Koch briefly recapped the funding announcement goals and objectives that the Committee approved in January as well as the eligibility and qualification requirements, noting the emphasis on supporting grassroots and community based organizations.

Ms. Koch reported that six applications were received, five of which were ultimately determined to be viable after review and scoring. She gave a brief overview of the review and scoring process. Ultimately, the review team, PCCD staff and the VIP Workgroup recommended funding the application submitted by WestEd's Justice & Prevention Research Center, in partnership with Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). While there were other strong applications under consideration, WestEd was determined to be the most capable applicant to "hit the ground running" and their proposed approach was most closely aligned with the goals and objectives of the VIP TA Project funding announcement.

Ms. Koch reviewed components and key features of their proposed project, noting that their technical assistance will range from low to high intensity. WestEd's proposal also included web-based resources and library, a focus on peer-learning, and inclusion of cross-site visits. Ms. Koch expressed appreciation for their acknowledgement of barriers for community based organizations.

Mr. Myers added that this project is a bit different than some other grantees in that it is more of a collaborative agreement than a straight grant. He also responded to a question regarding the potential impact of a legal case that cited WestEd, stating that it seemed to involve a different branch within the WestEd organization that was doing different work, which mitigated concern.

Ms. Koch concluded her presentation with a review of the project's timeline and related tasks. She also highlighted some of the ways that PCCD anticipates measuring and monitoring this initiative's progress in the short and long term through quarterly and annual performance measures, which will be used to identify the impact and inform future efforts.

Following her presentation and without any further questions, Mr. Myers called for a motion.

Motion to adopt the VIP Technical Assistance project not to exceed \$750,000, pending the resolution of programmatic and/or fiscal concerns

Motion: Hurley. **Seconded:** Hein. **Abstentions:** Reeves (sent recusal form). **Not Present for Vote:** None. **Aye Votes:** 14, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

III. Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) Presentation

Mr. Myers reviewed the summary provided in the meeting materials, noting that it is a preview of the official PAYS data report that will be released statewide next month. He noted that since 1989 the PAYS has been administered every other year to students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12 throughout the state (with the exception of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh school districts, as they do not participate). For the latest administration last fall, over 240,000 students from more than 1,000 schools participated.

Mr. Myers presented some of the key findings from the most recent PAYS for the Committee's consideration. He said that school safety overall seems to be moving in a positive direction over the past few years. While lower than in previous PAYS, there were still 13,000 reports of students bringing a weapon to school in 2021. There was also a noticeable decline in prosocial activities, likely due to the impact of COVID, and faith-based activities have been trending down even before COVID. There was also an increase in 6th graders abusing prescription medications.

While the number of positives is generally encouraging, Mr. Myers noted the concerning data on student mental health and well-being, particularly depression, adding that self-harm and suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts all are higher than in previous years. He reiterated that the Legislature has identified student mental health needs as a major concern, adding that several bills have been introduced as a result. These include:

- [House Bill 2022](#) – [School Based Behavioral Health Assistance](#)
- [House Bill 2023](#) – [Behavioral Health Awareness Model Curriculum](#)
- [House Bill 2024](#) – [Mental Health Instruction Study](#)
- [House Bill 2468](#) – [Student Mental Health Focused Grants](#)

Mr. Myers shared the incredible response to the small solicitation of \$2.5 million in Violence & Delinquency Prevention Program funding to support student mental health needs, for which over 200 applications were received, requesting nearly \$30 million. In addition, the Attorney General's Office recently released its [Safe2Say Something Annual 2020-2021 Report](#). While the total number of tips received decreased, the share of tips that were designated as "Life Safety" matters (including mental health crisis) increased to 21%, with the top event category being suicide and suicide ideation. Mr. Myers expressed his concern that these all portend a growing issue that needs to be addressed.

Discussion ensued around mental health issues, data collection issues, and the *Safe2Say Something* program, including:

- The value of the *Safe2Say Something* program
- The need to continually and consistently promote it
- The rising number of tips, particularly around mental health issues and suicide prevention
- The benefit of it opening up dialogue with parents, peers, and staff
- The value of data and reporting incidents that occur
- Some frustration with inconsistency in what needs to be reported, i.e. multiple students involved in an incident are reported as multiple incidents vs. one incident
- The need for help with responding to reports (counselors, etc.)
- The challenge of the general lack of resources available, how to best to support folks in those professions and ensure sustainability as it needs to be a long-term commitment

- The challenge of identifying the need but without the capacity and risk of burn out
- The challenge of ranking districts, which includes safety and security as a component, but those districts that continually report accurately are rated lower than districts that do not
- The potential use of telehealth for mental health services that could perhaps be used by multiple schools
- The challenge of having the capacity to provide staffing and ensure sustainability to meet the level of need

Mr. Myers responded to a question regarding the PAYS, confirming that both bullying on school grounds and cyberbullying are addressed. While marked movement in those areas and the impact on school mental health was not noted, he will verify that information and apprise the Committee. PCCD staff Geoff Kolchin, the PAYS survey coordinator, added that they did see an increase in cyberbullying, especially in the 6th and 8th grades.

Referencing the 2021 PAYS Highlights document in the meeting materials, a member noted that the nearly 20% drop in the final graphic indicating a decline in feeling that school will be important later in life was very concerning. He asked if that decline was associated with the rising mental health issues or if there was any other determination of the reason for that trend. Mr. Myers responded that data is not available to indicate why it's trending that way, but it is consistently doing so and warrants further analysis as to why students at every grade level are feeling that the school experience will not help them later in life despite administrators and other school personnel working to engage students in the school experience, noting that it will be important to get to the bottom of the reason for that erosion.

Mr. Kolchin added that they did look at that data and released a [special report](#) last December. He said that part of the impact on that trend is the remote learning that has occurred over the past two years, which greatly affected student connection to schools, teachers and peers. They are interested to see if that trend continues as schools get back to in-person learning but acknowledged that it is something they need to take into account and the trendlines with the "new normal". Mr. Kolchin stated that they are hoping that some of the Violence & Delinquency Prevention Program projects will address the impact of students being remote for so long and identify ways to assist schools in developing approaches, programs and supports to meet the needs that have emerged.

Mr. Myers concluded the discussion by noting that if there is funding in the state budget, there is certainly a lot of work to be done in this area and also on the physical side. He highlighted the value of the [baseline criteria](#) that this Committee established and the continued need for both ends of the spectrum to be covered.

IV. General Updates

In the interest of time, Mr. Myers asked if there was any opposition to providing the general updates on the Registries for the Assessment Providers and Third Party Vendors in an email following the meeting. Hearing none, he moved on to the next agenda item, inviting Ms. Carol Kuntz to give an overview of the school safety coordinator survey.

Ms. Kuntz briefly shared the [statutory background](#) requiring school safety coordinators to report on the school's safety and security practices and areas to improve to the school board by June 30 of each year. Ms. Kuntz referenced the coordinator report survey questions provided in the meeting materials, stating that from the statute's inception PCCD has sent a survey to all school entities to provide the Committee with this information. She concluded by asking if there were any questions regarding the survey, which is scheduled to be sent out on May 2.

Mr. Myers asked Ms. Koch if there was any update on the K-12 Threat Assessment Training. She said that the training is currently in a holding pattern awaiting federal approval of a grant adjustment modification, which hopefully will be resolved soon.

V. Member Updates/Comments/Questions

Mr. Myers invited members to share any updates. Hearing none, he informed the Committee that Ms. Kuntz has been appointed as the Safe Schools Advocate within the School District of Philadelphia. While she had been serving as both the Acting Safe Schools Advocate and the Manager of PCCD's School Safety Program Unit for the past several months, she has officially accepted the position as the fulltime Safe School Advocate. Mr. Myers expressed appreciation for her knowledge and expertise, noting that she will still be engaged in the work of school safety and security and congratulating her on this new role.

VI. Public Comment

Mr. Myers invited any public comment however none was offered.

VII. Adjournment

Mr. Myers thanked everyone for their time and contribution to the discussion. Mr. Myers noted that the next meeting is tentatively planned for July 2022, although the exact date and time will depend on the actions of the General Assembly, particularly around the budget, in June. Following the vote, the meeting adjourned at 2:00 PM.

Motion to adjourn

Motion: Hein. **Seconded:** Padfield. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** Thomas.
Aye Votes: 15; **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**