

November 16, 2022

Teresa Beck, President and Board Members of the
Spirit Lake Community School District Board of Education

(via email)

Re: Armed Staff Initiative

Dear Board Members:

I've recently been asked by District staff for an opinion on the District's initiative to arm a limited number of staff members. It was also recently suggested to me I would now be involved in creating and/or consulting on additional training and it's been requested I provide input on possible experts outside the area for consultation. Now the Board has received the proposed safety plan and invited comment, and given my concerns about the initiative, I feel it is the appropriate time to comment.

This past summer I had a brief discussion with Dr. Smith and Angela Olsen and they indicated they were working on a plan to arm some staff members in relation to active shooter threats. Some very general ideas were presented and I indicated I thought the concept may have merit, expressed a concern that teachers not be armed and they said they would be in touch. The next I heard about the matter was via a text a few weeks later, around 9 p.m. on a Monday evening, informing me the Board had voted earlier that evening to move forward to have staff conceal and carry and wanting to make sure they, presumably Angela and Dr. Smith, had "my full support" because they would be communicating with media and families and not wanting to misrepresent my opinion. Not much later that same evening, and without a response from me, a media release was sent out indicating the initiative was "fully supported" by me and I believe the same had been represented to the Board at the earlier meeting. That was not true and I'd never indicated I fully supported anything – at the time of our brief discussion there weren't any details provided to form an opinion about.

I later released a statement indicating what I had expressed previously - I thought the concept had merit and that I would be evaluating the initiative as it progressed. I'm aware of the training that has been provided and have now had an opportunity to see the District's

proposed Emergency Response Plan (Plan) which includes the District's plan to deal with armed intruders. My professional judgment is that arming staff members is an unworkable solution which also has the real potential to provide a false sense of security for students, parents and school personnel and interfere with law enforcement efforts in the event of an emergency.

So far, there have been 15 staff and teachers who have been actively trained. Teachers have not simply been observers. The training has consisted of some basic concealed carry instruction and becoming familiar with handguns, time on a shooting range and some basic "walk throughs" related to "tactics", actively searching rooms, etc. I have no reservations about the quality of the training received or the qualifications of the instructors, but the time actually spent hands on by individual staff and teachers who were trained is overstated and the suggestion that any aspect of it was comparable in a real sense to training received by trained law enforcement officers is inaccurate. Even though the content may be the same or similar, the training is abbreviated and casual compared to the intensity of actual training received by law enforcement, which also draws upon other elements of law enforcement training and experience. Even the "same" training for ordinary individuals really isn't the same as that training being administered and received by law enforcement professionals.

For real comparison, the basic law enforcement class for new officers at the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy is a 16 week program. The class content is available online from the ILEA and includes weapons training. A table attached to the Plan represents incorrectly that candidates receive 40 hours of "marksmanship/shooting" and that the District's armed personnel receive the equivalent. ILEA requires 72 hours of such training and those 72 hours are intense and hands on. The training to date for staff and teachers has consisted of approximately 5 or so actual total hours on two occasions on a gun range and with individuals having to wait their turn to access the range, meaning their individual time was limited. So if those two days are suggested to be the same as 16 hours of ILEA range training, they aren't the same. A simple count of rounds fired isn't a measure of the nature or effectiveness of training.

Law enforcement training has many components and the parts work together as part of the whole— picking and choosing a few components and thinking that some superficial experience with certain areas would prepare any regular person for all that could be encountered in an active shooter situation is not reasonable. This area is fortunate to have a tactical team comprised of law enforcement officers from several jurisdictions – several years of experience and many hours of specific training are required to serve on the tactical team. So in addition to a full time resource officer at the schools, the Spirit Lake Police Department and the Dickinson County Sheriff's Department there is an additional resource which trains specifically for active shooter situations.

The idea that staff and teachers having gone through some simple walk-throughs of "tactical" situations even begins to prepare them for facing an armed threat is concerning. The idea the District is suggesting it is forming some ad hoc tactical unit (which the Plan suggests) is

very concerning. At a recent ALICE training session, a staff member announced to school personnel "just give us thirty seconds", and the Plan even references the District's armed personnel will be focused on "getting to the threat within 30 seconds". ALICE training isn't about holding out for 30 seconds or any other arbitrary amount of time and that suggestion isn't consistent with the core of such training and the fluid nature of its teachings and could have serious consequences.

It is not realistic to expect that a group of educational or other staff can learn all that would be required to function as a tactical team or unit --- that takes years of training and experience for law enforcement and other professionals. Nor is it realistic to expect such individuals to make the leap from classroom to real world active shooter situations in an emergency --- their career training as educators and day-to-day experiences at work and at home can't be expected to simply disappear with some instant transformation in the event of a completely random emergency unlike anything they will have ever encountered in their normal lives.

It is also not realistic to expect that individually trained educational or other staff can learn all that would be required to identify, seek out and eliminate the threat of an active shooter. Again, that would involve years of training and experience ---- it's not something you go take a class, get a certificate and think that if and when a serious situation arises you will magically be able to do all that is required to be done. For example, it is well documented that the shooting accuracy of experienced law enforcement officers in real world situations can be very inconsistent. The idea that a school staff member will accurately and effectively discharge a live round under an active shooter situation is far more unlikely than likely, and odds are far greater that individual (1) will fail to discharge his or her weapon because of the overwhelming nature of the situation, and (2) if he or she survives to discharge the weapon it is probably more likely an innocent person will be shot (if the bullet contacts anyone) than the armed threat.

There has been no plan or provision for providing the District's armed personnel with any type of body armor -- the feeling is that would identify those who are carrying weapons and they would have to take time to go and find and put their body armor in the event of a situation and defeating the purpose of somehow making seconds count. Body armor is a requirement for safety and liability reasons for professionals --- not requiring it for amateurs (along with other things noted before and below) just sets them up to be victims.

The Plan suggests other and additional "law enforcement" training will happen on an annual basis, but is not specific about what that training will be. I can't give an opinion on that since it hasn't been developed other than to say I wouldn't ever even consider a Plan without knowing exactly what type of training is being proposed and what it specifically consists of and how it would be taught/supervised. To date that additional training hasn't been designed or specified, so my opinion is the Plan can't be approved when so many other critical pieces of the puzzle will still need to be figured out at a later time.

There is no guarantee that armed staff members would respond more quickly than law enforcement, but speed isn't the answer in itself. It isn't possible to list all the ways that individuals who can't be adequately prepared for an active shooter situation may make a situation worse. Any of those outcomes would result in more harm, more delay and in interference with law enforcement's response.

I've talked with many other law enforcement professionals in many other jurisdictions and their opinions are the same ---- arming staff isn't the best response.

My suggestions to the District are (1) to spend time and resources figuring out how to better secure buildings and making it impossible or as close to impossible as it can be for weapons to get into the buildings and (2) if armed personnel are decided to be part of the solution to dealing with the possibility of an active shooter then those individuals should be trained professionals. In the event of an active shooter emergency the schools should follow the procedures it has designed for that situation (and if that involves ALICE, follow ALICE) and make sure those procedures involve getting a call out for emergency assistance or whatever notification may be designed as quickly as possible and without delay.

It is the Board's responsibility to determine what its Plan should require, and I've only addressed the armed intruder aspect of the Plan at this point because that is the part that most directly involves law enforcement. We are all concerned about the safety of children at the schools and the safety of all of those who we trust with their care and education while at school. I appreciate the time and serious consideration you have given and will be giving to this matter. It is a complicated issue and none of the possible solutions are easy, but I think they need to be looked at very critically and carefully whatever direction you feel is best to go for the District.

Thank you for your consideration.



Shane Brevik
Chief of Police
Spirit Lake Police Department

CC: Dr. David Smith and Angela Olsen (via email)