

## Executive Order 203 Compliance Group

November 4, 2020 Meeting Notes

Members Present: Malta Town Supervisor Darren O'Connor; City of Mechanicville Supervisor Tom Richardson; Undersheriff Rick Castle, Saratoga County Sheriff's Department; Dr. Michael Prezioso, Commissioner of Mental Health & Addiction Services; District Attorney Karen Heggen; Public Defender Andrew Blumenberg; Opal Hinds, Esq.; Assistant County Attorney Michael Hartnett – Advisor to the Group; School Superintendents: Ken Slentz, Ballston Spa; Patrick McGrath, Burnt Hills Ballston Lake; Mark Stratton, Corinth; Michelle Ellis, Edinburg Commons; Brita Donovan, Galway Central Schools; Bruce Potter, Mechanicville Schools; Dr. Michael Patton, Saratoga Springs School District; Ryan Sherman, Schuylerville Schools; Dr. L. Oliver Robinson, Shenendehowa Schools; Kristine Orr, South Glens Falls Schools; Patricia Morris, Stillwater Schools; Patrick Pomerville, Waterford-Halfmoon Schools.

Dr. Prezioso welcomed those in attendance. He said he was chosen by this Group to lead the process. His day job is the Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services for Saratoga County. The other members of the Group introduced themselves as well as the School Superintendents who were not only there in person but also available on the call in number.

Dr. Prezioso said he wanted to take a moment to remind everyone of the process. The process has been designed in furtherance of Executive Order 203 the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative. The Order directs a comprehensive review of police force deployments, strategies, policy & procedures, and practices for addressing the particular needs of the community served and to promote community engagement to foster trust, fairness and legitimacy. Stakeholders including but not limited to membership and leadership of the local police force, members of the community, interested non-profit and faith based community groups, the local office of the District Attorney, the local Public Defender, and the local elected officials shall be consulted. Members have identified stakeholder groups, have been or are in the process of being identified and will have the opportunity to speak to the Executive Order 203 Compliance Group for 3 minutes each. Members of the public are invited to call in to listen to stakeholder input and Compliance Group discussion. Stakeholders in the public are strongly encouraged to submit comments in written form. A Saratoga County web page has been developed for this purpose. We expect a fillable form to be added very shortly within the course of the next couple of days. The input will be incorporated in a report to be considered by the Board of Supervisors in time to meet the Governor's April 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 deadline.

Dr. Prezioso said at this time he would like to turn to the folks in the room and give them an opportunity to provide their feedback for 3 minutes.

Mr. Bruce Potter, Superintendent, Mechanicville City School District – “I had the opportunity to review the outline for community discussions of reform. I believe the Saratoga County Sheriff's Department does an excellent job. I have no input regarding any recommendations for policy change. As a Superintendent, we do participate in the School Resource Officers Program. I think that maybe there is an opportunity to expand the focus on whether it is restoring justice on social emotion learning practices but have the officers present in a more student friendly manner to engage the community in that way beginning with the students at a young level so that the particular issues we are facing can be mitigated by building strong community relationships right at a young age.”

Mr. Patrick Pomerville, Superintendent, Waterford-Halfmoon Schools - “I have also read through it and I thought in the policing strategy section where it talked about where we are primarily a reactionary force in many parts of the County. I would encourage that they continue to take proactive steps to stop crime. I would encourage that in the future that those proactive steps, education in to the community and so on, I would strongly encourage that proactive stance continue and increase possibly.”

Ms. Patti Morris, Stillwater Central School District – “I concur with Bruce and Patrick. I appreciate all the efforts of the Saratoga County Sheriff's Department and the work collaboration we have had with our lock down drills and just visibility that we see in our District. In regards to the outline, what struck me, on page 8 appendix E reference, at this time the Sheriff's Office has not conducted implicit bias training for all of our members. In being governed by policy, as the school chief executive officer, I find that training is really important when it comes to policy that we

expect people to follow. We expect people to follow policy. But, when it is a policy that is so important that people have training for I would recommend considering training in that area. Thank you.”

Mr. Oliver Robinson, Superintendent, Shenendehowa Schools – “First thank you for having me be a part of this process. I’ve had a chance to thumb through the document that was provided. I just want something to think about as a group. And I would say for every school in the County, we have all our Superintendents on the call, that probably the predominant focus that people are focusing on is equity and opportunity for our students. And that’s a pretty broad comprehensive approach in terms of truly trying to understand the needs of our students by understanding our students first. And, so as I look at this I want to make sure it’s not just an academic exercise but something that focuses on strategies and approaches to truly understand the change in demographics in our County as well as the change in need of our residents and try to approach it from a very authentic approach similar to what we are trying to do in schools. In other words, as we partner more and more with law enforcement we want that similar premise if you will to be reciprocated between the two respective agencies. As he is thumbing through it I just want to make sure it’s not one of those situations...I think it is a tremendous opportunity for us as a County to really talk about how do we put the need of our citizens first regardless if it’s law enforcement, education or otherwise.”

Mr. Mark Stratton, Superintendent, Corinth Schools – “I think my colleague pointed out several good topics for today. I’m just going to sit back and listen. Thank you.”

Ms. Brita Donovan, Superintendent, Galway Central Schools – “I think we have a great foundation already with Saratoga County Sheriff’s Department. I was a little on the fence about the SRO Program. It’s been wonderful in terms of really showing our community what law enforcement can do positive. I think it’s a foundation. I think we can move even more forward with the program in terms of really down in the weeds as Dr. Robinson talked about, just not surface. So I agree with Patti as well that training is very important. I think we have a great foundation in our County. And I do think we can expand upon it and make it even better.”

Kristine Orr, Superintendent, South Glens Falls Schools – “I think everyone in the room pretty much summed up things nicely for us. Thanks.”

Mr. Ken Slentz, Superintendent, Ballston Spa Schools – “As Dr. Robinson said, very grateful for the opportunity. This is and I think one of our operating norms for this Group, I hope, is that we will all speak with great candor and respect. I think all of us have a wonderful working relationship with Sheriff Zurlo and his team there. But this is an opportunity to really move beyond compliance, as Dr. Robinson suggested, and take a deeply objective look at both the practices as well as the dispositions. This is a real opportunity for us as a group to educate the community. I think it is important that we get input from the youth within our respective communities. What their perceptions are, how we can utilize this as the education opportunity to make sure people understand how we are collectively operating; what it is that we are seeking to get better at; and making sure that the training offered along the way is the best that we can offer relative to best practices around the Country. Do we have an arm that is reaching out and looking for those things? I think that will be very important. I think if we are all willing to be comfortable with getting a little uncomfortable with some of these conversations, if you will, I truly believe the outcome is going to be good not only for our County but our County could actually serve as a model going through this same process.”

Mr. Patrick McGrath, Superintendent, Burnt Hills Ballston Lake Schools – “I would like to echo what Brita said from Galway. We have been involved in the School Resource Officer program for a couple of years now. We have a great Resource Officer that has connected us with a number of other resources through the Sheriff’s Department. We also are 40% in Schenectady County. So, through the Town of Glenville, we work with the Glenville Police Department quite a bit. Recently they worked together to sign a mutual aid agreement between Glenville and Saratoga County Sheriff to help bring positive outcome to kids in the District. I think as Ken said the idea of really working hard on this, make it a model, look at areas where people see a need for improvement, but also look at the successes and the value that having our Deputies connected with our kids and our families and seen as a positive force is a great thing. We have had a lot of positive here in Burnt Hills.”

Mr. Ryan Sherman, Superintendent, Schuylerville Schools – “Well Ken stole my notes, thanks Ken. I just want to echo what Ken said about candor and being candid with one another. It may be uncomfortable during these

discussions. My purview in regards to this is the SRO program that we have. We were on the initial committee in order to develop this. It's been a great success for us. One of the areas that obviously needs improvement is education. Professional development directly for SRO's working with youth. Part of the program is the relationships developed with SRO's and students. I think that a part in this discussion that has been valuable for us but needs to be enhanced. I want everyone to be comfortable, be candid during these discussions."

Dr. Prezioso said that would conclude the formal input for those on the phone and those in the room. He opened the floor for discussions. He said he heard a couple of things such as the importance of early engagement, the value of the SRO program, and the need for certain kinds of trainings.

Mr. Castle said he wanted to make a comment. One of the suggestions was to reach out to the youth and include them in discussions. He asked how can the school districts help the Group in completing that task. Saratoga County is a big County that doesn't have centralized resources for youth where you can make those contacts. The SRO's have the ability and do have good rapport with the students. But they may not be the proper person to collect that information. He is looking for recommendations from the Superintendents on how best to go about this.

Mr. Slentz, Ballston Spa, said each district has a student representative structure largely in the form of Student Councils. His recommendation would be those students as they are chosen by their peers. Either those groups or representatives from those groups he would suggest to form perhaps form a sister organization around this or to be able to go back to them to get feedback based on specific questions. Dr. Prezioso thanked Mr. Slentz and asked for further thoughts.

Mr. O'Connor said he thought that was a great idea in terms of the Student Councils. He asked how this Advisory Group go about establishing communications with them. Would this Group write to the Superintendent's Office or the Principals' Office and have it directed to the President of the Councils? Or is there another vehicle that could be used as there is a time crunch for collecting information.

Mr. Richardson suggested inviting the kids in the School Districts who are the representative to speak and give some ideas. He added he knows that Sheriff Zurlo and the Sheriff's Department does a great job around Saratoga County. Everyone was gracious about that, which is great. He said the Group would also like to get some perhaps not negative comments but comments with regards to things we could be doing better than what we are doing now.

Dr. Prezioso said reaching out to some of the pre-existing student bodies would be terrific. He said he wonders what the logistics would be for getting them to provide the Group with feedback.

Mr. Lentz, Ballston Spa, said there are a few different ways it could be accomplished. There is a tool some of the school districts have called Thought Exchange. This mimics a social media type platform where the Group could post a number of questions and ask for responses. The same as a Facebook platform, students could "like" comments and the most "liked" comments would rise to the top. He said, because of the time crunch and the hesitation of allowing students to attend in person, this could be done in an expedited form. The other is would be to set up Zoom times for the kids to respond. He said giving them questions to answer would be the best way to get information.

Mr. Castle said it's not going to be possible to get them all together for a meeting so a digital platform would be better.

Dr. Prezioso asked if he understood it correctly that there is a Facebook option to have the comments rise to the top. Mr. Lentz said a specific Facebook page could be used for this. He suggested, however, the Thought Exchange would be better as it is a more advanced form of surveying that allows results to be tabulated. He asked if any of the Superintendents have a subscription to that that this Group could tap into. He offered to arrange for it if no one had it. Ms. Orr, South Glens Falls, said her schools do use this and they do use it a lot. She said it is worthwhile. Mr. Lentz said students seem to be very comfortable with this as there are a lot of similarities to Facebook.

Mr. O'Connor asked if the Group would come up with the questions, put it on the Thought Exchange and then present it to the student body as a whole or just the Student Councils.

Mr. Potter, Mechanicville Schools, believes engaging each school districts student council or class presidents would be a good representation. He said it would provide responses from all areas of the County. Having the question and ranking the order of the responses so then it would enable the Group then follow up. Mr. Lentz said he would concur with that approach and thanked Mr. O'Connor for the question.

Dr. Prezioso said a couple Superintendents talked about training such as implicit bias training and some professional development. He wondered if anyone would like to give more specifics about the areas identified when it comes training.

Mr. Potter, Mechanicville Schools, said specific to the implicit bias he thought it's a case of you don't know what you don't know. He said they have very dedicated faculty but without the appropriate training to truly understand you don't know. He thinks it is very important for Police Forces to have training on implicit bias just because of the inherent dangers that could come with it. Faculty only know what they know through experiences they've had and without such there is implicit bias. It stands to reason that without specific training they would be subject to the same weakness.

Mr. Robinson, Shenendehowa, said it is important to try involve the SRO's in his district in various training so that they have appreciation of the school environment. They are able to tap in to whatever expertise the SRO's can bring to the table. He said the piece that needs to be focused on is how the creation of workshops, forums, and environments where people can integrate their own thinking. He suggests this because people don't know what they don't know. If a person has grown up a certain way and have seen certain things, the assumption is made that that's the way it is. But the reality is other people's experiences are different. He said a safe environment to interrogate each other's thinking to appreciate differences and grow from that. The demographics are changing and we need to be true to have platforms so people can have honest conversations. He said to go back to the discussion on engaging students. We need to think about what we really want from these students, what do we want them to do and what role would they play. When we go to present questions, don't go to the traditional structures. He added traditional structures don't typically represent the broader diversity of the school districts.

Dr. Prezioso asked for any other thoughts or comments on what has been discussed.

Dr. Patten, Saratoga Springs Schools, said he would like to know the type of questions that were going to be asked. The student government leaders are elected by their peers representing all the grade levels. He would like to know what the goal of this Group is, what kind of feedback the Group is looking for and what is the Group asking of the Superintendents. He thinks the Group has to be very specific in what the Group is trying to accomplish. He said the Group might want to look outside the student government leaders to get a broader view. He wants to know what is expected of the Superintendents, what information they should be providing, is it about the SRO programs or beyond that.

Mr. Castle said he agrees with all the comments that going to strictly the student councils is not going to be the reality. This Group is looking at the whole approach to community based policing and not just the SRO program. He fully expects that if there were a problem with the SRO program he would have heard about that directly from the Superintendents. The bigger question is if we are not going to the student councils, how the other students are engaged in discussions.

Mr. Slentz, Ballston Spa, said based on the time line that is being dealt with the expectation of how far the Group can go with student representative comments, he hopes this simply won't be a box that it checked and the report be placed on a shelf somewhere. This is an opportunity get feedback on the charge this Group has been given. From the feedback, determine what the long range goals will be for which we need greater diversity of voices in the room. He thinks the Group needs to be cautious about overstretching on the first run that would risk being out of compliance on the first part of the exercise.

Mr. Castle said to be clear on the charge of this Group; the order from the Governor is not to solve all the problems by April 1<sup>st</sup>. The goal is by April 1<sup>st</sup> the County will have a developed plan with a series of recommendations, whether

there are some or not, going forward. Someone had mentioned a diversity committee. That could be a recommendation that comes out of this. However, we don't have establish that prior to the April 1<sup>st</sup> deadline.

Dr. Prezioso said this is why so much of the comments made this far about structural items, this Group is to engage the community and develop input and feedback that could lead to recommendations. These recommendations won't have to be completed by April 1<sup>st</sup>. They need to be presented to the Board of Supervisors as a platform moving forward. He gave an example of a group he participated in at Burnt Hills Schools where the students were asked what they would like to see or what they would like their parents to know. He suggested asking students what their vision of a police force would be. The student comments should be broad based and not just the elected students.

Mr. Robinson, Shenendehowa Schools, said while the discussion has centered on the student piece, we can't forget the adult side of this. How do we get the perspective of the adult, the parents? If all this effort is being made to create a report to present to the Board, then why not try to do something to change the value structure. We want a community to embrace all the things we've been talking about. There needs to be a complete circle of people from the students to the people of authority.

Mr. Richardson said when this was started, the Group did not want to just put a piece of paper or book on the shelf and forget about. The Supervisors are very serious about this and everyone is on board to do the best we can. He thinks children should come first in everyone's mind. He is hopeful the Group will come up with a plan for not only the next couple of months but well into the future.

Dr. Prezioso said the Executive Order does specify that elected officials be engaged in this process and gain their feedback. Baked in to the process is people of authority being able to weigh in and learn more about what the Group is doing. The Board of Supervisors will have the opportunity to vote on and accept this. We do want to involve as many stakeholder groups as we can.

Ms. Morris, Stillwater Schools, said focused deterrence was an area that made her think about drug use in the area. Since we are talking about our kids and the family's they come from. We don't know what happens behind closed doors. What we do know is when those kids are in our classrooms they struggle to learn and focus based on what is going on in their home. She would like to know what resources are out there that could help our kids and their families.

Ms. Heggen said one of the things discussed at a prior meeting stems back to what we don't know we don't know. We are rich in resources in this community. What we need to work on is making the resources known. One of the programs she was involved with as an Assistant District Attorney and was County wide for a while, then funding changed things, was a youth court. She has been involved in oversight of this and the structure of the court process was used. A larger group of students act as a collection of peers to talk through the impact of the conduct of a student.

Mr. Potter, Mechanicville Schools, said he believed many of the practices are going on currently. Community Building and Harm Circles training is happening with faculty and students. There is an equity coalition to oversee and help lead the process. It begins with building community first and all is a consensual process with the offender and the party who was impacted. It is an educational opportunity.

Mr. Richardson said the District Attorney and he had spoken after the last meeting that it would be a great idea for the County to put together all the different resources available with an explanation of each one of them to be distributed to the schools. This will give a better idea of what services this County provides. There are many services people aren't aware of and this compilation would be a great benefit.

Mr. Robinson, Shenendehowa Schools, said Mr. Richardson hit the nail on the head. When they have kids or families in crisis, the hardest part is to identify the resources they can be referred to. We should have a network that can be connected quickly. There are many families that struggling from the Covid issue. These struggles are not only mental health but economical too. Mr. Richardson said a three ring binder should be assembled with the work of the County staff and the provider agencies easily. He said this is an important resource.

Dr. Prezioso said there are many resource lists available but going back to the theme, you don't know what you don't know. If you don't know these lists are available, you don't know. There are many places to get the things done that need to be done. However many of these agencies have lost people and funding. Across the State, his counterparts have access to many resources. They need to do a better job of getting the word out. Not everyone will look at the organizations and groups the same way.

Mr. Castle thanked the Superintendents for participating. He said additional comments after today would be welcomed. This effort is a whole community approach and not just law enforcement. Law enforcement from thirty years ago is drastically different than today. Are all the functions truly law enforcement functions.

Mr. Richardson thanked the Superintendents for their cooperation. Dr. Prezioso thanked all those in attendance as well.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, November 18<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m.

On a motion by Mr. Richardson, seconded by Mr. O'Connor, the Group unanimously adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pamela Wright  
Clerk of the Board