MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 26, 2018

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #5: RESPONSE TO BUDGET QUESTION FROM MAYOR SILBERBERG REGARDING SCHOOL RESOURCES OFFICERS

Question: What would be the cost of staffing each of the City's 14 elementary schools with one School Resource Officer (SRO) for each elementary school?

Response: First, under Virginia law public schools are responsible for making the decisions about public school security staffing, plans and protocols. City public safety officials can advise ACPS, but ultimately elementary school safety decisions rest with Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS).

The cost of adding 14 SROs (plus two relief officers to cover during the periodic absence of an SRO) to the Alexandria Police Department (APD) would be some $1,650,600 per year with an additional $668,800 for added police cruisers and equipment needed in the first full year of this staffing up. It should be noted that SROs are not primarily building security officers, but interact with students to build trust with police officers, as well as teach students about laws and law enforcement, and gather information from students that assists with community law enforcement. Alternately, Virginia law allows public schools to hire security officers (which cost less than a police officer). This is a tool that ACPS utilizes at certain limited times and circumstances.

The Interim School Superintendent has indicated that she does not believe that the addition of an SRO at each elementary school is the best way to enhance safety at our 14 elementary schools. Rather, Dr. Berlin has stated the hardening of public access to school buildings should remain a priority of ACPS. All elementary schools, with the exception of John Adams, which is scheduled for work this summer, have had their building’s access upgraded so that only those that gain access to the schools during the school day do so from an ACPS staff controlled access entry point. Maury and Minnie Howard (which already has an SRO) also need some security work. Dr. Berlin has also stated, that it is important to have City public safety staff available quickly when you need them (such as the APD and the Fire Department response to the recent Hammond bomb threat). APD, Fire and the Sheriff’s Office are available and ready to respond when called.
Question: Are there other ways to improve security at our elementary schools?

Pre-Parkland, ACPS has been working on improving the security of its various campuses and (as stated above) and will be nearly finished with this round of physical security improvements this summer when the John Adams project is complete. ACPS also continuously reviews the professional literature and resources (such as those provided by the Sandy Hook Promise) to enhance the protection and support of its students and staff. For example, ACPS has been undertaking nationally recognized ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) training of its staff. Also last month, ACPS, APD and Fire met to discuss how to improve the handling of school evacuations that may occur as a result of the entry of an active shooter, or in the case of a bomb threat. ACPS and APD are also currently engaged in a discussion on how to use the community policing model to create more formal interaction and trust between the community police officer assigned to or near elementary school areas, and the pupils and staff of those elementary schools.

cc: Debra Collins, Deputy City Manager
    Dr. Lois Berlin, Interim Superintendent, ACPS
    Michael L. Brown, Chief of Police