



KASSON-MANTORVILLE SCHOOLS

"Commitment To Excellence"

Independent District # 204 • 101 16th St NE • Kasson, MN 55944-1610

507-634-1100 • Fax 507-634-6661

Dear Kasson-Mantorville Families~

I hope the summer is treating all of you well and that your kids are enjoying some time outdoors in the nice weather! You usually won't hear from me until the August timeframe, yet there was a pertinent issue that I wanted to bring to your attention.

I realize there are some questions related to the School Resource and Relationship Officer position that is being advertised at Kasson-Mantorville School District. As always, please know that your children's safety is the highest priority for the staff and the school board members at Kasson-Mantorville Schools. We are confident that any possible position change will not lessen the safety of your children while they are attending Kasson-Mantorville Schools.

This new possibility for our SRRO is all about improving what we can do for kids and mimicking what other districts are doing at a more competitive cost for taxpayers. I conducted a comparative analysis with neighboring districts to determine 1) which of them has a liaison officer and; 2) what cost is incurred for that position. This conversation about seeking a new strategy actually began when Kasson-Mantorville Schools realized that the current cost of providing an officer through the Kasson Police Department within our school district was significantly higher than the cost of other districts in the area, especially within our own county.

When seeking alternatives to partnering with the Kasson Police Dept, my first contact was with Sheriff Rose from the Dodge County Sheriff's Office. For perspective, the DCSO has partnered with the Hayfield and Triton School Districts for many years.

Our district has historically hired a full time SRO during the school year and only on days students are in attendance. Thus, the contract with the K-M School district is for 175 days, and our portion of the contract costs the school district taxpayers \$67,283 (K-M provides 65% of the cost of the SRO to the City of Kasson). The remainder of the SRO contract is paid by the City of Kasson.

In Hayfield and Triton, the schools share one officer, and the cost to each district is significantly less than the cost to K-M schools in our collaboration with the Kasson Police Dept. In fact, Triton and Hayfield each pay only \$13,885 (total of \$27,770) and the remainder of the contract is paid by Dodge County. Unfortunately, the Sheriff's office communicated that, "although we're pleased in your interest to collaborate with us," they were not interested in providing an SRO for our district due to difficulties with "staffing issues." We certainly understand the position many law enforcement agencies are struggling with.

On April 20, I met with Kasson Police Chief Josh Hanson to discuss next year's SRO contract and the interest from the new Zumbro Education District in obtaining some of the time during the school year. According to Chief Hanson, the police officers union had issues with the current SRO reporting to the Superintendent during the school year and that the SRO should answer solely to the Police Chief. As well, Chief Hanson informed me that the current SRO would no longer assist K-M Community Education with teaching a curriculum and building relationships during snow days, which would utilize the skills our SRO exhibits while teaching the DARE curriculum to our fifth graders at the Middle School each year.

This was a disappointment to many of us as a new curriculum for K-M Community Education was purchased, training was offered, and this initiative did not come to fruition. In fact, when initially discussed with the community education leadership, they were excited about the opportunity for our SRO to work with that age group of children, even if only on snow days. Also worth noting, during my meeting with Chief Hanson, I was informed that there was a likelihood that our current K-M Liaison Officer would not be returning for next year.

A discussion about seeking alternatives to our current liaison officer and the concerns from previous conversations was held during the April 25 School Board Meeting. Both the KPD Union Chair and Chief of Police were present. During that meeting, a board member stated that we should possibly look at a different model for our SRO position and asked that the K-M Personnel Committee for the School Board should meet to discuss.

The K-M School Board Personnel Committee met on May 4, and during that meeting, I shared my conversation with Sheriff Rose about the Dodge County Sheriff's Office response. The personnel committee decision was to provide a recommendation to the entire board and inform me of the direction they wanted to pursue.

Advertising for a new SRRO was unanimously recommended to me by the Kasson-Mantorville School Board at our last board meeting on May 23, 2022. Our intent is to provide the same, if not better, services to our student body. The goal is to improve relationships with our students, while also providing law enforcement visibility on the school grounds. Our advertised position indicates a preference for an individual with law enforcement experience and School Resource Officer training. We would like to attract a qualified officer who may prefer regular working hours during the school day and school year, rather than overnight and weekend shifts. Our board members were fairly certain this posting may attract that individual.

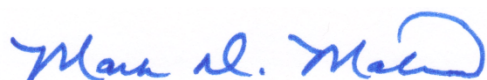
If we do not receive any qualified candidates, the K-M Board's intent is to revert back to our partnership with Kasson PD (which is signed over the summer months) and work to build stronger relationships between the SRO and our district students.

Again, our goal is to provide the safest environment for our students, in addition to improving relationships with students who may be struggling. We believe this position, as offered, can better assist that need. With the number of kids that are struggling with mental health, we understand how critical the relationship piece is to our SRRO position. Our intent is not only to keep our kids safe but to also assist those kids who need and are striving for a relationship with any adult within our school system.

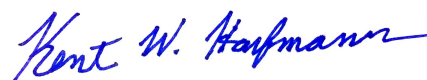
I support our law enforcement members. I always have and always will. I am confident our school board does as well.

We believe seeking a new individual that can provide a safe and welcoming environment for the students at Kasson-Mantorville Schools is critical to our Commitment to Excellence. As the job description indicates, we are looking for a licensed officer, but also want a district employee that will develop strong relationships with all kids at every building. In addition, we will ensure that this new hire will collaborate with the Kasson Police Department and Dodge County Sheriff's Office to make our community and school district even stronger. This decision isn't about reducing law enforcement, it is about growing it better within our school district and meeting the relationship and mental health needs of our students. We can do better, and our hope is that we will.

Sincerely,



Mark D. Matuska
Superintendent of Schools



Kent Harfmann
School Board Chair