

## **Takeaways from Hilton meeting on guards**

### **Meghan Finnerty**

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

A Hilton Central School District proposal to add armed guards was called essentially both stupid and smart during a school board meeting Monday.

About 120 people attended the meeting at Merton Williams Middle School. Residents posed questions about cost, liability, function, research, health and wellness and use of metal detectors, and asked why the public didn't get to vote on the policy change.

The Board of Education is considering arming all school security guards, officially called youth assistants, all of whom are former law enforcement personnel with 20 or more years of experience.

The proposal includes hiring five more youth assistants; there are currently 11.

The board had a previous public meeting Aug. 8 after tabling its decision in June in order to provide the community with more time to engage.

### **Why having guns in Hilton schools was brought up**

The school district hired a director of safety and security a few years ago. Since then, the director, David Inzana, and the district have been looking at possible changes to ensure school safety.

The need for school resource officers, sworn police who work inside a school, or armed guards has been discussed before this year. The fatal shootings of 17 students and staff members at a school in Parkland, Florida, in February was an awakening of sorts that pushed the rolling ball further along.

"I think that was a real eye-opener," Inzana said.

It's time to decide now rather than keep waiting, he said.

Hilton's uniqueness and geographic location were addressed multiple times in Monday's meeting. For instance, Greece has its own police department and all police officers have access to any Greece school building. In Hilton or Parma, the public is served by Monroe County sheriff's deputies or Greece officers.

If there were a shooting in a Hilton school, there would be lag time before police arrived, Inzana said. If armed guards already were on the scene, there could be instantaneous coverage, he said.

### **Who would be armed?**

The youth assistants — at least one at each school and three at the high school — would carry concealed guns.

The assistants would have to pass a physical examination and a psychological screening to see whether they were deemed fit to carry a firearm. They also would have to be in good standing with their current or former law enforcement agency.

The assistant would need to be certified in many programs; in compliance with New York state as an armed guard and with the SAFE Act; and regularly take school resource officer and other training.

According to the presentation, current security team members have backgrounds in training, SWAT, leadership, the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, defensive tactics and narcotic investigations. Members of Hilton's staff

created the Active Shooter Program training.

Inzana said the district will not have armed guards who do not have a law enforcement background.

### **When would guns be seen?**

Only when there is an active shooter situation. According to Inzana, the guns will not be pulled for any other reason.

The firearms will be in holsters otherwise. Additionally, the district would change the security team's current uniform to conceal the firearm.

### **Cost to district**

Arming youth assistants would cost the district less than hiring school resource officers, said Adam Geist, the assistant superintendent of business.

School resource officers would cost about \$125,000 apiece. While the district didn't answer how much an armed youth assistant would be paid, officials said this is a cheaper fiscal decision.

Hilton would require the armed guards to train monthly and would incur the costs of training materials.

School resource officers can make arrests; the youth assistants cannot.

### **Opinions vary**

As attendees entered the public forum, there was a stack of index cards and pens. After the PowerPoint presentation concluded, people were instructed to write a question or comment and pass it in.

Out of the questions and comments read aloud, for about an hour, it appeared the crowd had mixed emotions. One card said the writer supported the idea 100 percent. Another card said the money should be used on hiring social workers rather than guns.

Hilton resident Chostsani Whitt's card was the first to be read.

Whitt said her family is one of only a few African-American families in the district and having armed guards with close police ties could be dangerous for her son. She said he could become a target.

Whitt said she's concerned about implicit bias. Some around her cheered.

Hilton Superintendent Casey Kosiorek said the teacher and administrator associations are in agreement that Hilton schools should have armed guards.

"I think that anything we can do to protect all of our students in this type of situation, I think it's the right thing to do," Inzana said. "I do think we're in more of a unique situation than other school districts are because a lot of other school districts don't necessarily have the background in their security guards that we do."

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**Casey Kosiorek, superintendent of Hilton schools, makes the introductions during a public meeting last week on the possibility of Hilton schools potentially getting armed guards. CARLOS ORTIZ/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE**



**David Inzana, director of security for the Hilton School District, mentions ID passes. CARLOS ORTIZ/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE**