

Litchfield Board of Education  
Special Meeting Minutes  
May 25, 2023

1. Call to Order The Litchfield Board of Education meeting held at the Litchfield Intermediate School and via teleconference was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Mr. Terzian.

Members present: Mr. Terzian, Chair, Mr. Clock, Vice Chair, Mr. Malo, Secretary, Mr. Shuhi, Mr. Morosani, Ms. Reardon, Ms. Murphy, and Mr. Breslin. Also present: Mr. Leone, Superintendent, Ms. Della Volpe, Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Pascento, Principal Litchfield Middle/High School, and Mrs. Hodges, LPS & RSD6 District Liaison.

2. Pledge of Allegiance Mr. Terzian invited everyone to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Public Comment

Prior to beginning public comment, Mr. Terzian thanked everyone for their input and read aloud the names of people who submitted letters to the Litchfield Board of Education regarding this topic. They are: Michael and Lisa Archibald, Malina Clinton, Thomas Thivierge, Eva Gagnon, Sarah Worden, Jill Sage, Laura Lasker and Tom Curran, Kevin and Christina Murphy, Stephanie Betz, Brooke Celentano, Melissa Swanson, Jennifer Johnson, Melanie O'Leary, Nada Allard, Seth Martin, Barbara Ellis, Ashely Labonte, Nadene McDermott-Stevenson, Matt Stevenson, Jennifer Abraham, Kathryn Myers, Shannon Diek, Kallyn Gangell, Marni Smith, Amy Thivierge, Aiden Stevenson, Kim Roe, Jennifer D'Amore, Patrick Kelley, Jon and Melissa MacDonald, Lauren Capuano, Danielle Chase, Amanda Golovin, Polly and Gary Kertis, Maggie Noonan, Sara Sahl, Frances Harding, Maura Keeney, Kara Cruolgio, and Kyle Harris.

Mr. Terzian opened the floor for public comments requesting that when called to speak, the person state their first and last name, the town they reside in, and requested they respect the 3-minute time limit for public comments.

*J.R. Scappini, Litchfield* thanked the Board for taking the time to be here. He commented on how devastating school shootings are to entire communities. He said it is not a gun issue. It is not a mental health issue. It is taking care of our children issue. His wife and child go to school each day and he is concerned if someone comes to school with a weapon and hurts his family. Mr. Scappini commented on the upcoming holiday of Memorial Day where we honor men who fought with guns for our rights and to keep us safe and it is our duty to keep our children safe. Mr. Scappini commented that those who do such acts have mental health issues. We have people in our school who can help with those issues, and we have to be strong and strongly in favor of keeping the children safe. Mr. Scappini closed by saying he doesn't want to have to worry about his wife, his child, or anyone's children at school. There are armed guards at banks protecting our money. Our children are way more important than money and he would like to make sure there is protection for our loved ones.

*Brian Capuano, Bantam*, commented he went to Center School. He went on to say he feels we need to be proactive instead of reactive. Mr. Capuano graduated in 2005 and Dr. Breslin was his Principal. They had an SRO there Trooper Burke. Trooper Burke was great and came into shop with the students and built sheds with the students. He was a member of the school. Before Trooper Burke, they had Trooper Pantiesha (sp). Mr. Capuano ended by saying let's get some armed security back and protect his kids.

*Malina Clinton, Bantam* commented we are here for the safety of our children and families and believes having armed guards in schools is the best way to do that. Ms. Clinton went on to say she believes there

is confusion regarding security personnel. It is her understanding that the security personnel would not have the power to discipline children, and not give detentions or suspensions. Ms. Clinton assumes security personnel would carry a concealed weapon so children wouldn't even notice or see the weapon. She further commented that the district would have the ability to vet and carefully screen whoever is hired so they can find someone with experience in these situations, highly trained, and mentally capable.

She feels former law enforcement members are ideal for this position, have all the necessary training, can evaluate the risk of firing in a high-risk situation, and are trained to maintain possession of their firearm. She commented the current SRO at Center School was a former police officer who had to carry a weapon every day and is trained on how to carry and use it in a safe and responsible manner. We are asking the SRO to protect our students and staff without the necessary tools, without a firearm. He's nothing short of a human shield. Ms. Clinton commented we are lucky to be close to Troop L but fully relying on the fact that they can get there quickly is not enough. She spoke of a recent news story about the state being short about a thousand troopers. She said hiding our kids in the corner and hoping the police arrive soon is not enough.

Ms. Clinton said we agree that calling the police is one of the first things to be done so why wait for them to get there and why not have an armed guard already in the school, ready to respond? Some say there may be better options out there and I agree but while we're looking we shouldn't leave our schools unprotected. Why make us a soft target? Region 6 voted to arm their SROs; the surrounding towns have protection too. Just in the past few years alone, there have been shooting incidents in Litchfield, just a stone's throw from Center School. The number of teachers and parents from Litchfield Center School that came forward is telling that I'm not alone in my opinion.

Ms. Clinton spoke about the issue of how someone with a pistol could overcome someone with a high-capacity rifle. The example she gave was in July 2022 a man went into an Indiana mall armed, with a high-capacity rifle, and fired over a hundred rounds within two minutes. A legally caring bystander engaged the shooter with a pistol equipped with only a 10-round magazine and quickly and efficiently put an end to the situation before any more lives were lost. Ms. Clinton closed by saying having a designated person who is armed solely for the safety of the kids and inside the building could make all the difference for the district to not becoming another statistic.

*Julie Glockner, Litchfield* shared she has children at Litchfield Middle School and believes the worst thing that could have ever been done is gun-free zones put outside of schools, making schools a soft target. She went on to say criminals are being let loose without even a slap on the wrist and they are becoming more brazen because there are no consequences for what's happening. For armed personnel she would like veteran people that are trained, people that are not going to run and hide but know their job is to go in, not run from it, not hide and wait for backup, but go in and take care of it. Ms. Glockner believes veterans are capable and retired police officers are capable. It would be her request that security personnel walks the grounds as well as inside the schools. She went on to say she doesn't want someone that sits in an office counseling a student because how can they be guarding the schools and protecting our children?

*Imer Belica, Thomaston* wanted to comment on something that was said at the last board meeting about the data. There were a lot of studies that were brought up at the last meeting and the need to see the data. There are often times, where biases are included in the data of these studies. He went on to say when a decision is made he hopes the Board uses logic and not purely data when trying to make this decision. Mr. Belica thinks that having armed security logically makes sense. The school he attended used armed police officers for protection. He commented on the current school security personnel at Litchfield

Center School in that he feels that he doesn't have the tools to do his job. Mr. Belica closed by saying he understands this is a polarizing topic and hopes the decision will be made with logic and data.

*Kara Cruoglio, Litchfield* is a parent of a student at Litchfield Intermediate School and is here asking the Board to vote no to placing armed resource officers in Litchfield Public Schools. Ms. Cruoglio went on to say she would like to share data that every year in the United States, 7,967 children and teens between the ages of one and seventeen are shot. That's nearly 8 children for everyone in our school district. Since the 1990's, more than 30 peer-reviewed studies have confirmed this statement to be true. Access and proximity to firearms are associated with an increased risk of firearm-related, death and injury. Adolescents living in a home with a firearm are at a 4 times higher risk of dying by suicide than those living in a home without a firearm; outside is three times more likely. When there is a gun in the home an accidental death by shooting is 4 times more likely. The domestic violence victim is five times more likely to be killed when the abusive partner has access to a gun. Three times more people die in school shootings when an armed officer is present and proximity to firearms is associated with an increased risk of firearm-related, death and injury. At the previous meeting, a board member asked, What if something happens and I voted no to an armed officer who could have helped, how could I live with myself? It's a really good question. None of us know what's going to happen and any one of us could be wrong. So, if we are going to decide based on *what if* we have to consider what is most likely to happen. She went on to say there are 30 years of research that is clear; access and proximity to firearms is associated with an increased risk of firearm-related, death and injury and three times more likely that people die in school shootings when an armed officer is present than when one isn't. What if one of those people is an innocent bystander? What if they are a teacher? What if they are a student? What if they are your child?

*Adam Allard, Burlington* commented his wife teaches at Litchfield Center School. Mr. Allard shared he had a respectful email exchange with Board member Tina Reardon, and they agree on a lot of things. It's important to protect students and teachers. If there is armed security at schools it is important they have the credentials to carry a firearm. Mr. Allard also said data is important and appreciates the data that was shared by the prior speaker. He shared research from the National Center for Education Statistics, that displays casualties by year, injury, and secondary schools and encourages the Board to review if they have not already done so. He is wondering if there is a timeline for a decision on this topic. Mr. Allard closed by saying again, my wife teaches at Center School and is on the 1st floor in the back; two doors away from an exit entrance. I do think about her in this scenario ten times a day.

*Will D'Ambrosio, Litchfield* shared that a coworker told him a long time ago that the only thing you will care about your whole life is your children. He didn't know it was true until he had a child. With that said, Mr. D'Ambrosio believes it is in everyone's best interest to have armed security guards at all schools. He also spoke about the need for the security guard to be properly trained. He commented on the damage that could be done in three to five minutes when waiting for an officer to arrive and then cited that there have been multiple instances in public schools and churches, where a shooter has been eliminated within seconds by someone else in the crowd or building that had a gun. He also commented that there may be no documentation of an armed guard at a school stopping a shooting just might be because having one on site was enough to prevent the shooting from ever taking place. Mr. D'Ambrosio feels the studies that show an increased rate of deaths can be misleading and if you go through the data carefully you can see how they persuade you to think the way that they want you to. He closed by speaking about gun safety with children. You teach children not to touch anything hot and then they don't. You can also teach them about gun safety and not to touch a gun. If you teach them at a young age you won't have a problem when they get older.

*Lynn Rice Scozzafava, Litchfield Public School Employee* spoke as a 29-year veteran of this district. At the last Board meeting, Ms. Scozzafava explained her consternation and dismay over this board

considering arming personnel in our schools. Guns don't belong in schools, and she cannot imagine how anyone serving this community believes that guns do belong in schools. She went on to say she wants to address two points that were made at the last meeting. With respect to her esteemed colleague and board member, Mr. Malo, she will first focus on the moral quandary he articulated. She said she was paraphrasing and understood him to say he could never forgive himself if he voted no and something happened. She said she is confident that if Mr. Malo votes yes and something happens he will never forgive himself either.

Ms. Scozzafava restated the research and data quoted at the last meeting that the chances of something tragic happening is more likely with armed personnel in schools, whether accidental or intentional an event. There are more chances to experience gun violence with armed personnel than the prospect of an armed intruder. This is why members of the Board should not support arming personnel.

Ms. Scozzafava said she has deep respect for Mr. Clock who said he was listening to teachers and that was a determining factor in his decision. He supports arming personnel. She said she is grateful to him for considering the viewpoints of those in school buildings and encourages the other Board members to do so. She understands there are colleagues who support armed personnel and other colleagues who do not. She closed by restating that data does not prevent gun violence in schools and increases the risk of physical and/or emotional harm to black and brown students, boys and young men, and disabled students. Ms. Scozzafava closed by asking the Board to decide based on data and not fear.

*Harmony Tanguay, Bantam* thanked the Board for agreeing to take more time to thoughtfully address this matter. She commented on several people who spoke last time and presented data, that showed that armed SROs do not improve outcomes or prevent school shootings and often have other unintended side effects. She hopes the Board has had the opportunity to study the data before making this important decision. Ms. Tanguay shared a quote from Desmond Tutu; *There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.* She said from the last meeting someone said there should be armed SROs to be proactive rather than reactive. Pulling a gun on a shooter in a school building is already reactive. Being proactive means, putting systems in place that prevent that person from having a gun in the first place. We need to go *upstream* and find out why people are falling in. Why don't we consider channeling our attention toward more robust mental health resources?

A website run by the National Police Institute provides extremely useful data-driven insights into the profiles of perpetrators. The data confirms overwhelmingly that perpetrators are current or former students, nearly always male, and in over 94% of the incidents studied, it was reported that the perpetrator had recently gone through a life-changing event such as a parent's divorce, financial stressors at home, physical abuse, substance use, death or illnesses in the family. These kids need support, human connection, and empathy that should be found inside the doors of schools.

She said we are an incredibly resourced privileged district filled with creative problem solvers, visionary, thinkers, compassionate, staff, and administrators. She has faith that we can approach this crisis from a foundation of empathy rather than with tools of violence. She asks the Board to please review the multiple publications on [schoolviolence.org](http://schoolviolence.org) for recommendations on proactive preventative evidence-based measures that we can take and to please vote no to placing firearms in our schools.

*Ayla Marquez* is the current vice president of the Class of 2026 and said her role as vice president is to communicate the needs and concerns of her class. She also recently learned that in leadership roles you can't make everyone happy there will always be someone unhappy with your decision or disagrees with your decisions.

Arming school security isn't a simple issue, will be a shift that hasn't been done before and will affect several people, especially students. As vice president, she sent out a Google form to her 68 classmates asking if they wanted an armed school security officer or not. The form also allowed for comments and opinions. Ms. Marquez shared the results of 35 of 62 respondents providing the following data. 57.1% want armed school security personnel and 42.9% do not. 60% feel safer with a school resource officer and 40% would not. Comments from 57.1% were: the student moved from Chicago to Litchfield a year and a half ago and had an armed resource officer and nobody felt unsafe. Another comment was: the only thing I will say is I don't think we need more than one. And someone wrote having someone in our school can provide us with protection even though our school is small. The last comment was referring to the current school security personnel: he was an actual police officer, so he has the training that is needed, and he has experience with firearms.

To paraphrase a few comments from the 42.9% were: I don't want someone bringing any sort of firearm into a school system, the holder increases the risk of violence in the school, a firearm inside the building is rather unsettling and frightening, and I do not believe there's a point in fighting violence with more violence.

Ms. Marquez said any change or decision will affect the entire community but will mainly affect the teachers, and the students, and the opinions shared should be considered. Regardless of the decision, based on the survey half of the students will feel safe and half will not. A consideration could be to poll a larger sample of teachers and students on this topic to better benefit all.

Ms. Marquez closed by sharing as students we want a safe school and environment that is good for learning. We want to be able to focus on our priorities. We want to know that those in charge will take our voice and our concerns into consideration, and she thanked the Board for their time.

*Lillian Perkel, Litchfield* shared that she is a freshman and representative of the Student Council at Litchfield High School (LHS). Coincidentally, she learned from a friend that at her school they have an armed officer and she sought information about the officer from her friend. She learned that the officer was really nice but so is the current LHS school security personnel however she feels the district is coming at this from the wrong angle. What message are we sending kids about guns when we bring out even more guns? Ms. Perkel is currently learning about Communist China and feels this solution is similar to what she is learning about repressive governments.

She went on to say as a student, she sees the many aspects of our mental health crisis firsthand. Many of her friends feel overwhelmed and depressed but the resources to help them are few and stretched thin. We know that poor mental health is the main reason for these incidents. How would an armed guard actually prevent someone among us that is so disturbed that they begin planning to kill their friends?

Ms. Perkel shared that most school shooters are actively suicidal intending to die in the act. So armed school security may be an incentive rather than a deterrent. She added the death rate during school shootings and incidents was nearly three times higher in schools with armed school security than those without.

Another study says that the presence of the school resource officer was not associated with any reduction in school shooting severity. A 2021 study found this school resource, officers do effectively reduce some forms of violence in schools but do not prevent school shootings or any gun-related incidents.

Study after study shows that having an armed security officer in schools does not have any correlation with the number of school shootings that occur. They also suggest the need for improvement in

prevention. Therefore, instead of using the school's budget for hiring and training armed guards, which is extremely costly, invest that money in more school psychologists who can directly help treat and prevent these challenging mental health crises from occurring in the first place.

This is how to tackle the root of the issue with human kindness care and prevention; after all, a teen shooter is still just the same as you and your children, a teenager who is not long ago just a child.

*Maura Keaney* commented that she has a child at Litchfield Middle School and a child at Litchfield High School. Ms. Keaney said it is tragic we're having this discussion but there is a fundamental question of do armed guards make schools safer and the answer is no, they don't. Study after study shows that armed guards do not actually prevent shootings or make students safer. She said there is 39 years of data that support this. Ms. Keaney cited several mass shootings where armed personnel were present and none of the shooters were stopped. The studies she shared at the last Board meeting were done by accredited institutions and all of them found that armed security does not prevent school shootings. She went on to say the Board heard from students today and from others, as well as her own child that believes having someone with a gun in school would not make kids feel safer but less safe.

She then posed the question could armed security personnel be dangerous in schools? And sadly, the answer is yes. It could be counterproductive to have armed personnel in our schools. Research suggests that many school shooters are actively suicidal so having armed security personnel may be an incentive rather than a deterrent.

Ms. Keaney then brought up the topic of training and shared that police miss their targets 70% or 80% of the time based on the cited research study she provided. She references Mr. Malo's past comment about what if something happens and he voted no to having armed security. Ms. Keaney is concerned that if something happens and we *do* have armed security that makes a mistake and hits a child rather than the intended target?

Ms. Keaney closed by saying given the data that schools aren't made safer by having armed security why would we take that chance?

*Matt Moskowitz, Litchfield* thanked everyone for taking the time to hear people speak on this issue and said we all come here for the same reason, the protection of our children. Mr. Moskowitz provided his background and years of experience in different areas of law enforcement, and he believes that the proactive measure of putting an armed security officer in the schools is beneficial. He cited several locations of past mass shootings and commented he believes parents from those areas would have wanted armed security on site.

He does not want us to be complacent and if we do the same thing we've always done nothing changes. Mr. Moskowitz went on to share information about law enforcement being proactive when purchasing equipment—to have items for *if* this happens, or *if* it's needed. And while not all the equipment is used, officers are thankful they have it when needed. He shared there is someone in town that is able to take on the role of armed security personnel and restates it is better to have one in school for the safety of staff and students.

He shared statistics from the FBI that included 50% of active shooter incidences are over within 5 minutes, He also shared that from the time an incident is reported to the time law enforcement arrives on the scene is typically 15 minutes due to delays from the witness calling 911, to relaying the information to officers. He also shared that between 2000 to 2013 that 13% of active shooter incidences ended with an armed citizen restraining the active shooter.

There have been several close incidents that have happened near Center School, one of them was from the attorney's office across the street and it does make him wonder how safe his kids are when they go to school. Mr. Moskowitz closed with a quote from John F. Kennedy that *Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see*. He asked everyone to give that some thought.

*Nerice Gerena, Litchfield* commented how absolutely horrific it is that we are even having to have this conversation and as long as we have these weapons of war in the arms of civilians, these mass murders will continue. She went on to say she doesn't like guns and actually hates them but if the data said that having armed SRO officers in our schools would keep our children safer she would not be arguing against them. Guns in our schools will not make our children safer. If guns made things safer then our country would be the safest country on earth, instead, it is the opposite. She also cited a past school shooting where the good guys with guns stood by for forty-five minutes while children were killed. Ms. Gerena closed by requesting the consideration of more funds for mental health or infrastructure improvements that would prevent some of these shootings.

*Nadene McDermott Stevenson, Bantam*, thanked the Board for allowing our voices to be heard. Ms. McDermott Stevenson is in favor of armed security in our schools. She sits with her colleagues who also support security in our schools. She went on to say there are those against armed security but she and her colleagues are not asking for guns to be handed out to teachers or staff but instead arming professionals with the tools they need to protect us. Ms. McDermott Stevenson hopes a decision can be made quickly as we owe it to our children and staff members to be as prepared as possible. She closed by saying please do what is right and vote yes.

*Kate Litwin, Litchfield* appreciates the opportunity to be heard and appreciates that the room full of people are listening respectfully to each other on such a challenging issue. Ms. Litwin is a mother of two children and is a gun owner. She states she is not afraid of guns and honestly wished they would protect our students. She said she is a pediatrician and scientist and referenced a larger study from the Journal of the American Medical Association looking at all acts of gun violence in schools between 1980 and 2019, and said it really is a powerful read. Ms. Litwin believes this is a non-partisan research and is incredibly convincing that putting an arm safety officer in schools does not have any data to support that it makes us safer. She said she has much respect for so many people in this room that have instructed her children. She is grateful that this community can respectfully disagree on such an important topic but wants to go on the record as a mother and a fourth-generation Litwin in this community saying that she respectfully does not see any data that support arming school security will actually make our schools a safer place. As a pediatrician, she is concerned it will create more anxiety and mental health issues for the children in our community.

*Ashley LaBonte, Litchfield* shared she is a kindergarten teacher at Center School and a parent of three students at Litchfield Public School. She shared that we had the DARE program, and have had an officer in the building who we liked. We worked with them, we enjoyed working with them and it didn't bother us that they were in our buildings with a gun. The officer is there to protect us. We're not putting guns in the hands of people who shouldn't have them. We're putting them into the hands of someone who knows what to do with it.

She went on to say we grew up knowing that if there was an issue or shooting, we called a police officer to protect us. That is what we want to do. We want to put someone in our buildings who can protect us. Violence is on the rise and there is absolutely nothing we can do to prevent school shootings. We all know that common sense can't prevent it, but we need to have systems in place and have first lines of defense and peace of mind for people in the buildings.

Ms. Labonte said there are different feelings on this topic based on the building you reside; high school teachers feel very differently than elementary school teachers. At Center School, we work with babies. They are innocent. They are naive, they cannot protect themselves, and they look to the teachers to protect them. The teachers tell them what they have to do. So, if we are telling them to sit here in a corner, while there's a shooting going on, they are going to be hysterically crying and won't know what to do. High school students have a different mindset. They are older. They can defend themselves to a certain extent.

Ms. Labonte shared information she and her fellow colleagues received regarding the first five minutes. They were instructed to use the cord from their SmartBoard and wrap it around the hinge and lock of the door and then get the students to a safe place. Ms. Labonte said that cannot be done in a timely fashion and if there were armed security personnel in the building they could help be your first line of defense to help provide teachers with peace of mind, there's someone there that can help protect us, that gives us the peace of mind to do our job soundly each day.

Ms. Labonte said a teacher's job is dedicated to educating children and not worrying about somebody coming into the building. People have cited, the first five to seven minutes of a shooting is critical. If we have someone in the building that can help respond in these first five minutes, we will be able to protect our young babies instead of waiting for someone to get there. There is nothing we can do to prevent this, but if we have armed school security personnel in place to help, it gives us peace of mind and a chance to safeguard the students. Why not do that?

She added people have commented about more safety measures at the buildings. Ms. Labonte agrees and spoke to more effort into the mental health of our students, safety measures to classroom doors, and bulletproof glass in every single window. If these things can be done along with armed security personnel this will give educators peace of mind, and that there is a chance we can lessen the effect of an intruder. Ms. Labonte thanked the Board for listening and hopes the Board respects and listens to those who are in the building every single day with these young and essential children's lives in their hands.

*Melanie O'Leary, Litchfield* commented that someone once said to her that you shouldn't go to school in fear and that's not right. How can she not? Every day she can no longer walk into Center School without some fear each day. She no longer thinks what if this happened to us, but when will it happen to us? She no longer has the ability to look at her students who are 7 and 8 years old and not think about what they have on their desks that they can throw at an intruder if they need to. She can no longer go through a day without thinking of Sandy Hook or Robb Elementary and that is not okay. But when you live with the children that she does and it doesn't matter if they're pre-K, they're grade 12, doesn't matter. If you spend your day with children, then you know that you think about that every day, you know, you have that fear. Ms. O'Leary thanked everyone for listening to everybody here tonight and thanked the Board for seriously considering doing what's right for our babies.

*Carrie Szwed, Bantam* thanked the Board for the time to speak and was highly complementary of the two students who spoke earlier in the meeting. Ms. Szwed went to elementary school in a suburb outside of St. Louis and remembers her security officer in a positive light as he established a positive connection with the kids. She went on to say whether or not the Board decides to arm the school security personnel (which some have convinced her tonight is not the right solution) it is important to realize that these officers in our schools will have an influence on our kids' perceptions of the police and of security personnel. It is important that this person be someone who is a compassionate role model in the community. Additionally, please guarantee that these people are trained professionals not just in handling firearms but also in de-escalating situations and forming positive relationships with the community the teachers, and the kids.

*Mark Guma* commented he has a child at Litchfield Middle and one at the High School and what most of us are craving is the peace of mind that our kids are safe. Mr. Guma said he heard a speaker say they wanted an armed school security officer in the school who could act at the moment needed. He shared information regarding an event that happened exactly a year and a day ago. There was an armed officer in that school who knew that there was a shooter in the area that he could not stop and 19 children and teachers lost their lives. It was a team of police officers that had planned for years how to handle that situation and it didn't work. He commented on doing everything we can to prevent this and whatever decision gets made we need to invest in mental health for our kids. There are severe mental health issues and kids and adults need help, and we should make sure they get it. When reviewing social media after the fact, the signs of a problem were there.

*Brian Thomas*, commented he went to Litchfield Public School and grew up in the community. This evening he is hearing things like installing tinted windows, and additional mental health services and these are all speed bumps. Mr. Thomas said the real issue is whether there should be armed school security officers. He went on to say if an intruder comes to a school with a gun would you really want the intruder to be the only one having one? If this occurred (with no armed school security personnel) you would call the police and what do they bring guns? He said we are talking about is how long this depraved sick individual should have to use our school as a shooting gallery. Mr. Thomas would like to have armed school security personnel and he said the answer should be zero minutes and zero seconds that they should be able to use our school as a shooting gallery because some people weren't brave enough to do what it takes to protect children.

*Jennifer Johnson, Thomaston* has been a teacher at Center School for 24 years and appreciates the opportunity to speak. She said she agrees with supporting funds to be used for mental health and well-being. Ms. Johnson said she hates guns and that in a perfect world, guns would not exist however she feels strongly that our schools should have armed school security personnel.

As a teacher, she lives in the world of data and understands data and everybody talks about how there's really no research that says an armed security guard can't deter or cause fewer shootings. There are lots of studies that can show that shootings happen with armed SROs because yes, those shootings happen so we can record it. We can have data. But how do we really know how many schools that have armed SROs prevented somebody from coming to those schools because they are armed; we don't really know. She restated, she loves research and data but if something doesn't happen, there is no data to record or research.

Ms. Johnson also commented while people are concerned about guns in schools she thought about all the places that we as adults go with our kids or where we let kids go where there are guns, the mall, a concert, movie theaters, fairs, the bank, and amusement parks. All of these places have security. Do we keep our kids from going to these places because an accident could happen, probably not. Accidents could happen, but she has faith and trust in those arms security personnel, who are trained to do what they need to do. Ms. Johnson urges others to have faith and trust in the professionals who are carrying those guns in our schools, just like you do when you let your kids go to the mall, or the movies, or any of those other locations.

Ms. Johnson closed by saying hopefully arming school personnel would be a deterrent to an act of violence but if that unthinkable does happen, the first few minutes make a difference. And having armed security in the building is zero minutes and zero seconds to act., If that person can save the life of your child, your spouse, your friend, or your family member; wouldn't you want to make that decision?

*Todd Dyer, Litchfield* commented he has a child at Center School and understands why this is an emotionally charged issue, everyone loves their children and would be devastated in anything happened. He said he is struggling through this conversation this evening and feels spending money toward making classrooms safer such as bulletproof glass is important. Mr. Dyer said he heard people say some of the solutions are like speed bumps and slowing things down but by slowing things down it allows help to get there. Mr. Dyer also commented we should think about the liability of having armed SROs.

*Polly Kertis, Litchfield* requested the letter she submitted to the Board of Education be read out loud. The letter said:

We are **opposed** to arming school resource officers at LPS.

As parents of Litchfield Center School students (who LOVE LCS and feel very safe there), our research-supported position comes from an invested desire to keep our school as safe as possible.

To maximize the safety of our children, we stand in opposition to arming SROs at Litchfield Public Schools. We strongly urge the Board to vote NO on introducing armed SROs into LPS.

Please consider these researched points in support of an **unarmed** SRO:

- 1. The number one factor that increases one's risk of being injured by or dying from a gunshot wound is access and proximity to guns.**
- 2. In an active shooter scenario, having armed guards in schools INCREASES the rate of death by almost 3x.**
- 3. There is no research supporting the presence of armed officers in schools deterring violence.**
  - For example, recent school shootings in Uvalde, Texas and Santa Fe, New Mexico were not prevented by armed school resource officers.
  - A 2021 study examined data from U.S. schools between 2014 to 2018 to evaluate the impact of school resource officers. It found that school resource officers “do effectively reduce some forms of violence in schools, but do not prevent school shootings or gun-related incidents.
- 4. There are recent examples across the United States where an armed guard’s gun was left unattended and found by a student or accidentally discharged.**<sup>[6]</sup><sup>[7]</sup>

In summary, having an armed guard **decreases** the safety of our children in the event of a school shooter. And there is no data in support of an armed guard deterring school shooters.

If there's research we've overlooked that supports the correlation of armed officers and increased safety in schools, please share it with the community. Until then, I stand firmly for a safer school without armed SROs.

We hope you'll consider this researched data as you make a decision about the schools where our children spend the majority of their time.

Sincerely,

Polly & Gary Kertis, Dr. Maggie Noonan, Dr. Sara Sahl, Frances Harding

(Note: names, grades, and schools of children were listed and have been removed from the Board minutes)

#### 4. Discussion on Armed Security at Litchfield Public Schools

Mr. Morosani opened by commenting about the tremendous amount of enthusiasm and was happy to hear from all in attendance. He went on to say speaking from his own standpoint he has read a lot of the research and to him, a lot of it was conflicting and it's more of a commonsense thing. Mr. Morosani finds it difficult to imagine armed security personnel do not discourage or dispel more people than they encourage. He went on to say when you drill down there were some spurious methodologies there and when comparing schools in Litchfield, Morris, or the other small towns in the middle of nowhere versus an inner city, it is just not an apples-to-apples comparison. Mr. Morosani closed by saying Region 6 will be putting armed security personnel in schools in the fall and Region 20 will be taking up this topic soon and he is concerned about Litchfield if they do not move forward with this.

Mr. Breslin then spoke and said he was going to disagree with Mr. Morosani. Mr. Breslin feels what Region 6 does or what Region 20 may do is immaterial. The Litchfield Board needs to make a decision as it sees fit. He further commented on how touched he was by everyone who came out, especially one of his former students, and that he needs some time to really think this issue through.

Ms. Reardon commented she has written to a number of people who have spoken at this meeting, and admits this is a really difficult and challenging issue. She had done the research and whether or not the districts get armed school security personnel she would like to see the Board pursue items that were brought up such as tinted windows, robust mental health support, bulletproof glass, and possibly safe rooms with multiple cameras. She also commented about a room for the school security personnel with multiple cameras at entryways and around the building to view if an intruder enters the building. Ms. Reardon had the opportunity to hear an active shooter expert speak and he suggested fire extinguishers inside the door in every room. When a gun jams that is the time to take down an active shooter or if there are a couple of seconds someone next to the door can blast the person with the foam. Ms. Reardon clarified she is not saying this instead but she is making a list of items for consideration and discussion. She closed by saying the Board has heard from teachers at the Litchfield Center School but would also be interested in hearing from the Litchfield Intermediate, Middle, and High School teachers and staff as well.

Mr. Leone spoke and apologized for not being in person this evening but had a personal family issue that needed his attention. He went on and complimented the students who spoke and everyone else who attended this meeting and hoped future meetings would have the same high level of participation.

Mr. Leone referenced "grandstanding via email" and the Board not acknowledging every two years they receive a threat assessment and safety report which is protected under Executive Session. Also not acknowledging that five years ago, there were no internal cameras in any school building, not acknowledging this topic has been pushed down the road and it is unfair to the public, teachers, parents, and staff. Mr. Leone outlined the timeframe and impact any further delays in decision-making would have on providing the schools with armed security personnel in the fall should the Board decide to move forward. He went on to say this is really the only decision process in the last four years the Board has been asked to make. The Board was not asked to make any decisions on COVID and any further delays are not acceptable. Mr. Leone works between two worlds, this, and Region 20, and then to "kick it down to them" is not fair either.

Ms. Murphy inquired of Mr. Terzian what does the Board need to do at this point to move this forward and make a decision? She said bringing guns into our schools is an inconsistent message of no guns in school. Ms. Murphy also pondered out loud, how many armed security officers will make people feel safe? One cannot be everywhere, and would one be a target? Where would they be located? Who would be in charge of the armed security personnel? Buses are soft targets, would there be one on every bus?

Is the district more concerned about a threat coming into our school or a threat in our school and if it is in the school why not have armed security outside of the school, patrolling school grounds? Ms. Murphy commented whatever decision that is made, there is no guarantee and as a Board, we need to step up to the plate and make a decision.

Mr. Terzian added the Board would have a first read of the policy in June, followed by a second read in July, and would need to have 2/3 of the Board vote to pass so he encouraged the Board to start coming to a final decision.

Mr. Breslin said he resented Mr. Leone's comments and said the Board had had a very, very good engaging conversation, two weeks ago. He added Mr. Morosani suggested that the Board move along dual tracks and have a policy written and ready for our next meeting so as not to delay anything. Mr. Breslin said this is one of the most troubling conversations he has had in his career, and he was a school administrator for 30 years. He wants the best for the children he is in charge of protecting. This is a very hard and very complicated and important topic. And if it takes an extra week or two, it doesn't mean that the Board is trying to kick the can down the road. It means that the Board is trying to do the best for all of our teachers and our kids.

Mr. Shuhi spoke and said he has been actively listening and reading and has struggled with a decision as everyone else has but he did say he is ready to make a decision whenever the rest of the Board is ready to vote. Mr. Shuhi believes the Board should do everything possible to move this decision forward even if it means holding extra meetings.

A comment was made to Mr. Terzian inquiring if he wanted to poll the Board on where they stand tonight so there is a clearer indication of moving forward with the policy and the job description. Mr. Terzian began with Mr. Shuhi.

Mr. Shuhi said if you are going to have school security personnel in the building they need to have the ability to protect the kids. He would rather have someone in the building that could do something rather than have to wait. Mr. Shuhi is in favor of having armed security personnel in the building.

Before moving on to the next Board member, Mr. Leone requested to speak again and said he is sorry that Mr. Breslin deeply resented my comments, and he believes someone earlier mentioned a John F. Kennedy quote and shared one too. *There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long-range risks of comfortable inaction.* Mr. Leone said his comments were not meant to be resentful just that decisions need to be made.

Mr. Morosani stated that he is in favor of arming school resource officers.

Ms. Murphy commented that she is not in favor of arming our resource officers in the school though she is in favor of putting armed guard security outside of the school buildings. We need to protect our schools from bad people getting inside our schools because once they're inside the building, we have failed and things are going to happen that aren't good. She added armed security outside who patrols the building to secure the perimeter checks is something she can agree to but could not agree to have guns in schools.

Mr. Terzian called on Mr. Clock who said everyone made a lot of great statements tonight, but he is still in favor of having an armed security guard.

Ms. Reardon said she has not seen a Litchfield Public School Policy on arming school security and as a member of the Policy Committee she would like to see the policy first prior to making any decision.

Mr. Malo shared this has been probably one of the hardest decisions he has ever had to make in his life and while at times wavering on his decision he said someone made a comment in the audience that really set him firm and how he feels so he would vote yes.

Mr. Terzian said he has the utmost respect for all of the Board members, however, at this point, he would vote yes to having armed security in the schools.

Mr. Terzian closed by saying the Board is not acting today. We now have a sense of where the Board is at this time. It is important to get 100% of the Board's participation and need to hear from Ms. Stone before moving forward. Mr. Terzian hopes all Board members will be able to attend the next meeting in June to continue the conversation on this topic.

5. Adjournment There being no further business to come before this Board **Mr. Clock made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Morosani seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.** The meeting adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Christine Escobar  
Secretary, pro-tem