

RECOMMENDATION xx: MPD should regularly seek input from City stakeholders and representatives of the community in evaluating the performance of its Neighborhood Officers on at least an annual basis. [OIR 41]

The Neighborhood Officer program in Madison dates to the 1980s. Each patrol district has two to four neighborhood officers who work full-time in their assigned neighborhoods. Rather than responding to calls for service, neighborhood officers take a proactive approach to find long-term solutions to problems in their neighborhoods. The program is based on the idea that neighborhoods and their needs are unique, and the relationships a dedicated officer can build with the neighborhood residents promote trust and constructive interventions. Under this model of policing, the individual officer plays a vital role in the effectiveness of the program. Not all officers are equally well-equipped for the unique responsibilities of the neighborhood positions. These responsibilities include rapport building, the skilled and judicious exercise of discretion, and a clear and focused understanding of the unique “mission” that community policing entails. Officers in these positions have a high level of autonomy. The nature of the position requires an officer to engage the community without being seen as just another “MPD cop” who has been inserted into the neighborhood to watch for any criminal activity and arrest residents for minor law violations.

The program results have varied over the years. Some officers are a trusted part of the community, and they regularly engage with residents, community leaders, and elected representatives. Others do not. Given the nature of the program, it is critical that MPD develop a systemic, formalized way to receive regular feedback from City stakeholders and representatives of the community who have contact with and/or are being served by a neighborhood officer on the officer’s performance, so MPD can know how effectively the officer is performing his/her job duties; commend exemplary performance; identify, address, and remediate problematic conduct; and have information that could serve as one measure through which to determine whether to retain the neighborhood officer in the assignment.

The feedback process does not have to be complicated. It can be as simple as sending a short email to the appropriate stakeholders requesting feedback. For example, feedback on the performance of a neighborhood officer could be solicited from the council member whose district is being served and the residents of the neighborhood via a short email requesting input on the officer’s performance.

MPD noted in its November, 2018 updated response to the OIR report that it had created a survey to solicit feedback on neighborhood officers that it anticipated moving forward with in early 2019. The Ad Hoc Committee recommends that MPD gather feedback on the performance of neighborhood officers on at least an annual basis.

RECOMMENDATION xx: MPD should regularly seek input from school stakeholders and juvenile justice partners in evaluating the performance of its EROs on at least an annual basis. [OIR 51]

Educational Resource Officers (EROs) are MPD officers stationed at East High School, LaFollette High School, Memorial High School, and West High School. As with the neighborhood officers, the individual ERO is crucial to the success and effectiveness of the program in achieving its potential as a constructive, student-centered element in the school environment. Because there is only one officer in each high school, the officer's approach to the job and ability to establish a connection with students and school personnel significantly impacts the functioning of the program.

In recent years there has been much debate about the presence of police officers in Madison's high schools and whether the public safety benefits of having EROs are outweighed by the sometimes problematic and disproportional patterns of enforcement, particularly for students of color. While the contract was recently renewed, the matter continues to be divisive and subject to community-wide discussion. Because the ERO is working in an environment not regularly frequented by MPD supervision, it is incumbent upon MPD to regularly seek input, in a systematic manner, from school stakeholders and juvenile justice partners on the performance of the EROs. Currently, MPD does not do this; for example, there are juvenile justice partners who have regular contact with EROs that have never been asked by MPD for feedback on the ERO's performance.

The feedback process does not have to be complicated. It just needs to be formal and proactive. It can be as simple as sending a short email to school stakeholders and juvenile justice partners on an annual basis requesting feedback, such as, "How do you think our Education Resource Officer is doing? Are there suggestions you might have to improve our program?"

In its November, 2018 updated response to the OIR report, MPD noted that it had created a survey to solicit feedback on EROs that it anticipated moving forward with in early 2019. The Ad Hoc Committee recommends that MPD gather feedback on the performance of EROs on at least an annual basis.