

Mikos: Funding and effectiveness at crux of DARE debate

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It is gratifying to see so much passionate verbal support being expressed for DARE by parents and students in Moorpark and by fellow elected officials. It shows that all of us care about our young people and their education to resist drugs and other violent influences.

Ever since I was elected to the Moorpark City Council, I have voted to expend funds for a full-time DARE position, the last five years or so of which has been funded solely by the City, when the Moorpark Unified School District (MUSD) chose to no longer share in funding DARE, based on its own funding priorities.

We have all been challenged to research this more fully this year, since both the MUSD and our local Police Chief, Captain Jeff Matson, have recommended shifting the DARE officer to become a school resource officer.

I have personally attended a number of DARE culminations and know what impressive events these are and how motivated and passionate the graduating students are. As a lifelong educator and a former elementary school teacher, I support quality prevention programs for youngsters before they get to middle school or high school, when students' attitudes are (unfortunately) more solidified than when they are younger.

DARE, a popular fifth grade classroom program, benefits both the school district and the city—which would suggest sharing the funding for the program between MUSD and the City. For a time MUSD paid for part of DARE but in recent years, while they may like DARE, funding for DARE has not been a MUSD priority. To be sure, MUSD has many reasons why, not the least of which might seem surprising, but was expressed by Superintendent Ellen Smith when I asked her about it last week:

Our "Safe and Drug Free Schools" funding, limited as it is, has to go to programs such as Project Alert that comply with federal "Principles of Effectiveness." You may want to review the link below that lists research-validated programs: www.californiahealthykids.org/c@synj8PMQm2-0/Pages/rvtable.html. You will see Project Alert, but DARE is not currently on the list. Consequently we are not allowed to spend SDFS funds for DARE. (E. Smith, June 8, 2007)

I recognize that DARE USA changed its curriculum to respond to critical research studies saying that DARE is not validated as effective. (Moorpark has been using this "new" DARE curriculum.) I also realize that studies are underway to study "new" DARE to see if it can become research-validated. Unfortunately, studies for fifth grade have not been completed. Either way, DARE is not currently on the list of approved curricula in California and it has been discontinued in many, many other communities, most recently in Thousand Oaks.

Even if DARE is eliminated, it does not mean that drug abuse resistance education has been eliminated.

Other Programs Offered

Quite the contrary. The school district uses Project Alert in the sixth grade, other programs at other levels and desires to institute a new program for fifth grade, should DARE not be funded. In my conversations with school district personnel, they said that they will involve parents and other community members in choosing what they hope

will be a more cost-effective, research-validated program for fifth grade in lieu of DARE. A full-time police officer costs much more to fund than a full-time teacher or counselor.

What are the costs? A full time police officer of any kind will cost the city \$191,000 in 2007-2008. For DARE, if we prorate only the officer's time for his fifth grade duties (not the car, gas/maintenance for the car, computer, phone or other tools), the cost for 2007-2008 that would qualify for joint funding is projected at \$122,000 with the remaining time spent on city patrol at the city's sole cost.

The prorated time for the school resource officer at Moorpark High, with more time on campus, costs \$150,000 with any remaining time also spent on city patrol at the city's sole cost. If we wanted to fund both, the city would have to buy a new car for \$28,000 for the new officer. Yearly gas/maintenance and supplies are \$9,000 a year for each police car.

MUSD has agreed to fund their fair share (50%) of the SRO (\$75,000) with the city picking up its equal share plus all other expenses for that officer. If they did the same for a DARE officer, the MUSD fair share cost would be \$61,000 more, again with the city picking up an equal share plus all other expenses. However, MUSD has so far not offered to do that.

Property tax is one of the city's three largest sources of general fund income. For every dollar a resident pays in property tax, the city gets only 7.4 cents, while MUSD gets 33.5 cents, the county gets 17.2 cents, the fire district gets 15.1 cents, the Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF) gets 14.3 cents and the rest goes to the college district and special districts. ERAF goes to the state to fund shortfalls in mandated education funding that the state failed to provide. Before 1993, there was no ERAF and cities, counties and special districts were allocated this money instead. Moorpark's lost share is 0.4 cents.

A perhaps more telling figure is the revenue that the city receives per capita from all unrestricted general fund sources (property tax, sales tax, vehicle license in lieu fees, and a few others) as compared to other nearby cities. Moorpark receives \$239.58 per resident from all these sources combined. Thousand Oaks gets \$600.43, Simi Valley \$325.18 and Camarillo \$448.73. All of this means that we have to do more with less.

Increased Costs

The cost for the city's law enforcement contract with the Ventura County Sheriff's Department, if we keep the same level of staffing as last year, has gone up by \$250,000! Since monies for streets and roads from the state do not cover full costs, the city will have to spend over \$1 million of general fund money to repave Tierra Rejada Road this year. Shortfalls in the funds for the many landscape and lighting districts in the city that pay for parkway landscaping and street lights were about \$328,000 this year, all of which has to be paid out of the city's general fund. These are only a few examples of significant expected cost increases in Moorpark.

Some have said that we should go to the voters to find out what they believe are the priorities. For the last five years, I have been asking for us to do just that. Thankfully, in this year's budget, money has been allocated.

In the mean time, knowing all the other funding pressures the city faces, and having considered the recommendations of our police chief and the superintendent of schools, for now I feel that I can support keeping the DARE officer only if fair share funding is available to pay for the school district's share of both positions (school resource officer and DARE). If new information comes forward about this, I will definitely consider it before making a final decision.

Fundraising Possibilities

It is my understanding that because of an anomaly in the distribution of redevelopment funds whereby more is available this year than expected, the City was able to provide an additional \$76,000 to the MUSD just last week, per our agreement on the distribution of such funds. Perhaps the MUSD could use \$61,000 of that to fund (for one year only) their fair share of the DARE position.

Then during the year, the many people in the community who are passionate about funding DARE could fund raise and seek sponsors to fund the position in the future. Alternately, perhaps the community should give the MUSD a chance to show how Project Alert in sixth grade, and another new fifth grade program can fill in for DARE effectively, at less cost.

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