

Final Report

Investigation of the Culture and Climate in the Round Rock Police Department

On September 11th, the Round Rock Independent School District contracted with Patricia Linares, Ph. D to conduct 2 formal investigations. The first investigation consisted of a review of documents and one on one interviews with Mr. Joseph Burleson and Chief Dennis Weiner to address a complaint filed against Chief Weiner. This investigation was completed and resolved on September 22nd, 2023.

The second investigation was to determine the culture and climate of the Police Department. This investigation began on October 2nd and concluded on October 24th of 2023. The consultant conducted 37 one on one (45 minutes in length) interviews with current social workers, police officers, sergeants, the assistant chief, and support staff in the department.

In an effort to conduct a valid and unbiased investigation, I conducted interviews with both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. For staff currently working in the Police Department, they were given a Likert scale of questions to determine the culture and climate of the department and then questioned by the interviewer with poignant questions regarding culture and climate along with questions brought up in Lighthouse reports. All interviews were anonymous, and no documents revealed any names or distinguishing attributes of the people interviewed. Interviewees were told that anything stated in the interview would remain anonymous. Staff were required to sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure the anonymity of the answers provided.

The following is a report on the findings gathered from the Likert Scale summary and interview questions (see attached documentation).

Observations:

- The culture and climate are extremely negative and there is little to no cohesiveness in the department. Descriptions of the department include: toxic, very divided, a lot of tension, chaotic, lack of leadership, full of favoritism, no organization, top down, intimidating, disorganized, no two-way communication, lack of trust, unstable, hostile, full of drama and mentally draining. A few said that it is good, okay or in a season of change, however the majority felt like it was very negative and at an all-time low.
- New/appropriate leadership is requested by many when asked what would make the department more efficient and effective.
- There is a lack of professional communication by the Chief (inappropriate comments made to and about police officers and sergeants). Staff is unhappy and felt the police officers were disrespected when the Chief said in a meeting that the officers may need

mental health assistance after he moved them to new schools at the beginning of the year. There was the feeling that moving the officers from schools where they had established relationships went against the basis for the model of the department. The department was established to foster collaboration and relationships with the students and staff in a school and moving them because the officers were “too close to the school” went against the pillars of the model. Some felt like this was a form of retaliation since not all officers were moved.

- Staff feel like they have “no voice”. There is no two-way communication in the department. Everything is top-down.
- There is a need for better collaboration between the police officers, the social workers, the area superintendents, and other leadership departments in the district.
- There is a prevalent sense of favoritism in the department by leadership.
- There is a fear of retaliation if someone disagrees with leadership or speaks against them.
- Social workers believe that favoritism was evident in the selection of the Interim Director. They are most upset with how the interim director was given the position. They were told that she was given the position because the Chief “knew her best” not allowing for others to apply or even be considered.
- Favoritism by the Chief, Assistant Chief and Sergeant Cleere was specifically mentioned. Numerous interviewees stated that there is an “in crowd” that is given special attention and opportunities not allowed to all. This includes professional development opportunities, days off, overtime and special tasks.
- The therapy dog program would be very good if implemented with fidelity. It seems to be a good program, however there are questions about favoritism and connections with the training program used. There is the perception that Sgt. Cleere has a personal friendship with the owner of the training program used.
- There is a need to ensure that all officers and sergeants designated for a school be present at their respective school and not downtown. If indeed this is the case, schools are left unattended or staffed only by 1 police officer. This could cause an issue if a security threat occurs at said schools.
- There is a need to review who can access body cameras and for what purpose. Body cameras are accessed by civilian staff. When asked if there is a process for approval to access cameras, staff said that they try to ask the Chief or Assistant Chief, but if they are not around, they can access them at any time. Protocols need to be established to identify when and by whom cameras may be accessed.
- The perception is that decisions are based on personal issues rather than professional qualifications. Also, it is about who you know and like rather than who is most qualified. An example is made by many regarding the favoritism shown to Nick Short.
- The most challenging aspect of the job was noted as: leadership (majority of interviewees), intimidating environment, lack of integration and coordination,

divisiveness, favoritism, lack of trust, disorganization, staffing vacancies, disrespect from Chief, AC and Cleere and the new radios.

- The radios and dispatch office are causing much distress and disruption. The radios are not connected to the city police officers, the county, or the sheriff's department. There is a fear that the new dispatch center may not be able to handle severe security issues quickly. While this is a work in progress, it is frustrating to some officers. Also, before implementing the new telephone system, protocols and training must be given regarding who can push the emergency and when.
- Contract days for the police officers should be reviewed. They are currently on a 260-day contract and are at work when there are no students nor staff.
- There is a failure to follow district procedures for applications and hiring of personnel. The department acts as its own district and not part of RRISD. They need to work more closely with the HR department.
- A review of stipends should be conducted to ensure that equity is present for all departments. Some stipends are given when a person takes on additional work and others are not. There was also a question regarding stipends for staff who are requested to perform bilingual translations.
- A review of the organizational chart is needed to clarify the line of authority for the social workers. The staff was told that the organizational chart was for optics only and that they needed to do as the Chief requests.
- The office of Risk Management should be reviewed as to whom they should report. It is confusing as to why they are in the police department and not with the CFO, operations or HR.
- A requirement that all vendor bids and orders be reviewed by the CFO/finance office as there is a perception that there may be a connection between the Chief and a vendor used.

While these are a synopsis of statements in the interviews, I recommend that the actual statements given be reviewed as I believe they paint a very clear picture of the state of the culture and climate in the Police Department of Round Rock ISD.