

Report on Events at Muncie Central High School in Relation to *V for Vendetta* Project and Leading Up to November 15, 2021 Student Protest and Days of E-Learning

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What follows below is our review of the events that occurred at Muncie Central High School in early November 2021 in relation to the *V for Vendetta* project assigned by language arts teacher Employee A, the subsequent student protest on Monday, November 15, 2021, and the decisions to provide E-Learning to MCHS students on November 16, 17 and 18, 2021.

Process

To complete our review, we spoke with seventeen administrators, staff, school resource officers (SROs), and students likely to have relevant information regarding the *V for Vendetta* assignment and the events leading up to the November 15 student protest. We also reviewed numerous documents, including the Grade 11 English Language Arts curriculum map, MCHS Faculty Handbook, relevant MCS Board Policies and Administrative Guidelines, email correspondence, personal notes prepared by the administrators identified above, social media postings of students and staff (including photos and video recordings), documents relating to the *V for Vendetta* assignment, hallway surveillance footage from November 12 (41:53), and photographs of student posters.

Relevant Portions of MCS' Policies and Administrative Guidelines

MCS Policy 2240 addresses the handling of controversial issues in the classroom and, in part, states:

For the purposes of this policy, a controversial issue is a topic on which opposing points of view have been promulgated by responsible opinion and is likely to arouse both support and opposition in the community.

The Board will permit the introduction and proper educational use of controversial issues provided that their use in the instructional program:

- A. is related to the instructional goals of the course of student and level of maturity of the students;
- B. does not tend to indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view;
- C. encourages open-mindedness and is conducted in a spirit of scholarly inquiry.

Controversial issues related to the program may be initiated by the students themselves provided they are presented in the ordinary course of classroom instruction and it is not substantially disruptive to the educational setting.

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When controversial issues have not been specified in the course of study, the Board will permit the instructional use of only those issues which have been approved by the Superintendent.

Board Policy 2240 (Controversial Issues), available at BoardDocs at <https://go.boarddocs.com/in/mun/Board.nsf/Public#>. Further direction is contained in MCS' Administrative Guideline 2240, which states, in part:

The following guidelines are designed to assist teachers in the instruction of controversial issues, defined in Policy 2240, in the classroom:

- A. When a controversial issue is not part of a course of study, its use in the classroom must be approved by the principal.
- B. When discussing a controversial issue, the teacher may express his/her own personal position as long as s/he makes it clear that it is only his/her opinion. The teacher must not, however, bring about a single conclusion to which all students must subscribe.
- C. Teachers should help students use a critical thinking process such as the following to examine different sides of an issue:

For each stated position:

1. What is the person (group) saying?
2. What evidence is there that what is being said is true?
3. What is said that would lead you to think the position is valid?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this position?
5. What do you think would happen if this point of view was accepted and was put into practice?

For reaching conclusions:

1. On balance, what do you think is the most reasoned statement? The most valid position?
2. What is there in the statements that supports your conclusion? What other things, beside what is being said, leads you to your conclusion?

Administrative Guideline 2240 (Controversial Issues in the Classroom), available at BoardDocs at <https://go.boarddocs.com/in/mun/Board.nsf/Public#>.

Relevant Portions of MCHS Faculty Handbook

The MCHS Faculty Handbook includes the following expectations under Guidelines and Procedures:

11. Students are to be involved in instructional activities appropriate to the assigned class throughout the designated class period and every day the class meets. We need students on time and on task. It is the expectation that teachers are teaching from bell to bell.

...

28. Lesson plans that incorporate appropriate Indiana Academic Standards and Corporation Curriculum Guides are a daily expectation. It is especially important that detailed plans are left for substitutes. Lesson plans should include objectives, materials, methodology, assessment, and standards. Course syllabi should be given to students and the principal at the beginning of each semester. Syllabi should include rules, grading procedures, and other information pertinent to the class. An example of syllabus content is included the Course Syllabus section of this handbook.

29. Showing R rated movies is discouraged. Prior written permission from principal is necessary before showing an R rated movie. You may obtain an R rated movie permission form in the Main Office. In addition, parents and students will be given the option to do an alternative assignment if they so choose.

See pages 12-14.

The Handbook includes a section on Course Syllabus Guidelines and a Course Syllabus Form, identifying the recommended elements of a course syllabus, i.e., course title; teacher name/information; course description/objectives; textbooks, supplemental readings, and resources; course calendar/ schedule; assessment/evaluation. *See pages 26-27.*

The Handbook also includes a section on Lesson Plans/Grade Books, which states as follows:

Classroom teachers are expected to develop lesson plans that address the curriculum and Indiana Academic Standards. Lesson plans should include the following basic components: objectives, academic standards and assessments. Administrators will schedule a check of lesson plans each week.

It is important that grade books be kept up-to-date and contain adequate information regarding assessments that are used to determine students' grades.

See page 34.

The Handbook also includes MCS' Action Plan for Security Enhancement and a section on the Role of Security Officers, which outlines the following expectations:

B. Student/Officer Interaction

Security officers are encouraged to interact with students to develop a rapport and serve as a trusted authority figure with which students might confide valuable information regarding safety and security issues. Officers will be positive role models promoting the profession of law enforcement and police officers.

Promoting the school corporation's mission, officers will increase their visibility and accessibility in the individual buildings and the school community.

C. Security Officer as Role Model and Mentor

Security officer will be in approved attire while working for the school corporation.¹ Officers will conduct themselves in such a manner as to convey a sense of authority and professionalism enhancing the school staff in situations which may cause legal intervention. Security officers should be approachable, courteous and convey a sense of understanding to students and parents who may need to communicate safety concerns to someone.

D. Duties and Responsibilities of Security Officers

Officers will routinely patrol the outer perimeter of the school security building and parking lots to ensure outer doors and entrances are secure at all times. Security officers will assist in hallway supervision during passing periods and during class times, assist in dining area security, patrol hallways, restrooms, unoccupied classroom spaces and inconspicuous areas of the building. Security officers may be asked to perform the duties of a police officer regarding report preparation, requesting juvenile probation assistance or other community-based service organization intervention for youth.

See pages 82-83

Summary of Events

A. The Assignment

In connection with a unit Employee A developed on treating a graphic novel as a genre, students in Employee A's three junior level classes (English 11, an American literature course) were asked to read *V for Vendetta*, a British graphic novel, by Alan Moore. Employee A developed this unit after students expressed interest in reading *V for Vendetta* when Employee A shared, during an introductory activity at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, it was the teacher's favorite book.² Employee A devoted weeks to this unit and had students read an electronic version (a free PDF) of *V for Vendetta* during class. Employee A also had students watch the 2005 film based on the book, which is rated R. Although Employee A reported securing parental permission from all but a few students to watch the film, Employee A did not seek prior written approval from MCHS Administration as required in the MCHS Faculty Handbook.

¹ Approved attire includes MCS attire, not police attire. As reported at the February 9, 2021, meeting of the Board of School Trustees by MCS' Chief of Security, officers are provided four shirts, three pairs of pants and one jacket with their names displayed on the sleeves. The purpose of providing this attire is "to have the officers look more approachable to students but also have a presence of security in our buildings." See Minutes of the February 9, 2021 Regular Board Meeting, available at BoardDocs at <https://go.boarddocs.com/in/mun/Board.nsf/Public#>.

² Although the MCS Faculty Handbook indicates teachers are expected to submit a course syllabus and weekly lesson plans, those expectations were relaxed for all MCHS teachers during the 2021-2022 school year. Accordingly, neither a syllabus nor weekly lesson plans for Employee A's English 11 classes were submitted.

As the culminating project for this unit, Employee A gave students the following five options and developed a rubric for each:

- (1) Select songs for a soundtrack for the story, write a rationale for each song, and design an album cover.
- (2) Rewrite the ending of the story.
- (3) Adopt a character's persona and create poetry and/or journal entries reflecting how the character felt at particular points during the story.
- (4) Create five TikTok videos reviewing various aspects of the book.
- (5) Create three posters that "advocate for and support V's resistance in today's America" and "use a collage of pictures, images, slogans, quotes and historical facts to convince the people to join V." Each poster must showcase a current problem in American society, include at least six historical facts, figures, graphs or statistics (citing sources on a separate page), include at least three different quotes from the novel, and include a graphic of some kind on each poster.

Students worked on the project in class and most students chose the poster option. Students were expected to prepare a draft of their posters and provide them to Employee A for review and approval. Although the assignment was not due until Friday, November 12, some students completed their posters as early as Monday, November 8. As students completed their posters, they were permitted to hang them on the lockers in the second floor hallway outside Employee A's classroom. Employee A reported that the purpose of publishing the posters in the hallway was to bring attention to the social and political issues referenced in the posters.

To provide context for the posters in the hallway, a description of the assignment was hung on red posterboard stating:

"The central question is, is this guy [referencing a picture of Alan Moore] right? Or is he mad? What do you, the reader, think about this? Which struck me as a properly anarchist solution. I didn't want to tell people what to think, I just wanted to tell people to think and consider some of these admittedly extreme little elements, which nevertheless do recur fairly regularly throughout human history."

- Alan Moore, Author of *V for Vendetta*

Project: Think critically about the characterization and themes in the graphic novel, *V for Vendetta*. Design a poster that draws attention to a problem in American society and asks viewers to THINK about it critically and "join V's resistance".

In addition, a banner was hung stating the following: "Remember, Remember the 5th of November. The gun powder, treason, and plot. I know of no reason why the gun powder, treason ... should ever be forgot." The banner was surrounded by drawings of Guy Fawkes masks (i.e., the face of V) on paper plates. Below the banner, a poster was hung stating "When Justice Becomes Law ... Rebellion Becomes Duty. – V for Vendetta."

Students prepared posters on a variety of topics, such as sexual assault, fair wages/underage workers, mental health, child labor, body image, police brutality, gerrymandering, LGBTQ+ issues, Black Lives Matter, and women's issues (e.g., My Body My Choice).

B. Police Brutality Poster

Although more than one poster focused on police brutality, one poster in particular generated considerable attention (the "Police Brutality Poster"). This poster contained a graphic image of a pig dressed in tactical gear with the American flag between its teeth and what appears to be blood dripping from the pig's chin. The poster includes the statement, "I am the law" in large block lettering, a definition of police brutality, more than 40 names, several quotations, a bar graph, some statistics, and several statements, including the following:

- "[Black people] 3x more likely to be killed by police than white people;"
- "30% of Black people were unarmed in 2015 compared to 19% of victims who were white;"
- "Jim Crow laws;"
- "Great Railroad Strike of 1877;"
- "1658 police frequently drank and slept on the job;"
- "Chicago Police Department 1875-1920;"
- "The death of Walter Scott;"
- "The shooting of Philando Castile;"
- "The beating of Rodney King;"
- "The death of Eric Garner;"
- "Fabricating evidence – the John Spencer case;"
- "Sexual assault and rape by NYC police officers;"
- "False arrest and coercion Rachelle Jackson"

The sources for that data were not written on the front of the poster. The quotations on the poster included the following:

- "We aren't anti-police. We are anti-police brutality. – Al Sharpton"
- "No justice no peace. -- ?"
- "I could kill you and get away with it. – Police"
- "I can't breathe. – George Floyd"
- "Your [sic] supposed to protect us. – Me"

as well as the following quotations from *V for Vendetta*:

- "People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people."
- "I remember how different became dangerous."
- "My father was a writer. You would've liked him. He used to say that artist[s] used lies to tell the truth, while politicians used them to cover the truth up."

Aware that the image on the poster was likely to offend, Employee A asked the student who prepared this particular poster, Student A, to consider the impact of the image and specifically whether another image could be used. Student A considered the question and ultimately chose not to select another image.

The Police Brutality Poster was finished and hung in the hallway by the end of third period (i.e., appx. 1 PM) on Monday, November 8, 2021.

C. Events Between Tuesday, November 9 and Friday, November 12

1. *Tuesday, November 9 – The Posters Attract Attention*

Employee A reported that, beginning Tuesday, November 9 and continuing over the next several days, numerous people stopped in the hallway to look at the posters. Employee A recalled seeing approximately 8-10 adults (all MCS staff members and/or SROs) stopping to examine the posters. Employee A attempted to start conversations with those looking at the posters to provide them an opportunity to voice their concerns, but those efforts were unsuccessful.

2. *Wednesday, November 10 – Area Police Chiefs and Others Express Concern About Police Brutality Poster*

On Wednesday, November 10, MCS' Chief of Security was contacted by a "couple of area police chiefs" inquiring about the poster depicting the pig in police uniform (i.e., the Police Brutality Poster). The Chief of Security inspected the posters and informed MCHS Principal that the Police Brutality Poster was creating a stir and shared pictures.

Later that day, Employee B contacted MCHS Principal expressing concerns about the posters and potential disruption.

3. *Thursday, November 11 – Additional Concerns Expressed, Employee A Requests Meeting, and the Principal, Department Chair and Master Teacher Evaluate the Assignment*

In the morning of Thursday, November 11, Employee C expressed concerns to MCHS Principal (and others) about the posters and potential unrest. Employee C also reported that some students were upset and emotional about the Police Brutality Poster.

That afternoon, Employee A contacted MCHS Principal to discuss the poster display because many teachers and staff were observed stopping and taking pictures. Employee A's purpose in contacting the Principal was to "get ahead" of "misunderstandings" and "complaints." Employee A acknowledged that the Police Brutality Poster contained a grotesque image and would be considered offensive by most definitions.

Later that day, MCHS Principal met with English Department Chair and Master Teacher to review how the assignment was related to the Indiana Academic Standards, MCS Curriculum Map, and the approved or commonly used resources by MCHS teachers.

The English 11 Curriculum Map identifies “Non-Fiction – American and Indiana Historical and Current Documents” as content for November with the following suggested resources: the *Connections* text, historical documents, Indiana documents, historical photographs, and charts/graphs. The *V for Vendetta* assignment did not have a clear connection to the curriculum map because the text is fiction (and the map speaks to non-fiction) and is a British graphic novel (and English 11 is an American literature course). Concerns were also raised about the R-rated nature of the movie and the lack of prior administrative approval.

That evening, MCHS Principal in conjunction with the Director of Public Education/CEO determined the Principal would discuss the relocation of the posters with Employee A the next day.

4. *Friday, November 12 (Morning) – Eaton Police Chief Communicates Intent to “Pull Officers” from Building*

In the morning of November 12, a meeting between Employee A, MCHS Principal and MCHS Assistant Principal was scheduled for fourth period.

At approximately 10:30 AM, MCS’ Chief of Security informed MCHS Principal that the Eaton Police Chief was upset about the posters and intended to “pull officers” from MCHS. The MCHS Principal informed the Chief of Security of the scheduled meeting to discuss the relocation of the posters later that day.

Shortly thereafter, the Chief of Security notified the Police Chief and SRO A that the posters would be moved.

D. Hallway Exchange Involving School Resource Officers During Third Period on November 12

Third period at MCHS begins at 11:40 AM and ends at 1:35 PM and is also the period in which students eat lunch. During third period on November 12, students in Employee A’s class were working to finish their *V for Vendetta* projects. There were between 15-20 students in the class. Some students worked in the classroom and a few others sat in the hallway just outside the class to finish their posters.

At approximately 11:55 AM, three SROs A, B and C and Employee D walked to the hallway near Employee A’s classroom and began inspecting the posters. At least one of these individuals was aware that the posters would likely be relocated and acknowledged that the purpose of the visit was to inspect the posters “before they came down.” The three SROs were dressed in police attire, including shirts with “POLICE” in block lettering on the backs, rather than MCS attire. SRO B works at another MCS school and happened to be at MCHS to drop something off after having left work early due to illness.

For approximately ten minutes, the three SROs stood in the hallway inspecting the posters (Employee D left after approximately three minutes and did not return). During this time, a few students and one employee (Employee E who had a prep period during this time) entered and exited Employee A’s classroom, but did not engage with the SROs.

At approximately 12:05 PM, Student A entered the hallway from Employee A's classroom (along with 1-2 other students), approached the SROs, and began talking with SRO B (whom Student A had known since middle school). Student A acknowledged entering the hallway to be "nosey" after learning the SROs were inspecting the posters. By this time, Student A was aware the Police Brutality Poster was getting attention and that Employee A was scheduled to meet later that day with MCHS Principal and had been told by Employee A that the poster "might need to come down."

For approximately three minutes, Student A talked with the SROs (primary SROs A and B) alone about the posters and assignment. Employee A and Employee E had entered the hallway and were observing the exchange, but did not participate in this portion of the conversation.

Student A (and others) recalled that SRO B expressed disappointment upon learning that Student A prepared the Police Brutality Poster. SRO B acknowledged questioning Student A about the sources of the information on the poster and stated that some of the data on the poster contradicted SRO B's own research. Believing that SROs A and B were upset by the poster, Student A offered more than once to take it down. While SRO B declined Student A's offer, SRO B continued to question Student A regarding the sources of information.

Student A eventually became upset and tearful, and around that time Employee A and Employee E engaged in the conversation. Also around this time, Student B (who was not a student in Employee A's class, but happened to be in the hallway) began observing closely and remained for the rest of the exchange. Some students from Employee E's classroom continued to enter and exit Employee A's classroom and observed from a distance.

After approximately ten minutes in the hallway, Student A returned to Employee A's classroom. Student A reported being upset when entering the classroom and was consoled by other students. Student A reported telling classmates that Student A "felt like the police were interrogating" and that, as a result, Student A "just wanted to take down the poster."

For approximately twenty more minutes, the three SROs, Employee A, and Employee E remained in the hallway talking. Student B remained in the hallway observing closely the entire time. Other students (passing by and from Employee A's classroom) observed from a distance without engaging. The discussion among the adults related to the assignment, the sources of information cited in the posters, the reliability of certain statistics (including relating to police brutality), whether police brutality is a problem, systemic racism, and Black Lives Matter.

At one point during this discussion, Employee C walked past, shook their head, and said something. Employee A and E understood Employee C to say "deplorable(s)," but others did not hear this (and Employee C denied saying it). Student B recalled that Employee C said "too political."

As the conversation continued, more students gathered. By approximately 12:35 PM, there were around 13-14 individuals observing, including Student C (a student from Employee A's class) who began recording portions of the conversation and later posted the recordings to social media.

Around this time, MCHS Principal received a phone call from Employee C stating that officers and Employee A and E were arguing in the hallway in front of students. The MCHS Principal radioed SRO A, who informed him there was no argument and that the parties were engaged in a conversation.

Employee A and E and SROs A and B (SRO C did not participate in an interview) reported that the conversation was generally civil and respectful, but there came a point when everyone agreed it was time to “wrap it up.” That point occurred when Employee C was heard to say loudly, from the other end of the hallway, “Yes, they do” in response to a reference to “all lives matter.” According to Employee C, who had not engaged in the conversation at all until this point, the statement was made in response to the following statement from Employee E: “When the Black Lives Matter movement started, people said all lives matter, and they don’t.” Although recollections of Employee C’s precise statement and the preceding comment varied some, everyone agreed Employee C made a statement that was heard to affirm the proposition that “all lives matter.” In response to the comment, students were heard to gasp. Employee A invited Employee C to participate in the conversation, but Employee C declined.

Shortly thereafter, Employees A and E and the SROs thanked one other for the “good conversation” and went their separate ways. Employee E was crying and students attempted to provide comfort.

Students in Employee A’s class returned to the classroom and spent the remainder of the class period (5-10 minutes) discussing the hallway events. Employee E checked in with students, including Student A, to “make sure they were okay.” Students A and C recalled asking Employee A whether the posters would need to be taken down or moved and recalled Employee A saying “no.”

E. Employee A Meets with MCHS Principal and MCHS Assistant Principal During Fourth Period on November 12

During fourth period on November 12, MCHS Principal and MCHS Assistant Principal met with Employee A and discussed both the location of the posters and the hallway conversation involving the SROs. Employee A declined to voluntarily relocate the posters, noting that students would be upset and might not “accept” that decision and that removal of the posters from the hallway might cause a bigger disruption. Employee A asked to talk with the Director of Public Education/CEO before any action was taken and that request was relayed.

In describing the hallway conversation with the SROs, Employee A described the conversation as “tense, but civil” and viewed the exchange as a good example of respectful disagreement for students. Employee A expressed concern about Employee C’s comment and reported that students were upset by some of the statements made, such as the statement reportedly made by SRO A that “police brutality is not a [real issue], and if it was, it was not based on race.”

F. Director of Public Education/CEO and Assistant Superintendent Talk with Employee A About Relocating Posters

Late afternoon Friday, November 12, the Director of Public Education/CEO and Assistant Superintendent spoke with Employee A by phone for nearly one hour regarding the concerns raised about the posters and the ensuing disruption. Employee A expressed concerns about removing the posters, including concerns about the reaction of students, suggesting students would protest their removal. After much discussion, Employee A was notified that the posters needed to be moved from the hallway by Sunday at noon. Among the topics discussed was the opinion letter issued by Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita on November 11 addressing Black Lives Matter displays in schools and the need for school displays to be politically neutral. Employee A agreed to relocate the posters by Sunday, November 14, at 1 PM.

G. Social Media Postings Reference SROs “Pulling” Teacher Out of Class and Employee A’s Firing

As early as the afternoon of November 12, postings regarding the hallway exchange with the SROs were published to social media. One of the postings that was widely circulated on various social media platforms stated as follows:

This is NOT okay. Our class did a project after reading the book V for Vendetta. This book talks about an antihero named V tearing down the government for racism, sexism, and homophobia. All of which can be pinpointed to a few things happening currently in our world. Our teacher, [Employee A] provided us with a poster board and had us associate it to real world things. We were allowed to choose anything from womens [sic] rights to religion, police brutality, and racism. Most of [Employee A’s] classes decided to link the book to the Black Lives Matter movement, as you can see in the videos and images provided. **Upon which [Employee A] was pulled from our classroom by the schools security and was told it was offensive and that our research was false despite credited resources on each and every poster on the lockers.** They insisted that it’s not all cops (Obviously!) and that by spreading the word of this it was teaching our students wrongly. **[Employee A] is now (rumoredly) at a threat to potentially lose [Employee A’s] job for allowing us to write on such topics. Keep in mind they also spewed information about All Lives Matter in defense and tried to talk on Blue lives and insisted they were not in any way racist.** We are not trying, as students of Muncie Central High School, to defend not only ourselves but our peers and continue to make this a safe space to express ourselves and our views. Black lives matter and always will, and we should be allowed to express our opinions. We are protected under the first amendment and choose to continue to speak up. Please share this post to get the word.

UPDATE AND EDIT: Our protest will start Monday morning before the bell in the middle of the Student Center. We will hold signs and chant and peacefully make our statement. If by Wednesday our voices are not heard we will be making a walk out. Get our voices heard.

#blacklivesmatter #blm #ACAM #policebrutality #awareness #delwarecounty
#munciecommunityschools #muncieindiana #firstamendment #racismisreal
#systemicracism

This posting contained at least two inaccurate statements: (1) that Employee A was “pulled” from the classroom by the SROs; and (2) that Employee A was “at a threat to potentially lose [Employee A’s] job” because of the assignment. None of the individuals interviewed reported that Employee A was “pulled” from class or that Employee’s job was in jeopardy. The students interviewed acknowledged that the SROs never entered the classroom, never stood in the doorway, and never “pulled” anyone from class.

The inaccuracies continued in other social media postings. For instance, by November 14, the AEGIS Alliance posted a YouTube video (3:24) titled “Muncie Central High School Indiana Teacher Faces Losing Job After *V for Vendetta* Book Class Project!,” which stated that Employee A was “pulled” from the “classroom by school security and told that what [Employee A] did [in assigning the project] was offensive” and that “[Employee A] has now been threatened with potentially losing her job for allowing students to write on such topics.”

Employee A reported having no idea how students concluded Employee A’s job was in peril. Employee A acknowledged telling some students about the planned meeting with MCHS Principal on Friday afternoon, but said nothing about job jeopardy.

H. Over the Weekend, Employee A Moves Posters Into Classroom and Posts Multiple Copies of Rokita Letter

On Saturday, November 13, Employee A moved the posters from the hallway into the classroom and asked to display Rokita’s opinion in the hallway “as an explanation to the students as to why the display was moved.” The Assistant Superintendent responded affirmatively and told Employee A to keep the opinion posted the entire week of November 15-19.

On Sunday, November 14, Employee A posted several copies of Rokita’s seven-page opinion in the hallway outside the classroom.

I. November 15 Student Protest and Decision to Move to E-Learning

Over the weekend, various administrators learned that MCHS students were planning a protest for Monday, November 15. The Chief of Security reported that, to avoid exacerbating tensions between students and the SROs, the decision was made to keep the SROs away from the building. To the extent law enforcement assistance became necessary, administrators planned to rely on the local department.

By approximately 7:50 AM on November 15, approximately 25 students were in the MCHS Student Center for the protest. As the day went on, more students assembled and by lunch, several hundred students gathered. Several administrators addressed the students and worked to create an

orderly opportunity for them to voice concerns. The students were relocated to the auditorium later in the day because the color guard had class in the Student Center area.

The Chief of Security reported being contacted by some local law enforcement representatives with concerns about the protest, including student statements on social media that were derogatory toward the police. Specifically, the Chief of Security reported that the Eaton Chief of Police said SROs were “being pulled” from MCS.

Due to a variety of factors, including the lack of security, the decision was made that MCHS would operate on an E-Learning day on Tuesday, November 16. Thus, at approximately 3:40 PM, MCS’ Chief Communications Officer notified the MCS community of this decision in an email, which read:

Dear MCS Family,

Late last week, an assigned class project prompted a display of student-created posters regarding social issues in a hallway at Muncie Central High School. The display created a disruptive discussion between a student and School Resource Officers that the student and other observers found offensive.

As a result, the teacher involved was asked to relocate the posters to her classroom where she could invite visitors to view them. This occurred over the weekend. That inspired some students to organize a peaceful protest, which they held in the MCHS Student Center at the start of the school today.

The students voiced their concerns and engaged in civil discussion with school and district officials. No other outside agency, including the Muncie Police Department, was involved with this protest. Muncie Community Schools takes the concerns of our students and parents very seriously, and will continue to look into the incident. Once the investigation is complete, the district will make its findings known.

As a result of today’s actions, MCHS will be operating on an e-learning day on Tuesday, November 16. In-person learning will resume the following day. Thank you!

The Chief of Security reported that the last sentence in the first paragraph of this communication caused additional frustration among law enforcement representatives because they felt it portrayed the SROs in a negative light, i.e., as the source of “a disruptive discussion” that others “found offensive.”

J. Student Demands following Protest

During the lunch hour on November 22, 2021, a list of “Student Demands” was placed on the MCHS Principal’s desk in his office without a note or any identifying information. The document stated as follows:

STUDENT DEMANDS:

1. [Employee A's] class' posters will be put back on display by 11/29.
2. Students need a clear and proper outlet in school that allows them to express their concerns about the school by the end of this semester.
3. The Student Resource Officers (SRO) involved will not come back to MCHS.
4. MCHS will actively seek out a more diverse staff when they hire new positions of any kind. Our school staff should look like our school population.
5. Any replacement SRO hired by MCHS will go through sensitivity training with a culturally competent curriculum that is open disclosed to the community.
6. We want a list of current resources that the students have at their disposal for mental health and safety already in place in the building (i.e. cool down room).
7. We want it to be spelled out in the school handbook what is and is not allowed in schools. (i.e., BLM clothing, BLM postings in the hallway, BLM or LGBT flags, etc)
8. We want the handbook to accurately reflect what disciplinary actions take place for rule breaking.
9. We, the students, want to know if MCHS or MCS as a whole agrees with Todd Rokita's statement.
10. We ALL want to feel safe in our school.

Summary of Conclusions

The material facts regarding these events, including the November 12 hallway exchange involving the SROs, MCHS employees, and several students, are largely undisputed. In our estimation, any variations in accounts are attributable to mistaken recollections, individual world views and sensitivities, and misunderstandings, rather than intent to mislead.

The events that flowed from the *V for Vendetta* project followed several questionable (and some poor) decisions made by MCS employees that in isolation would likely have little or no impact, but in sum resulted in significant disruption to the educational process, including the following:

- The decision not to require Employee A (and others) to submit syllabi and lesson plans.
- The decision not to review lesson plans to ensure alignment between instructional activities and Indiana Academic Standards, MCS' curriculum, and MCS' strategic/innovation plan.
- Employee A's decision not to secure approval before showing an R-rated movie and discussing controversial issues in connection with an instructional activity in accordance with the provisions in the Faculty Handbook and the Controversial Issues Administrative Guideline.
- The decision not to address the project and posters immediately after learning of staff, student, and law enforcement concerns.
- SRO B's decision to spend more than an hour at MCHS on November 12 after leaving work early due to illness.
- Decisions by the SROs to spend more than 40 minutes standing in the MCHS hallway on November 12 inspecting and discussing student work, including questioning the citations, sources of authority, and the merits of the positions taken in the work. This activity and

discussion is outside the purview of the SRO's job responsibilities. It is also significant that these actions occurred during the student lunch hour and passing periods where the need for student monitoring is especially important.

- Employee A's decision to devote more than 20 minutes of class time on November 12 to speaking with adults in the hallway about the project, students' work, and social issues, rather than work with students on the assignment.
- Employee C's conduct during the November 12 hallway exchange (including the decision to loudly affirm the proposition that "all lives matter" while remaining disengaged from the conversation), which contributed to misunderstandings and could reasonably be viewed as inflammatory.
- The decisions of the SROs not to wear designated MCS attire as expected, but to wear police gear.

Although each of these decisions may have been well-intentioned, each contributed to the significant breakdowns that culminated in the student protest and three days of E-Learning for MCHS students.

The events were compounded by pre-existing tensions among certain staff, underlying student concerns about a lack of support and potentially disparate treatment, communications from law enforcement officials including a threat to "pull officers" if the posters were not removed, and inaccurate statements in social media postings about the hallway exchange and Employee A having been "pulled" from the classroom by SROs and being placed in job jeopardy.

Recommendations

Based on our review, we offer the following recommendations:

- Develop policy addressing display of student work.
- Leave the posters for the *V for Vendetta* project in Student A's classroom, rather than return them to the hallway, to prevent further disruption of the educational program and division among staff, student and community members. While there can be a place for discussion about the topics referenced in the posters, such discussion should be facilitated in a way that is consistent with the curriculum, MCS' policies and guidelines, and MCS' strategic/innovation plan and structured to promote good staff, student, and community relations.
- Increased monitoring and oversight of classroom instruction to ensure alignment with Indiana Academic Standards, MCS' curriculum, and MCS' strategic/innovation plan (including regular review and feedback on syllabi and lesson plans).
- Professional development on addressing potentially controversial issues in the instructional program, including training to ensure use is related to instructional goals of the course, does not tend to persuade students to a particular point of view, encourages open-mindedness, and is conducted in a spirit of scholarly inquiry.

- Review expectations for school security officers to ensure alignment with MCS’ goals for the program.
- Continued training for school security officers on job responsibilities, expectations, and culturally responsive practices.*
- Continued training and support for administrators on monitoring staff performance, effective supervision, and administering remediation and discipline.
- Continued training for all staff on implicit bias and culturally responsive practices. This should include discussion about the impact of statements that affirm the proposition that “all lives matter.”*
- Review faculty handbook to ensure it accurately reflects and clearly communicates expectations for staff. Review process for training/orienting staff on expectations.
- Additional mechanisms and/or publication of existing mechanisms for students to communicate concerns regarding discrimination and harassment.*
- Convene meetings with students facilitated by Peace and Conflict Facilitators with an MCHS administrator in attendance to hear student concerns, identify solutions, and promote positive relations.*
- Create intentional opportunities for school security officers to build relationships with students.*
- Review student handbook to ensure behavioral expectations and sanctions are clearly set out. Review process for training/orienting students on behavioral expectations and sanctions to ensure clear, consistent communication.*
- Review processes used to monitor administration of disciplinary and behavior consequences to ensure consistent, nondiscriminatory implementation.*
- Consider additional learning opportunities for responsible social media use and civil dialogue.
- Consider creating additional extracurricular opportunities for students to become engaged with peers on social issues.*

The recommendations marked with an asterisk were informed by the interviews with students and/or the “Demands” document.