

SAFETY & SECURITY

Securing the right data to make inclusive school safety decisions

Dr. Casey Kosiorek couldn't sleep. He was awake wondering why a proposal to arm security guards in his district's schools had gone so quickly awry.

It started a few months earlier, at a safety forum held shortly after the Stoneman Douglas school shooting in Parkland, Florida. He told an emotionally-charged crowd of 200 constituents that the board would discuss arming the retired police officers who guard the district's schools. Soon after, the board chose to act.

"They decided to move forward with a resolution that would overcome federal and state laws banning firearms on school grounds," Dr. Kosiorek says. "We saw it as the board taking action and then informing everyone of the steps that were being taken."

Many constituents, however, saw it differently. Those who read the resolution days before the board would vote quickly took to social media to air their concerns.

Before long, Dr. Kosiorek was speaking to media. Community groups against guns were vocally opposed. African American parents expressed concerns about implicit bias by retired police against their children.

"It went from zero to 60 real quick," Dr. Kosiorek shares. "People didn't know the details of the proposal, and that caused them to exchange nonfactual information. It just built from there.

"As a leader, I was left wondering, 'What do we do now?'"

"There were other questions we couldn't answer."

As he sat up at night pondering that question, Dr. Kosiorek realized that Thoughtexchange could help.

"I really liked the concept of Thoughtexchange," he says. "I wanted to be able to see what people were thinking because we would have 20 or 25 people show up at a board meeting and maybe 80 percent of them were saying they didn't support the proposal. We wanted to understand if this was a vocal minority, or was it a majority?"



"We didn't put our heads in the sand. We were able to facilitate a true conversation with our community and get the information to make the best decision possible."



Thought Leader

Dr. Casey Kosiorek

Title

Superintendent



Hilton Central School District is committed to educating each student for success academically, physically, emotionally, and socially.

Industry:

K12 Education

Location:

New York State

Size:

4,500 students

Budget:

\$81 million



The ROI

 **3x**
lower
cost

 **5x**
more
participation

The Hilton team also held two public meetings on the issue of armed security guards. To reduce emotional volatility, there was no opportunity for the public to speak. Dr. Kosiorek and four of his senior administrators did their best to answer a manually collated version of 200 submitted questions over two nights. Staff later posted all questions with answers on the district website.

“Thoughtexchange was much more beneficial,” Dr Kosiorek says. “It captures the thoughts right there, and everyone can just log in and see what’s being said. Thoughtexchange costs pennies on the dollar when you consider the cost of all the staff time involved in setting up those two forums, collating all the information and getting the answers back out through the website.”

The board agreed with Dr. Kosiorek’s recommendation to table the resolution and get more input from the community. They used Thoughtexchange to host an online community discussion (an *exchange*) and held two public forums.

“We had nearly 700 people participate in our Thoughtexchange,” he notes. “Because of the accessibility of the technology, we were able to reach groups that normally might not participate. And, it allowed us to hear some thoughts that might not have been voiced without the exchange.”

From the exchange data, Dr. Kosiorek and the board learned that a majority of participants supported the proposal. However, it also revealed some key concerns they hadn’t considered.

“Although most participants supported armed security, the data was rich enough for us to see that there were other questions we couldn’t answer,” Dr. Kosiorek shares. “There was doubt about how we address implicit bias and other concerns that came forward in the data.”

He adds that the Discover Dashboard made it easy for each of the board members and administrators to dig into the results.

“We found it beneficial to go back and drill down in the data by clicking on the different charts,” Dr. Kosiorek explains. “It helped us have some great conversations as a team and make a better decision.”

The best decision possible

In the end, they decided against arming school security.

“Thoughtexchange helped us understand that we want to take some other steps moving forward,” Dr. Kosiorek explains. “Safety and security mean more than having armed guards. So, now the district is working on identifying gaps in our social-emotional curriculum to make sure our plan is truly comprehensive.”

Dr. Kosioriek adds that making this decision was a powerful leadership moment for both the board and himself.

“We didn’t put our heads in the sand,” he says. “We were able to facilitate a true conversation with our community and get the information we needed to make the best decision possible. In the end, we changed our approach and I think Thoughtexchange provided vital information for that action.

“I can put my head on my pillow at night and know we did everything we can to provide a safe and orderly school for our students.”

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