



How do you feel about the foot patrol partnership with the Brighton Police Department, and what else should we consider as we work to ensure our high school is safe for all students and staff?

We don't know what we don't know. This small but universal truth is where an exchange makes a real difference.

For Dr. McGowan and BCSD, this revelation came as the result of an exchange on police presence within their schools. The initiative was innocent and well-meaning: a partnership with the Brighton Police Department which would keep the students and community safe.

But for some students - especially those in the community who identify as visible minorities - this initiative had the opposite effect of what was intended. Instead, they found themselves feeling more anxious and profiled than they'd been before the partnership.

Dr. McGowan shared just how eye-opening the exchange was for him and his team. "As leaders and as a whole community, we were able to experience the frustration, anxiety and pain being caused by this police presence by engaging in other people's thoughts. Had we engaged the community differently, we likely would have only experienced majority thinking and in a very limited way."

An exchange benefits both sides of the conversation. For Dr. McGowan and BCSD, this meant feedback from people most impacted by the initiative, without those voices being drowned out by a majority opinion. For those impacted, this meant being able to openly share their concerns and frustrations without risk of being singled out by members of the larger community.

"We gained valuable perspective that didn't get overshadowed by the over-represented responses, and in doing so changed our strategy with very little pushback from the community. I believe this is because they experience the feelings themselves by being in the exchange.

There just isn't another platform that forces everyone to actually read and engage in other people's thinking."

So, what advice would Dr. McGowan give to others who are considering asking this kind of question?

"We left the question wide open enough to create a better dialogue about safety overall. This brought more people into the exchange than just those interested in this single topic. It also took attention away a bit from this being strictly an exchange about diversity and equity. In doing so, more people became engaged than otherwise would have."

To quote Dr. McGowan's address to his community when delivering the exchange results

” Thank you for participating and for always being our partners in this work.

We're happy he feels that way. So do we. ❤️



Brighton Central School District is a public school district in New York State, serving nearly 4,000 students. It has over 600 employees and an annual budget of \$76,082,951.

Dr. Kevin McGowan, Ed.D. is the current Superintendent of Schools.