An Equity-Based Review of
Police Involvement in Schools:

The School Resource Officer Program

Louis Riel School Division

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Executive Summary

The Louis Riel School Division (LRSD) Board of Trustees passed a motion on the 2nd of February 2021 to approve an independent equity-based review of the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program in the LRSD. This report represents the findings of the independent researcher hired to conduct the review.

In total, 30 one-on-one interviews were conducted with participants, including students, parents, and school staff, including teachers and administrators. More than 3,100 surveys were completed, which included over 700 written comments submitted by participants.

An equity-based approach was adopted throughout the research process. This included prioritizing the experiences of families who identify as Black and Indigenous, given the current and historic disproportionate negative experiences that these communities face with policing. This approach recognizes that even though a majority of community members may support having police in schools, a portion of the community that includes equity-seeking groups, such as those who identify as Black or Indigenous, will continue to feel alienated from the school community as long as police officers are present, because of the risk of potentially harmful police contact in and outside of schools. This is why the impact of equity-seeking groups must be prioritized in school policies, especially with regard to police involvement.

This review illustrates that, at best, the SRO program is ineffective in its stated goals of "building relationships" and "promoting safety and education." At worst, the SRO program negatively impacts the school space by making many students and parents feel unsafe and targeted. As well, this review shows that police involvement in schools exposes families to further risks, including unwanted and unwarranted police involvement in their lives. Thus, SRO involvement in schools infringes on school policies related to safety, inclusion, and educational well-being.

As a result of the negative experiences of racialized members of the LRSD community and the documented research evidence, this report recommends that the LRSD Board of Trustees immediately end the SRO program. It also recommends limiting any police involvement in schools, collecting data on police involvement by race, and implementing processes for evaluation and accountability of police involvement in schools. Furthermore, the LRSD would benefit from an anti-racist approach throughout its school policies to prioritize engaging Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) and to avoid programs that may have disproportionately negative consequences for these communities.

Scope of the Review

In February 2021, the LRSD Board of Trustees passed a motion to "approve an independent review of the School Resource Officer Program in Louis Riel School Division."[1] Soon after, in March 2021, the author was hired to independently conduct an equity-based review of the SRO program in the LRSD. For more details see Appendix 1. The goal of the review, as summarized by the superintendent of the LRSD, is to look at the "lived experience[s]" including "hear[ing] from members of the community that might not have shared their experiences were it not for the [equity] approach we're taking [in this review]." The LRSD Board of Trustees will consider the findings of this review when deciding the future of the program, "which could include enhancing or cancelling it."[2]

The review report summarizes issues raised by participants and identifies how these issues impact schools and families in the LRSD, especially those from equity-seeking groups. The report also makes recommendations for the LRSD Board of Trustees to consider moving forward.

Context

The School Resource Officer Program in the LRSD

In 2016, the LRSD, in partnership with the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS), began the SRO program which involved one police officer, armed and in uniform, to work in schools. At the time, it was announced that the SRO would be "visiting our high schools; connecting and learning about our school communities and opening lines of communication about the needs of our staff and students." Official communication by the LRSD also emphasized the positive role of the police in the community.[3]

The current contract between the LRSD and the WPS is for a three-year period from September 2020 to June 2023 and involves one SRO working within the school division. LRSD pays the WPS approximately $60,000 annually, in addition to $15,000 "in-kind office space, telephone, and

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[1] See Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the LRSD Board of Trustees (2 February 2021), "Action Item 11". https://www.lrsd.net/SchoolBoard/Trustees/Minutes/2021%2002%2002%20Minutes%20of%20the%20Regular%20Board%20Meeting%20Virtual.pdf

[2] CBC News (7 April 2021). https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/school-resource-officer-police-louis-riel-school-division-winnipeg-1.5977455

[3] However, the program did exist before in the Winnipeg School Division; See "LRSD Welcomes Our First School Resource Officer." https://www.lrsd.net/News/Pages/Welcoming-our-first-School-Resource-Officer.aspx

supplies." The contract states that the SRO will be assigned "primarily to Glenlawn Collegiate; and as a resource to Windsor Park Collegiate." It also stipulates that LRSD will establish a "Management Committee" to "oversee the SRO program." This committee involves two representatives each from the WPS, LRSD, and the community. In addition, it includes "one student from the schools included in the project as appointed by the Division."[4] This committee was established in February 2021.

The contract states that the SRO objectives revolve around the following issues: enhancing "neighbourhood safety," "strategic crime prevention resources and strategies," "strengthening relationships," and "demonstrating potential cost saving for the justice, education and social service systems."[5]

According to the WPS, the SRO's main duties are to: "provide a visible uniform presence," "identify and resolve problems," and "enforce breaches of the criminal code." The SRO also provides "lectures related to social, legal, and police related subjects" and "opportunity counseling and intervention." In addition, the SRO is expected to perform "other related duties as required or any other duty as directed by a Police Supervisor." It is also noted that the WPS "will maintain sole control and direction over the SRO at all times."

One of the few requirements for the SRO position is to "possess the minimum acceptable qualifications listed in the class specifications for the rank of Constable." SROs are also required to successfully complete the "Effective Presentation Course and Cross-Cultural Communication Course before or within six (6) months of assuming the position."[6]

It is important to note a few things related to this contract: First, while one SRO, is a seemingly minor number, they can act as a bridge or connection to a large network of law enforcement in surrounding neighbourhoods. Thus, schools can provide space for an alternative to or protection from broader systems of law enforcement or they can link into them. Second, an amendment to the existing contract was made in February 2021 to "correct the list of schools" by removing references to the "specified schools." This change to the contract "more accurately reflect[s] the agreement" between the LRSD and the WPS. The amending agreement also includes a new statement that the SRO will be "assigned primarily working from the LRSD Clinical Services Unit located at the Monterey Board Office, 50 Monterey Road; and as a resource to the LRSD schools."[7]

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[4] As stated in the Agreement (signed October 2020) and Amending Agreement (signed February 2021) between LRSD and the WPS. LS File No. G.4/2020(185).

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid, Job Description, Constable – LRSD Resource Officer, in Schedule A, LRSD SRO Program.

[7] Amending Agreement, LRSD SRO Program, LS File No. G.1/2021(100).

Snapshot of SRO Program Reviews Across Provinces

In 2017, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) in Ontario, [8] Canada's largest school board, voted to discontinue their School Resource Officer Program after conducting a review that indicated that some students had significant concerns. These concerns included individuals feeling intimidated and/or targeted, the stigmatization of communities, and breaches in privacy.[9] According to recent data by the TDSB, the number of suspensions dropped by 24% and expulsions by 53% in the two years following the removal of the SRO program, suggesting that the presence of SROs is correlated not only with criminalization but with punishment more broadly. [10]

Several other school boards across Ontario have ended their SRO programs, and others are currently under review. The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board in June 2020, the Peel District School Board in November 2020, the Upper Grand District School Board in April 2021, the Waterloo Region District School Board in June 2021, have all cancelled their SRO programs. SRO programs have also been paused and are being reviewed in the Thames Valley District School Board since October 2020, and in the York Region District School Board, starting in March 2021.

School districts in other provinces are also ending or reviewing their SRO programs. The following school boards have all voted to end their SRO programs: the Winnipeg School Division—the largest school division in Manitoba—in March 2021, the Vancouver School Board in April 2021, and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB)—the largest school board in Ottawa—in June 2021. Currently, the SRO program is being reviewed in public school divisions across Alberta and Saskatchewan, including Calgary, Edmonton, and Regina.

It is important to note a few trends observed from this provincial scan of SRO program reviews:

- First, most SRO program reviews have been initiated due to concerns raised by equity-seeking groups and amplified by Black Lives Matter and Defund the Police movements.

- Second, several reviews have found that the SRO program has a disproportionately negative impact on BIPOC students and other equity-seeking groups. This has been documented in several reviews of SRO programs. As recently argued in the report for the OCDSB's SRO program review (2021):

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[8] TDSB (2017). School Resource Officer Program Review. Report No. 11-17-3269.

[9] The review included a survey that was sent to 15,500 students. While 57% said that having an SRO made them feel safer at school, only 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thus, the decision to cancel the SRO program was not based on "majority rules," instead it was based on listening to the experiences of those who had been most affected, even if they were a minority. [9]

[10] Toronto Star (12 November 2020). https://www.toronto.com/news-story/10265563-tdsb-votes-to-expunge-suspension-records-for-early-elementary-students/

It is clear from the information that came forward during the review process, that the current practice of involving police in schools is creating barriers for some Indigenous, Black and marginalized students that prevent them from fully enjoying their right to education without discrimination. It is evident that the way OCDSB is currently using police to regulate behaviour of children in school is disproportionately impacting on children with disabilities and who are Indigenous, racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ [Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Questioning].[11]

• Given the disproportionate impact of policing on equity-seeking groups, most reviews of SRO programs suggest the need to adopt an equity focus that prioritizes the experiences of structurally disadvantaged groups in their school population and not that of the majority. When a review does not center the experiences of equity-seeking groups, it can bias the results by focusing on mainstream experiences that are often white and not negatively impacted by police involvement in schools.

• Last but not least, in most cases where school boards decided to review or cancel the police in school programs, the response from the school and the community was divided. In the schools, BIPOC students and families are often against police involvement in their schools, unlike school staff who are often in support of police involvement. Similarly, while school boards can receive praise by advocates and community groups for adopting a more equitable approach, there also has been a backlash from the respective police services and those who support the police.

School Demographics in the LRSD

The LRSD has 40 schools in total; 9 high schools and 31 elementary schools.[12] Based on data from 2019, there are over 15,000 students in the LRSD.[13] However, it is difficult to estimate the number of racialized or BIPOC students since this information is not publicly available. Some demographic information by language was shared with the author, but language is not an appropriate proxy for racial identity. The lack of data by race on student and staffing is not unique to the LRSD; it is a common issue across school divisions in Winnipeg.[14] Without racial data disaggregation it is difficult "to inform policy or resource allocation decisions;" and

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[11] Office of the Human Rights and Equity Advisor (2021). *Policy and Practice of Police Involvement in Schools.* Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB).
https://ocdsb.ca/UserFiles/Servers/Server_55394/File/News/OCDSB%20News/2021/June/Appendix%20A%20to%20Report%2021-049.pdf
[12] For a list of schools in the LRSD see https://www.lrsd.net/schools/Pages/Schools.aspx
[13] LRSD by the Numbers, https://www.lrsd.net/About-Us/Pages/LRSD-By-The-Numbers.aspx
[14] See Newcomer Education Coalition (2020). *The State of Equity in Education Report.*
https://www.necwinnipeg.org/post/nec-launches-state-of-equity-in-education-report

therefore, makes it more likely that school policies will be developed with white majority instead of "minority" interests in mind. [15]

Despite the lack of data by race in the LRSD, one could expect that racism and poverty are issues faced by many families in its community. Research in the LRSD shows that some families in the LRSD face structural disadvantages in the community including "complex poverty"[16] and "where police are called so many times to the community."[17] Data provided by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority also show that some schools in the LRSD include families with very low-income and living in extreme poverty. Demographic information by race also shows that the St. Vital Community area, a large part of the LRSD, is racially diverse, including Indigenous (11%), visible minority (21%), Immigrant status (20%), and lone-parent families (16%).[18]

Methodology

The Equity-Based Approach to Review

The review process followed an equity-based approach. This approach centers the experiences of equity-seeking groups,[19] such as those who identify as BIPOC and who are often marginalized, misrepresented, and mistreated by the dominant white mainstream society. Contrary to the equality-based approach, where the aim is for all communities to be treated equally or "the same" e.g., by giving a voice to each participant, the aims of the equity-based approach "are far more nuanced in that they take into consideration the varied and evolving realities of these [equity] communities."[20] By focusing on equity, this approach is also "liberationist," concerned with social justice and freedom against oppression and systemic

[15] Kauh, T. J., Read, J. G., & Scheitler, A. J. (2021). The Critical Role of Racial/Ethnic Data Disaggregation for Health Equity. *Population Research and Policy Review: In Cooperation with the Southern Demographic Association*, 40(1), 1–7, p. 4.

[16] See Silver, J. and Sjoberg, K. (2019). *Reducing Poverty to Improve Educational Outcomes: What a School Division and a Local Community Can do Together*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/reducing-poverty-improve-educational-outcomes; Complex poverty is defined as "not only a shortage of income, but also poor housing, poor health including especially the effects of trauma, unemployment, social exclusion, intimate partner violence, racism and colonialism"

[17] Ibid, p. 26 according to a staff affiliated with Woodydell Family Centre.

[18] WRHA (2019). St. Vital, Community Area Profile 2020. https://wrha.mb.ca/files/cha-2019-profile-st-vital.pdf

[19] For a definition, see the Canada Council for the Arts Equity Policy, https://canadacouncil.ca/about/governance/corporate-policies, "Equity-seeking groups are communities that face significant collective challenges in participating in society. This marginalization could be created by attitudinal, historic, social and environmental barriers based on age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, gender, nationality, race, sexual orientation and transgender status, etc. Equity-seeking groups are those that identify barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources due to disadvantage and discrimination and actively seek social justice and reparation."

[20] Dodd, S. J. (2021). *The Routledge International Handbook of Social Work and Sexualities*. New York: Routledge, p. 488.

discrimination.[21] The equity-based approach takes for granted that in order for a policy or program to be fair, it must be fair for everyone not just a numerical majority.

The equity-based approach must be prioritized in a society that produces inequalities,[22] including one where the systems such as education and police continue to fail those they seemingly intend to support. One way these and other systems continue to negatively impact racialized communities is by failing to recognize that policies which benefit a numerical majority may disadvantage others, thus exacerbating injustice and inequality. An equity-based approach better ensures that the safety and well-being of all students are considered and acted upon, not just the experiences of the majority. For these reasons, the equity-based approach has been used by several school boards in Canada to review police involvement in schools.

> Equity is about focusing on the experience of marginalized communities despite the fact that their experiences are not those of the majority. Disaggregating data this way highlights the identities that are often invisible, marginalized, and dismissed, and brings to light discrimination that would otherwise be hidden in a broader data set. When using an equity approach to analyzing data, the experiences of those most impacted by a program or policy, even when those communities represent a smaller percentage of the overall population, are centered or highlighted. This is one way in which systemic racism is identified and dismantled.[23]

Information Collection and Analysis

To gather information, individual interviews and surveys were conducted with students, parents, and school staff, including teachers and school administrators. Participants were asked questions about their experiences with and perceptions of the SRO program. They were also asked about the impact of the SRO program on equity-seeking groups and what they would like to see happen with the program in the future. Surveys and most interviews were conducted online because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Surveys. A survey was designed by the author using Google Forms. The survey included several multiple choice and short-answer questions, and one open-ended question inviting participants to share their experiences and thoughts about the SRO program. The survey was open for a two-week period from April 5 to April 19, 2021. The link for the survey was sent to all students in the LRSD high schools from grade 7 to 12.[24] The survey was also sent to all parents and staff

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Shaheen-Hussain, S. (2020). *Fighting For a Hand to Hold: Confronting Medical Colonialism against Indigenous Children in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 59.

[23] Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB). (2021). *Police Presence in Schools Task Force Report*, p. 5. https://www.ugdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-03-23-Police-Presence-in-Schools-Task-Force.pdf

[24] Elementary schools were excluded since it is assumed that many students would have limited interactions with an SRO.

in the LRSD. All responses submitted were anonymous. The LRSD asked all school principals to help recruit families through email and word-of-mouth.

The survey responses were helpful to understand the perceptions and experiences of students. More importantly, however, the survey allowed for a direct and confidential way for participants to contact the independent researcher. Participants were able to express interest in participating in a conversation with the independent researcher; they could provide their contact information for the researcher to contact them, or they could contact the researcher directly. This was the main method of recruiting families to participate in the interview portion of the review.

In total, 3,117 survey responses were submitted. 428 responses were removed because they were from elementary school students who were not part of the proposed methodology. Seven responses were excluded because the participant type was unclear, and they could not be categorized. Therefore, 2,682 survey responses were used in the analysis. The experiences of Black and Indigenous families were prioritized given that these groups are often cited in the research literature and in the media as being disproportionately targeted by police because of systemic racism. Tables 1 to 5 show demographic information for survey respondents.

Table 1: Survey participants

Category	n	%
Student	963	36%
Parent	1,253	47%
Staff	466	17%
Total	2,682	100%

Table 2: Survey participants by racial identity

	Students		Parents		Staff		Total	
Racial Identity	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Black	115	12%	110	9%	6	1%	231	9%
Indigenous	86	9%	129	10%	56	12%	271	10%
POC	287	30%	285	23%	27	6%	599	22%
White	472	49%	719	57%	374	80%	1,565	58%
Other	3	0%	10	1%	3	1%	16	1%
Total	963	100%	1,253	100%	466	100%	2,682	100%

Table 3: Survey participants by gender

Gender	n	%
Female	1,707	64%
Male	927	35%
Non-binary	34	1%
Other	14	1%
Total	2,682	100%

Table 4: Student survey participants by school

School	n	%
Collège Béliveau	247	26%
Collège Jeanne-Sauvé	44	5%
Dakota Collegiate	433	45%
Glenlawn Collegiate	89	9%
J. H. Bruns Collegiate	67	7%
Louis Riel Arts & Technology Centre	23	2%
Nelson McIntyre Collegiate	23	2%
Windsor Park Collegiate	32	3%
Did not respond	5	1%
Total	963	100%

Table 5: Student survey participants by grade

Grade	n	%
7 or 8	91	9%
9	175	18%
10	236	25%
11	234	24%
12	226	23%
Did not respond	1	0%
Total	963	100%

Interviews. Participants who identified as Black or Indigenous in the surveys and who had direct experiences with police in schools were prioritized for interviews. This focus is important given that these groups face disproportionate targeting by police and their experiences may be different than other racialized groups due to systemic racism and colonialism. In total, 30 one-on-one interviews were held with students, parents, and school staff between April and June 2021. Two interviews were excluded because one parent also identified as a member of the WPS, and one student was excluded because they did not identify with any equity group and had no direct experiences with an SRO. Therefore, 28 interviews were used for the analysis. Most interviews were conducted through an online meeting platform (Zoom) and a few

interviews were done by phone.[25] Interviews ranged in length between 20 minutes and one hour. Each participant received a $10 e-gift card. Representatives from the WPS declined a request to be interviewed. Instead, written responses to the interview questions were submitted for consideration in this review. Table 6 to 8 shows the demographic information for interview participants.

Table 6: Interview participants

Category	n	%
Students	11	39%
Parents	8	29%
Teachers	6	21%
Administrators	3	11%
Total	28	100%

Table 7: Interview participants by racial identity

Category	n	%
Black	6	21%
Indigenous	5	18%
POC	8	29%
White	9	32%
Total	28	100%

Table 8: Interview participants by gender

Category	n	%
Female	17	61%
Male	11	39%
Total	28	100%

The independent researcher audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed all the information obtained from participants in this review. Some interviews were conducted in Arabic and were translated by the researcher. To analyze the data, an inductive approach was used in which the findings emerge from the information and through the researcher's interactions with the information. This approach avoids predetermined theoretical assumptions about the data. To ensure the confidentiality of all participants, any identifying information shared was redacted. As well, details (such as pronouns) that could be used to identify individual SROs were redacted.

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[25] Only one focus group was conducted with two staff, but these were included as one-on-one interviews given the low number of participants that expressed interest and were able to attend the meeting.

Limitations with Recruitment and Community Engagement

Recruiting Black and Indigenous participants for the interviews was difficult. None of the students interviewed identified as Indigenous; all were either Black or persons of colour. Only one of the parents interviewed identified as Black, and three parents identified as Indigenous. Similarly, many families and school staff who responded to the surveys identified as white and did not have direct experiences with SROs or the police.

The low number of Black and Indigenous participants is likely related to the fact that these communities face structural disadvantages that prevent them from engaging in school activities including reviews. Schools in Manitoba often struggle to engage and involve racialized families in the education system due to structural and social factors, including mistrust, racism, and lack of translation and social supports.[26] The Covid-19 pandemic worsened these challenges by limiting community engagement and in-person conversations. Thus, it is possible some participants who have had an experience with an SRO did not engage in this review because the communication came through a school system that they did not have sufficiently meaningful relations with or trust enough to be comfortable sharing potentially sensitive or traumatic information. Studies also show that when topics are considered stigmatizing, the "recruitment of multicultural populations may become a challenge… because participants may be concerned about becoming stigmatized if their participation becomes common knowledge."[27] Given that the schools have aligned themselves with the WPS, if a student had a negative experience with an SRO, it is likely that they would not see an interview with what they may presume to be a school-affiliated researcher as a safe place to share that experience. This is why active collaboration and community-based strategies of involvement are often recommended. Given these constraints, the experiences that were shared should hold exceptional weight.

Consistent with these experiences, research shows that the use of Web-based surveys often results in bias to participate and to complete a survey. Population demographics such as race, age, gender, or socioeconomic status (SES) can influence the potential respondent's accessibility to the internet as well as their motivation to participate in a Web-based survey. Participants who respond to survey research are often more driven, face fewer barriers to access and use of technology, and can be more actively engaged in the issue being examined, which could result in self-selection bias. Thus, surveys are not always successful in targeting underrepresented groups, which is why community engagement is important to reach these groups.[28] One of the ways of overcoming this self-selection bias was to seek out students from underrepresented groups, which meets both the equity orientation of the survey *and* improves its representativeness.

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[26] See Ennab, F. (2017). *Being Involved in Uninvolved Contexts: Refugee Parent Involvement in Children's Education.* CCPA, Manitoba. https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/being-involved-uninvolved-contexts

[27] George, S., Duran, N., & Norris, K. (2014). "A Systematic Review of Barriers and Facilitators to Minority Research Participation among African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders." *American Journal of Public Health, 104*(2), e16–e31. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301706

[28] Jang, M., & Vorderstrasse, A. (2019). "Socioeconomic Status and Racial or Ethnic Differences in Participation: Web-Based Survey." *JMIR research protocols, 8*(4): e11865.

Findings and Discussion

Perceptions of Unsafety: SROs Maintain Systemic Racism in the LRSD Schools

Most interviewed participants in this review expressed concern that the SRO program in the LRSD disproportionately targets BIPOC families. These concerns stemmed from an understanding of the negative role of policing in the community given its relationship to systemic racism. Thus, for many BIPOC families in the LRSD the individual SRO officer cannot be separated from the violent history and current negative impact of policing in communities today. Therefore, many participants felt unsafe and targeted by any police involvement in schools.

Overall, most participants interviewed for this review (71%), including all Black and Indigenous students and parents, and all teachers, indicated that they felt that the SRO program has a negative impact on equity-seeking groups in the LRSD. The remaining participants interviewed (29%), were supportive of police involvement in schools; this group consisted of a few parents and students and all school administrators interviewed. The students and parents that supported the program were from newcomer backgrounds and identified as persons of colour, while all administrators identified as white.

It is important to note that for many participants there was no distinction between the mere presence of an SRO and the behaviour of or experience with an SRO. While the review highlights various experiences and perceptions, the fact remains that even if the SROs were "perfectly" behaved, their presence alone is alienating for many students because of systemic racism in policing. From an equity-based approach, there is no objective "good" or "bad" quality to the SROs to be found. Instead, there are different and sometimes opposite experiences, and schools make decisions about whose experiences matter when they create policies or allocate resources.

Feeling Targeted by SROs

A consistent theme in this review is Black and Indigenous participants indicating that the SRO program makes them feel unsafe. BIPOC participants often used the following words to describe their feelings toward police involvement in schools: "targeted, "fear," "dangerous," "panic," "scared," and "uncomfortable." SRO involvement in school was not welcomed and was seen as a source of injustice and harm. This was expressed by many participants in this review.

> ████████████. So, if I see a police officer I would panic. Even long after the police officer is gone, I would find myself shaking because anything could happen...█████████████ ████████████████████ And most of the time, I don't know [I feel] just scared..." (Black student)

"Putting an officer into school and calling them "School Resource Officers" doesn't do anything. They're still cops. For people like me, people who've had a history of being marginalized with police and the justice system — SROs don't make me feel better. They make me feel watched, monitored, and uncomfortable. I don't like parking by the cop cars [at school]." (POC student)

"I feel like having an officer in schools won't help, it'll just cause fear. There are better ways to deal with 'problem kids'" (Non-binary student)

"No, police simply make everyone uncomfortable. They should be defunded and de-bastardized then I'll think about it." (Black student)

"[Police in school] are dangerous. Keep them away from Indigenous children they only harm them." (Indigenous parent)

"[The SRO program] will negatively impact minorities and less privileged persons creating a level of anxiety and fear." (Indigenous parent)

██ A sense that there is a power figure in the school building, and a sense of fear. There is an armed officer walking around... It is about the one time where somebody doesn't feel safe. The time and the students are becoming more plentiful all the time... It is unsafe program in the school. It does a lot of emotional damage to students." (Black parent)

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"Police in schools make targeted communities feel even more targeted." (White staff)

"I don't think police have a space within schools. There are more negative associations for BIPOC students and staff." (White staff)

"I asked them [students] what they thought of the [SRO] program... They did mention that they didn't feel that a police officer made them feel safe." (White staff)

Several participants explained that for some racialized students it is particularly unsafe for them to see police in schools because they had previous "negative experiences" with police in the

community. In one case, a parent mentioned that they were worried about their children experiencing harm from SROs because the parent themself had had negative interactions with SROs in the past when they were a student.

"Based on statistics, Indigenous people are over-policed. A lot of students might be uncomfortable. Some students I am sure had other experiences outside of school with police officers. I don't imagine seeing a police officer in your school will make you feel comfortable either." (White staff)

In particular, the presence of an armed and uniformed police officer as an SRO in schools was very troubling for some BIPOC participants. Many students and families described feeling unsafe in the presence of weapons, which often symbolize the threat of violence and police brutality. Several students involved in the SRO Management Committee in the LRSD have also raised concerns to administrators and representatives from the WPS about the presence of armed police officers in their schools. These students questioned the need for police to be present with weapons. As one student said, "Police don't need guns in schools because it makes students think of school shootings."[29] Many teachers interviewed also spoke about how students often focus on the guns and tasers of an SRO when the SRO happens to engage with students in the school. Participants expressed their fears and concerns with weapons in the various ways, including:

"The uniform and the weapon represent too much to be ignored and to try to look past that... There's something inherently wrong with this type of weapon that's not used for hunting animals to feed yourself. It's meant to put somebody down." (Indigenous parent)

"If I were to see a [school resource] officer in school halls, I'd find myself watching their weapons even if no threat is imminent..." (Indigenous student)

[29] Based on personal observations during SRO Management Committee, March 23, 2021.

"The inclusion of a police officer which inherently is one of violence... physically in bringing weapons to school... if we are listening to our BIPOC folks in our school[s], and these are children, they say they do not feel safe and they say they do feel targeted. To disregard that and ignore those voices is shameful and embarrassing... It has a very silencing and erasing effect especially on non-dominant voices." (White staff)

Consistent with the feedback shared through interviews and survey comments, the survey data also shows that for many Black and Indigenous students, police involvement did not make them feel safer. For example, 23% of Black or Indigenous student survey respondents indicated that they feel like they are being "targeted or watched" by SROs in schools. Across all racial groups, around 10% of students felt that having an SRO in school makes them feel "uncomfortable to attend the school." For more details see Figure 1 below.

Figure 1, Percent of students who agree that "having an SRO involved in school makes me feel":
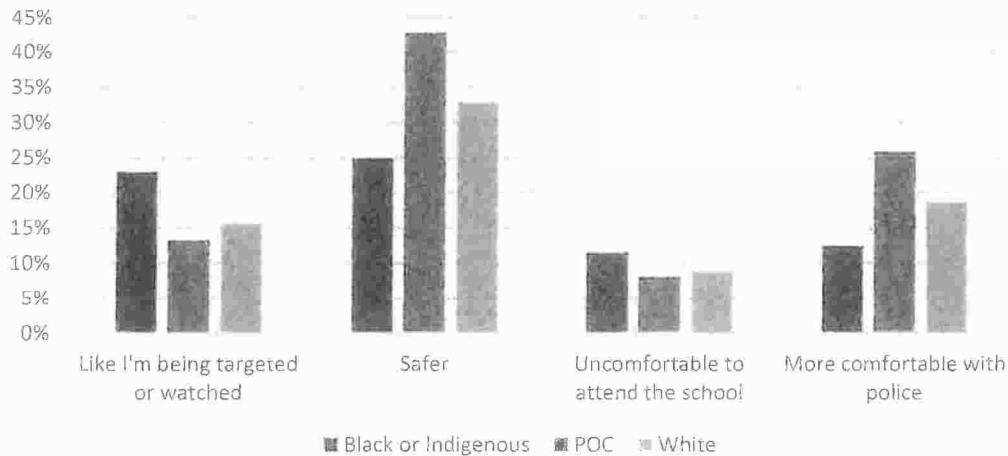
The fears and perceptions discussed above are well documented by research studies. Policing is associated with significant harmful outcomes for the health and well-being of Black and Indigenous communities. Some of these outcomes are direct, such as the disproportionate use of lethal police force against Black and Indigenous communities. While other effects are indirect, including the harm to mental health for entire communities through constant

surveillance and threat of violence.[30] Research on policing in Canada,[31] along with several reviews conducted by school boards across Canada, show that policing racialized students and communities is often associated with experiences of vulnerability, surveillance, and over-policing. SRO programs disproportionately target schools in low-income, racialized, and urban areas.[32] Racialized students and community members are often made to feel not just uncomfortable, but unsafe and targeted by police involvement in schools, even without experiencing a direct encounter with an SRO. This is especially the case for Indigenous or Black families who equate policing with violence, either because of historical or contemporary associations of policing with systemic oppression and genocide. The mere presence of a police officer is enough to generate negative feelings in these students. As an operational review report of the WPS argues, "The distrust and animosity that Aboriginal people in certain areas of the city have of the police are a result of a complex combination of history, and intergenerational poverty and the conflict [or systemic racism] that exists in the urban environment."[33]

Consistent with the research on policing, various reviews of SRO programs in Ontario have showed that non-white students are often made to feel unsafe by police involvement in schools and are more likely to be negatively impacted by it. For example, Black students in Ontario schools with an SRO program often reported that they felt targeted and unsafe with police in schools. Black students also reduced their participation in school activities to limit contact with SROs. Various stakeholders, including students and parents, expressed concerns that school boards were more likely to place police officers in schools with large Black populations due to negative stereotypes of Black students. Many felt that the SRO program in schools had a "devastating effect" on Black students.[34]

Systemic Racism in Policing

Feeling unsafe in the presence of SROs is often associated with systemic racism in policing. Many participants in this review had strongly negative perceptions of the SRO program and were against any police involvement in schools, even if they did not have a direct experience with police in schools. These participants associated policing with systemic racism that had and continues to have a negative impact on racialized communities.

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[30] See Bailey, Z., Feldman, J., and Bassett, M. (2021). "How Structural Racism Works — Racist Policies as a Root Cause of U.S. Racial Health Inequities." *New England Journal of Medicine* 384: 768-773.

[31] See Maynard, R. (2017). *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present.* Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

[32] See Madan, G. R. (2019). "I'm Just a Friend Now": Community Policing in Toronto Schools. In F. Villegas and J. Brady (Eds.), *Critical Schooling: Transformative Theory and Practice* (p. 21–45). Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

[33] Griffiths, C. and Pollard, N. (2013). *Policing in Winnipeg: An Operational Review.* Canadian Police Association, p. 75. https://curtgriffiths.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/WPS-operational-review.pdf

[34] See James C. E. (2019). Community, Schooling, and the Education of Racialized Students: A Postscript. In Villegas F., Brady J. (Eds.), Critical Schooling (p. 327-338). Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

"We feel strongly about not having police in school in general. Historically the context is significant with our Black and Indigenous communities. It continuously perpetuates [the] need for policing for communities which can do it on their own. It really has disenfranchised communities from being able to connect with each other when they are constantly more so under watch and overpoliced... we are not exactly comfortable with someone who is supposed to be being humanized and portrayed as approachable and helpful to our child in a way that is in fact not what they actually do." (Indigenous parent)

"Due to the systemic racism inherent in all mainstream organizations, policing included, having a police officer in schools would be a very different experience for each student depending on their ethnicity. It does not seem that this was taken into consideration when incorporating this program into schools." (Black parent)

"It's another useless waste of money. There is no need at all for an officer to be in a school. Police officers in my opinion and experience are racist and ignorant." (Black parent)

"#WPGPoliceCauseHarm #ACAB #JusticeForEishiaHudson" (Indigenous parent)

"Myself nor my child has not had involvement with SRO, but throughout history and today a lot of BIPOC do not feel comfortable with police as often times than not BIPOC are profiled and experience discrimination." (Indigenous parent)

"I'm also aware of the countless people who know, just as well as I do, that police do more harm than good, and have no place in schools." (Indigenous student)

"I feel the basic line is they [police] do not like people of colour, they do not like different people, I feel I am always a threat and they are always right and most of the time they do not want to hear our opinions and they are here to judge us." (Black student)

▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓. I definitely have a rather anti-police stance on the matter in general." (Indigenous student)

"I don't agree with the way cops work in our society. The system is a joke." (Indigenous student)

"I hate cops, they use their power for wrong things, they need more training." (Black Student)

"[Police] more often scares people than protect." (POC student)

"Police views are very flawed and racist we already have enough problems with racism in the school systems we do not need students to have extra things to stress about like being watched by a police officer inside the school!!! This is a very bad idea in general. If you have students who've already had bad experiences with police officers, they would be more stressed around the police officer!" (White Student).

"I am white, but my children are First Nations. There is no benefit for them in having police in the school. No more police in LRSD schools. #DefundThePolice" (Parent of Indigenous student)

"From a distance it would appear that you're hiring these "officers" to be a link for minority staff and students. I'm not sure if you realize the level of offense this creates among minority students/staff. You're essentially singling out people of the BIPOC community... this is appearing as very "white saviour" behaviour and I think it may need to be re-evaluated... There are way too many white hands in charge of BIPOC issues in not only this school division but society as a whole." (White staff)

"Looking at socio-historic relation of power and why policing exist in society in the first place. RCMP were created to basically control Indigenous people and to look over the slave trade... policing from its very genesis have been that of oppression and control of marginalized and non-dominant groups and we see that perpetuated still every single day. We do not have to look very far for that reality." (White staff)

"I have read enough about the negative effects they [SROs] can have on Black and Indigenous students to be very uncomfortable with the idea." (White staff)

"I do not feel safe with an armed police officer walking around school, especially as a Black person. If we are to get into a situation, I am 99% on the losing end because anything can happen. I think of school as a safe space." (Black student)

[redacted] is not
surprising, especially for Indigenous and Black communities, who face racial bias and racially unequal outcomes in almost all aspects of the criminal legal system, including policing.[35] Black and Indigenous peoples are considered both vulnerable and expendable due to the continuous impact of oppression and systemic racism, including "chronic medical conditions, inadequate access to quality health care, mass incarceration, poverty, food and transportation insecurity and underemployment."[36] Black and Indigenous peoples are more likely to interact negatively with police and are disproportionately impacted by racial profiling e.g., "carding or street checks" that can lead to being arrested and handcuffed.[37] Those inequities "reflect the unfortunate reality in which those with the least trust and confidence in police are those who have experienced the worst outcomes from interacting with police."[38]

In Winnipeg various community organizations, including Police Free Schools Winnipeg and the Police Accountability Coalition, have raised concerns about racial discrimination by SROs against students in Winnipeg,[39] and by police officers against community residents.[40] These allegations are not unique to Winnipeg; there is a "long and well-documented history of racism and abuse towards Indigenous peoples by the justice system and law enforcement in Canada."[41] Today, as in the past, a primary role of police in Winnipeg is to maintain a white settler society through the management and containment of Indigenous and other racialized people. This is evident in the disproportionate targeting of racialized communities with the "more obvious [police]

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[35] See Maynard (2017). *Policing Black Lives*; and Bailey et al. (2021), "How Structural Racism Works".

[36] Douglas, D. (2020). Very Necessary: Pandemic Protests and Pedagogies of Possibility. In A. Rounce and K. Levasseur (Eds.), *COVID-19 in Manitoba: Public Policy Response to the First Wave* (p. 206-212). Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

[37] See Samuels-Wortley, K. (2021). "To serve and protect whom? using composite counter-storytelling to explore black and indigenous youth experiences and perceptions of the police in Canada." *Crime and Delinquency*.

[38] Card, K. G., et al. (2020). "Event-level outcomes of police interactions with young people in three non-metropolitan cities across British Columbia, Canada." *The International Journal on Drug Policy*.

[39] Police Free Schools Winnipeg. https://policefreeschoolswpg.ca/

[40] CBC News (2020). https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-police-board-racism-profiling-1.5737193

[41] Palmater et al. (2019). *A National Action Plan to End Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls*, p. 42.

practices – such as 'red zoning' and 'starlight tours' – to the seemingly mundane operation of searching for the 'usual suspects' who 'fit the description.'"[42]

The current COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities and has resulted in increased use of racial profiling of Black and Indigenous people by police across Canada. In Winnipeg, there were "three officer-involved shootings over a ten-day period during the first wave of the pandemic (8 to 18 April) that resulted in the deaths of three Indigenous people."[43] One of these deaths involved Eishia Hudson, a 16-year-old girl who was fatally shot by police in the community area of the LRSD.[44] This shooting, along with increasing media attention on police violence, had a deep impact on families in the LRSD. For many families it was difficult, if not impossible, to separate police involvement in schools from the violent context of policing.

> "When Eisha Hudson was killed. Our oldest... There was concern for him, there was not a lot of understanding... [of how a] young person who was killed... especially when you have the conditions that are typically there where the 15-year-old was not actively shooting against the police. And, you know, they were driving away or trying to get away or they were unarmed and so forth... as we constantly see with Eishia, and otherwise, we are only left with the tragedy and zero understanding... But the fact that things are set up to ensure that it could happen, but out of an aura of 'safety' or whatnot, and that, to me, it's always so crazy!" (Indigenous parent)

> "My child included has seen people taken down by police officers. Have known people whose family members have died at the hands of police officers. Have seen like brutal things. Even now it is all over the internet. There is such a distrust right now, specifically young black and people of colour of police." (Black parent)

> "As soon as I mentioned that we will be talking about the role of policing in schools they [students] were very vocal about not being in support of having more police officers. They expressed some distrust in police officers. One mentioned George Floyd... Seeing someone with the same colour being killed by police officers is very vivid for them, very upsetting." (White staff)

> "Different groups of people that have had unfortunately really horrible experiences [with police] and things happen not on occasion but consistently... It is at the point where people are even talking about at the water cooler and the staff room... It is interesting this year listening to older students talk about Black Lives Matter in the

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[42] Comack, E. (2019). Policing Racialized Spaces. In H. Dorries et al. (Eds.), *Settler City Limits: Indigenous Resurgence and Colonial Violence in the Urban Prairie West* (p. 175-195). Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, p. 175.
[43] See Douglas (2020). Very Necessary: Pandemic Protests and Pedagogies of Possibility
[44] CBC News (10 April 2020). https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/teen-dies-police-shooting-family-winnipeg-1.5528957

United States and how they really struggled to connect the dots that the same issue happens in their own city." (White administrator)

Experiences of violence and discrimination with police have caused many Indigenous and other racialized communities, to "lose trust and confidence in the Canadian justice system... and police services in general."[45] Recent data from Statistics Canada also show that "visible minorities" in Canada also report less confidence in police and are more likely to report experiencing discrimination when dealing with the police.[46]

Consistent with research findings and experiences of BIPOC communities, recent equity-based reviews of SRO programs have argued that "The police have a long history of discrimination against and targeting of the 2SLGBTQIA+ [Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Androgynous and Asexual] community and were deeply entwined in Canada's colonization of Indigenous communities."[47] For BIPOC families the "underlying concerns of safety, stigma, surveillance, over policing and criminalization" are often intertwined with "concerns about systemic racism, discrimination and bias."[48] Thus, SROs in schools often represent, as police employees, a symbol of surveillance, oppression and injustice, regardless of individual skills or abilities.

As shown above, for many participants the mere presence of an SRO in school is associated with fear and violence. Feeling unsafe and targeted by SROs in schools is related to wider community experiences with systemic racism in policing. The disproportionately negative impact of policing on BIPOC communities is connected to the historic role of policing in eliminating Indigenous resistance and ensuring a white colonial order built on land theft and slavery.[49] For this reason, many participants wanted the SRO program in LRSD to end. As one Black parent says, "Cops rebranded as 'Resource Officers' have no business in schools." However, for some participants, negative feelings associated with SROs resulted from direct experiences with police in schools and were not simply based on previously held perceptions.

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[45] Canada (2019). *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.* [Web Archive] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, p. 717, https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0028038/

[46] Ibrahim, D. (2020). Public perceptions of the police in Canada's provinces, 2019. Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00014-eng.htm

[47] UGDSB (2021). *Police Presence in Schools Task Force Report*, p. 74.

[48] Office of the Human Rights and Equity Advisor. (2021). *Policy and Practice of Police Involvement in Schools*, p. 55.

[49] See Ennab, F. (2010). *Rupturing the Myth of the Peaceful Western Canadian Frontier: A Socio-Historical Study of Colonization, Violence, and the North West Mounted Police, 1873-1905.* (M.A Thesis, University of Manitoba). https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/xmlui/handle/1993/4109; and Maynard (2017). Policing Black Lives.

Direct Experiences of Anti-Indigenous and Anti-Black Racism by SROs in the LRSD

Most participants in this study perceived the SRO program negatively simply because the presence of a police officer in schools was associated with police violence and made them feel unsafe and afraid. For this reason, many participants did not want any police involvement in schools.

[REDACTED]

Consistent with this narrative, other staff mentioned that SROs were attached to "home" or "host" schools with large numbers of students who were racialized and living in poverty. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that the previous SRO agreement between the LRSD and the WPS had previously indicated, until it was removed earlier this year, that the SRO program was assigned "primarily to Glenlawn Collegiate; and as a resource to Windsor Park Collegiate."[51] Since both these schools are in a community with one of the lowest income quintiles in the St. Vital Area,[52] one could also expect the presence of racialized families who would be disproportionately targeted by police involvement in the LRSD.

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[51] For more information see above section Contextual Information.
[52] WRHA (2019). St. Vital, Community Area Profile 2020.

Student experiences in the schools often replicate, if not intensify, the racism they experience outside of schools. As many racialized scholars argue, the practices toward Black and Indigenous students and families are part of:

> A societal cultural structure that places them at a disadvantage in school and in society where preconceived ideas, educational routines, and policing measures – supported by an inequitable socio-political structure – contribute to a web of stereotypes and racial profiling from which it is difficult for the youth to escape.[53]

BIPOC students often have a disproportionate involvement with police in schools and are more likely to face discrimination by SROs in schools and by police in the community.[54] Recently, in 2021, as discussed above, three different SRO program reviews in Ontario have demonstrated that SROs, and at times school staff, have been involved in incidents of discrimination against Black and Indigenous students.[55] One review concluded:

> Participants related experiences that were unequivocally rooted in systemic racism, specifically anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism. These experiences involved psychological harm, physical and verbal violence, and surveillance. The systemic violence that is experienced in community settings is transferred into school spaces when police engage with Indigenous, Black, 2SLGBTQ+ and students living with disabilities. The experiences of trauma are not removed or isolated because the environment has changed from community to school. Having armed police officers in schools has the potential to impact the well-being and development of all youth, but

[53] James, C. E. (2018). "Singled Out": Being a Black Youth in the Suburbs. In L. Foster, L. Jacobs, & B. Siu (Eds.), *Racial Profiling and Human Rights in Canada: The New Legal Landscape* (pp. 133–151). Toronto: Irwin Law.
[54] See Ontario Human Rights Commission (2017). *Under Suspicion: Research and Consultation Report on Racial Profiling in Ontario,* Toronto. http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Under%20suspicion_research%20and%20consultation%20report%20on%20racial%20profiling%20in%20Ontario_2017.pdf
[55] A study on the Peel District School Board also shared evidence of SROs discriminating against Black students. See Chadha, E., Herbert, S., & Richard, S. (2020). *Review of the Peel District School Board.* http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/new/review-peel-district-school-board-report-en.pdf

racialized youth are particularly susceptible to negative impacts given the long-term and widespread problem of systemic racism.[56]

Consistent with the recent reviews of SRO programs and research on policing, this review documented experiences that demonstrate that the SRO program targets Black and Indigenous students in schools. For these participants, policing is seen as racially coded and makes their bodies targets for surveillance and punishment.

Gender Discrimination by SROs

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Some school staff felt that it was not safe or appropriate for police to discuss issues related to sexual exploitation, consent, and internet safety with youth. They suggested that SROs, unlike other trained community workers or advocates, lacked the competency to work with youth in a safe way that is inclusive of all abilities, genders, and preferences. They felt that individuals associated with an institution that is violent against Black and Indigenous women and children should not be the ones to offer support to youth, especially to victims of sexual violence.

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Furthermore, teachers also recognized that talking to youth requires an empowering and inclusive approach, one that doesn't blame or victimize women and girls or attempt to educate young children through fear-based tactics (e.g., "stranger danger").

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[56] Office of the Human Rights and Equity Advisor (2021). *Policy and Practice of Police Involvement in Schools*, OCDSB, p. 10.

For similar reasons, many participants recommended defunding the SRO program and reinvesting in social supports for equity-seeking groups. For more information, see the discussion below under recommendations.

It is important to note that the devaluation and mistreatment of Indigenous and Black communities by police is a systemic issue in Canada, one with "a long and well-documented history of racism and abuse."[57] The government of Canada continues to use the police "to implement and enforce laws and policies designed to control, assimilate, or eliminate Indigenous Peoples."[58] It has also been noted that when it comes to policing, the intersection of sexual and racial discrimination:

> Combines to create a unique form of racially targeted and sexually violent treatment of Indigenous women and girls by police. Not only are Indigenous women and girls less likely to have their claims of sexual assault taken seriously by police, but they have the added fear of police committing acts of sexualized violence against them.[59]

Indigenous and Black girls and women are often "overpoliced and overincarcerated as potential offenders, yet under-protected as victims of crime."[60] For these reasons, the National Action Plan for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2021) had recently emphasized, "It is vitally important that… police services be more accountable for their treatment of families and survivors, and for how they investigate missing and murdered First Nations women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people."[61]

Concerns related to gender violence and discrimination also apply to SRO programs. As a recent review of SRO program in Ontario argues, "The data results show a clear correlation between sexuality and the likelihood of feeling discriminated against by an SRO with 2SLGBTQIA+ students at an increased risk compared to their Non 2SLGBTQIA+ student counterparts."

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[57] Palmater et al. (2019). *A National Action Plan to End Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls*, p. 26; Ennab (2010). *Rupturing the Myth of the Peaceful Western Canadian Frontier*, p. 100

[58] Canada (2019). *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, Volume 1a, p. 717. https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1a-1.pdf

[59] Ibid, p. 45.

[60] Ibid, p. 121; Maynard (2017). *Policing Black Lives*, p. 128.

[61] Canada (2021). *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People National Action Plan: End Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People*, p. 36. https://mmiwg2splus-nationalactionplan.ca/

Students who identified as 2SLGBTQIA+ were more likely to have interactions with police and more likely to feel discriminated against by SROs than other students.[62]

Criminalizing BIPOC Students and Protecting Privilege

Some participants in this review expressed concerns that police involvement in schools can make minor things "too serious" and can result in students receiving harsher discipline, including criminalization. ██

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Research shows that police involvement in schools puts BIPOC students in a vulnerable position and exposes them to more negative encounters with police that have been proven to have psychological and "criminogenic" effects on youth.[63] This means interactions with police "may predict engagement in delinquent behavior."[64] BIPOC students, including those who are low-income and undocumented, face increasing surveillance and harsher disciplinary measures, including criminalization at high disproportionate rates compared to white students.[65] In addition to inducing criminal engagement, negative involvement with police erodes student trust in educators and damages their self-esteem.[66] After all, since SROs are part of the police,

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[62] UGDSB (2021). *Police Presence in Schools Task Force Report*, p. 63.

[63] Del, T. J. et al. (2019). "The Criminogenic and Psychological Effects of Police Stops on Adolescent Black and Latino boys". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 116*(17), 8261–8268.

[64] Ibid, p. 8262.

[65] See Maynard (2017). *Policing Black Lives*, p. 217.

[66] See Oluo, I. (2018). *So you want to talk about race*. Seal Press.

their perceptions of the students they interact with is influenced by policing culture. Thus, racial biases are a key part in an SRO's discretionary decisions regarding investigations and arrests. SROs, like other police officers, are likely to assume that the actions of BIPOC students are more harmful, and BIPOC students are assumed to be more accountable for their actions.[67] Research shows that:

> Police presence in schools has made Black and other racialized youth increasingly vulnerable to criminalization... police are frequently called into Toronto schools, and will often handcuff black youth for relatively minor infractions.[68]

Experiences like these pushed several school boards in Ontario to end the SRO program in their schools. Last year, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario have argued that race was a factor in an incident where two SROs from the Peel Regional Police handcuffed a Black six-year-old girl's hands and feet, leaving her shackled for 28 minutes.[69] In June 2021, a review of SRO programs in Ottawa schools have also shown that BIPOC students are disproportionately targeted by SROs and are more likely to be criminalized by receiving harsher discipline.[70] Similarly, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board in Ontario completed a comprehensive literature review of research in both Canada and the United States and concluded that:

> The majority of research points to the link between challenging student behaviour and the deeper systemic, personal, family and community difficulties they face daily. In addition, the research points out the fatal flaw in the program - it puts police in the lives of at-risk youth and equips them with one strategy to address behaviour: the criminal justice system... [71]

Concerns like these have also been highlighted by an advocacy group in Winnipeg that shared numerous statements from students who felt targeted by police involvement in schools. They also shared stories by teachers who were encouraged to bring in SROs to deal with minor student behaviours.[72] A review for the WPS also documented how police officers can rely on SROs to gather information on students in schools.[73] Police involvement in schools can allow for collaboration with other branches of law enforcement, such as the Child and Family Services and the Canadian Border Services, which can result in children, especially those who are

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[67] Zahreddine, D. (2019). "School Resource Officers: Not a Resource." *The Society*: Sociology and Criminology Undergraduate Review, Vol. 04, p. 6-9.

[68] Maynard (2017). *Policing Black Lives* p. 220; and Mink, J. (2019). *Teaching Resistance: Radicals, Revolutionaries, and Cultural Subversives in the Classroom*. USA: PM Press, p. 113.

[69] Brampton Guardian (2 March 2020). https://www.bramptonguardian.com/news-story/9873004--a-clear-overreaction-human-rights-tribunal-issues-ruling-in-case-where-peel-police-handcuffed-six-year-old-black-girl/

[70] Office of the Human Rights and Equity Advisor (2021). *Policy and Practice of Police Involvement in Schools*, OCDSB, p. 51.

[71] Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (2021). *Police School Liaison Program Literature Review*, p. 17. https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/meetings/Standing-Committee-Agenda-1622755995.pdf

[72] See Police-Free Schools Winnipeg, https://policefreeschoolswpg.ca/

[73] Griffiths and Pollard (2013). *Policing in Winnipeg: An Operational Review.*

racialized or without legal immigration status, to be criminalized and experience significant harm. The SROs and all other community policing initiatives are important intelligence-gathering opportunities for police. When this intelligence is shared with social services, it makes accessing social services riskier for those at higher risk of police scrutiny and criminalization.

Police officers are not trained in the same caring or relational approaches as other social or educational professionals like teachers, counsellors, etc. Police have a different 'toolbox' for responding to problems. Police involvement undermines the educational achievements of BIPOC students and pushes them into the criminal justice system. The process is often referred to as the "school-to-prison pipeline" or net widening, which is the increased formal processing of individual contacts with the law through the criminal justice system.[74] This trend has been associated with zero-tolerance practices that forcefully push students, especially those who are racialized and underprivileged, out of the school. Several participants in this review referenced the link between the SRO program and criminalizing BIPOC students.

> "School resource officers suggest that students are not trusted to be free in spaces where they should feel safe. These officers don't do jobs teachers could not do and the 'law enforcement' type jobs they are trained for should not be an ominous overtone at the school as they lumber around the school treating students as suspects... There is more research showing that this type of involvement, type casting, or stereotyping of specific children. Certain children are viewed differently by the police force. The data is so overwhelming at this point." (Black parent)

> "I think it will negatively impact the lives of minority group in the school and cause lots of problems that can be solved. People will get charged for things when we could have just talked it out and solved it." (Black student)

> "I think that a lot of that what they [SROs] describe as 'community building' is a facilitation of criminalization, information gathering and targeting of racialized and marginalized groups." (Parent of student with disability)

> "Involving police at school makes little teenage issues into big issues and makes things way too serious." (POC student)

> "I feel like officer are to keep white peoples safe and target people of colour." (Black Student)

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[74] See Maynard (2017). *Policing Black Lives*, p. 221; and Zahreddine (2019). "School Resource Officers: Not a Resource".

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"We know there are poor educational outcomes and the school to prison pipeline is more of a thing for Indigenous and Black students, this is observed from a phenomenon that no one is making up." (White staff)

"I feel children are children, if they break the law, I don't think they need law enforcement because I do not believe in criminalizing children. The student... especially if there was a peer involved, they wouldn't tell on a peer. They used the word 'snitch'. They would not snitch on a classmate... because they just wouldn't do that." (White staff)

Even when there is no racial bias by police or a negative outcome with the justice system, the very presence of police in schools contributes to an "ethics of punishment," where students are monitored and controlled by police, which reinforces existing inequities.[75] Furthermore, when investments in policing is paired with divestment from education funding and larger teacher to student ratios, the police gain more power to respond to problems just by virtue of a weakening of other response mechanisms

As shown above, this review shows that many participants are concerned with how police involvement in schools promotes more risks for BIPOC students, which can have a damaging psychological and social impact on youth. [████████████████████]

[████████████████████████████████████] While this can have a disproportional impact on BIPOC students, it can also affect all students. [████████████████]

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Weaponization of SROs by School Administrators

Similar to the criminalization of students by SROs, school administrators may also initiate and influence the involvement of SROs in situations involving BIPOC students. Some participants felt that an administrator, just like an SRO or any other white or privileged staff, is prone to racial bias and can also choose to quietly "brush things under the carpet" or to overuse police or the threat of calling the police against BIPOC students "to explain the consequence or scare them."

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[75] See Villegas, F. J., & Brady, J. (Eds.). (2019). *Critical Schooling: Transformative Theory and Practice*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

"What is true there is a racial bias, there is a likelihood of swinging in the other direction. It is not if you do not comply, it is if you are white and have money. This is something that is reinforced by the SRO program." (Indigenous parent)

The weaponization of police by the state and by settlers against Indigenous and racialized people is a historic and contemporary issue in settler colonies such as Canada.[76] A recent review of SRO programs in Ottawa schools has shown that police officers are "being used to scare children in the progressive discipline process" and that school administrators and parents were using their discretion to disproportionately involve police in responding to the behaviour of Indigenous, Black and marginalized children."[77] Similarly, in the Great Toronto Area, it was found that the "threats of calling police were regularly used to manage the behaviour of children in elementary school."[78] The involvement of police in these cases were often initiated and influenced by school administrators. As research on SRO programs in Canadian schools explains:

> Some SRO practices in Canadian schools are not because the police officer wants it that way but because school administrators do... This can leave police being directed by the school to engage in practices that may be consistent with the administrator's racial bias rather than the SRO's. This is the complexity of systemic racism.[79]

The power relations and dynamics between SROs and administrators are not surprising. Research shows that most, if not all, of the discussions involving SROs don't involve students.[80]

Consistent with this evidence, the survey data from this review shows that just over one-third of student and parent survey respondents know about the SRO program in the LRSD, whereas 84% of staff respondents were aware of the SRO program. Furthermore, about 10% of student and parent respondents indicated that they interacted with an SRO a "few" or "many" times, as opposed to 44% of staff respondents. Many students and parents had never heard of the SRO program before completing the survey for this review in 2021; some of these participants were unhappy to hear about the police involvement in schools. As one parent of colour said, "I am certain many parents are unaware about it... The role hasn't been well advertised [and it is] neither affective [sic]." Other participants expressed "outrage" that funds are being "wasted" on a program with no impact.

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[76] See Maynard (2017). *Policing Black Lives*.

[77] Office of the Human Rights and Equity Advisor (2021). *Policy and Practice of Police Involvement in Schools*, OCDSB, p. 28.

[78] James, C. E., Turner, T., Tecle, S., & George, R. (2017). *Towards Race Equity in Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the GTA*. Toronto: York University, p. 57.

[79] NACTATR (2020). *Police in Schools: Laying the Foundation for a Trauma-Informed Assessment of School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs*. https://nactatr.com/news/alert-sro.html

[80] Broll, R., & Howells, S. (2019). "Community Policing in Schools: Relationship-Building and the Responsibilities of School Resource Officers". *Policing*.

[redacted]

The weaponization of police against BIPOC people is a common occurrence that the LRSD needs to be aware of. For example, there have been numerous cases in Ottawa where police or by-law officers were called by white women against BIPOC community members for very trivial things. Earlier this year, a school board trustee harassed and made racially insensitive remarks to a Black teenager for playing basketball. The trustee also reported the young man to by-law and suggested he could end up in jail. A few months later, several other BIPOC people were falsely reported to police by other white women for doing everyday activities such as walking or bicycling. Given these experiences, a recent petition is seeking to end the "weaponization of 911 calls" against racialized communities.[81]

Perpetuation of Oppressive School Space

As shown above, for many BIPOC students public schooling in Canada is not a "neutral" experience. In fact, BIPOC students are "exposed to both systemic and individual hostility within the education system, as well as violence from their peers, school officials, and teachers."[82] Research in Manitoba shows that BIPOC students face harsher discipline including suspensions, have higher drop-out rates, and are being disproportionately streamlined into lower-level educations or jobs.[83] The higher levels of discipline and policing aimed at Black and Indigenous students through the SRO program maintains, formally and informally, an unsafe and carceral learning space in schools. [redacted] Thus, the SRO program maintains an oppressive school culture for BIPOC students, creating as one staff says, "less comfortable and less of a safe space to come every week." Armed police officers were often associated with a culture of oppression and fear since BIPOC students are more likely to be negatively impacted by police involvement inside and outside their schools.

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[81] End the weaponization of 911 against BIPOC in Ottawa. (2021). https://www.change.org/p/enforce-legislation-to-end-racially-motivated-911-calls-in-ottawa

[82] Maynard (2017). *Policing Black Lives*, p. 226.

[83] See Ennab (2017). *Being Involved in Uninvolved Contexts: Refugee Parent Involvement in Children's Education*, p. 2.

[black redaction marks]

> "I think it could make people more scared to be there especially people of colour and black people. I would be scared to be there. I already fear police as it is. Even in public I try to avoid them if possible. I see school as my safe place. So, to have someone I fear coming to school where I consider it safe, it is not going to be a safe space for me, especially with an SRO." (Black student)

Given that many participants felt that the SRO program creates feelings of being unsafe and an oppressive school space, some participants felt that police involvement in schools negatively impacted their academic performance. Police involvement in schools was seen as "disruptive" and made it more difficult for students to "focus" during class and for teachers to continue with their lesson plans.

> "Inside my school it is like I can't focus [when the SRO is in the school]. I am always looking behind my shoulder, like what is going to happen and would I be okay and everything." (Black student)

> "I will be more scared [in the presence of an SRO]. I will definitely be more anxious. There were times where I found myself in like the vicinity of a police officer and I had like mini panic attacks. I don't feel comfortable. I would probably be hesitant to come to school when there is one patrolling the hallways." (Black student)

> "I feel distracted and anxious in the cafeteria when they [SROs] walk in. They disrupt the environment and make it harder to focus in class. The rate of violent crimes in schools is already very low, so why do we need uniformed officers?" (POC student)

Instead of enhancing the learning environment or providing support to students, police involvement in schools had the opposite effect; it made school feel unsafe and made it more difficult for students to focus and learn, regardless of when, why, or how police were involved in schools. This in turn had a negative impact on students' well-being and academic performance. The police, as discussed above, is an institution associated with systemic racism through over-policing and under-serving racialized communities in today's context, and in the past by forcing children into residential schools. Thus, it is difficult, if not impossible, for many participants to express solidarity towards Indigenous peoples *and* prioritize relationships with the police in schools.

In sharp contrast to most interview participants, who noted that police involvement in school is harmful for students, several school staff (especially administrators), and some BIPOC parents felt that police involvement in school is needed for safety reasons or to promote positive perceptions towards police. These respondents had perceived SROs to be helpful in situations that involved violence, mental health crises, or substance use, and required an intervention.

> "Years ago, I saw a young man run into [name of school redacted] from a parked car with an iron bar in hand... If there is a School Resource Officer at the school, they can hopefully intervene in situations like this." (Black parent)

> "With the recent Asian hate issue in Canada, I think the program would give a sense of security for Asian students... [but] not in elementary schools." (POC parent)

> "I feel okay with police in school... You see students drinking and smoking drugs... in school, I worry about my daughters, two teenage girls. I get worried when they go in and out of school." (POC parent)

> "If we are looking for something where your thought is someone is going to be charged for something there has been an assault or something to that degree, then the SRO in that sense would play a role as a guide so what is the next step and what do you do... If the SRO need to be called that have to be filtered through me, the principal, to know that the call was being made... [SROs] are available like that on a dime, if I call the police and have them come, you might be waiting for them, and then what are we going to do with that?" (White administrator)

All the above comments are about hypothetical or assumed roles for the SRO, not actual instances of the SRO helping with those situations. Often people imagine the police as useful in ways that they are not in practice. Several administrators appreciated the "direct contact" with SROs who they felt were an "important partner" to help guide, provide information on things in the community with their "spidy sense," or intervene on "a particular situation" related to school safety. SRO involvement was preferred over another WPS officer not familiar with the schools, because it provided a "better," "quicker," and a "more consistent way to have a conversation with community police." Yet, as demonstrated by research, policing is not effective in addressing crime and promotes the disproportionate targeting of BIPOC students. Policing does not and cannot prevent crime, and "can in fact only lead to increased violence."[84]

Many other participants in this review disagreed with using this false safety narrative to justify police involvement with BIPOC students and families. Instead, they argued that SROs are not

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[84] See Walcott, R. (2021). *On Property*. Ontario: Biblioasis; and

able to form positive relationships with participants. ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

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"I have had a small handful of experiences with SROs in classrooms. One of which was particularly negative and others in which I don't feel students would've taken anything positive away from… having them in our schools creates an uncomfortable and negative environment. LRSD aims to foster a community of belonging and I don't think SROs add to that in any way." (White staff)

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Participants did not feel that SROs are able to build relationships with staff or students, especially when ███

"They always come in dressed in their gear and their uniform... It is not associated with community building. If there is an SRO in the school, they [students] feel there is... something bad is in the school like drugs or that happened... gives them a bad impression of their school because if they only associate the police officer with something negative then they end up viewing the school as a bad school not a good school, which creates that dynamic." (Indigenous staff)

For some participants, especially school staff, the limited or lack of response from an SRO was not necessarily related to a negative experience or perception, but due to the fact there is only one SRO for all schools in the LRSD, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to build relationships and "make bonds with students" across the division. As another school staff explained,

> "With 40 schools it is impossible to make bonds with students especially those that come from minority groups that may have a distrust of authority. It sometimes takes guidance councillors a semester to earn the trust of a student, therefore I cannot see how an officer is expected to do the same task in so little time." (White staff)

While many participants felt that the SRO program is ineffective in its stated goals, some BIPOC participants went further by expressing fear and concern about the negative impact of policing in schools. As discussed above and argued by research studies, SROs can increase the "potential for serious harms" for students not because of individual problems with officers, but because "these potential harms to students are an institutional problem... they stem from the official role, obligations, and training of police officers, not from

deficits of individual SROs."[85] Thus, discussing police involvement in schools through the "safety narrative" is at odds with most research and review findings on the negative impact of SRO programs. SROs, as representatives of injustice and violence, are a very real threat to many BIPOC students, despite their individual skills or abilities.

It is noteworthy that many participants are aware that there are dominant pro-police voices in the LRSD that justify the SRO program by using the narrative of 'safety' to either push for more police involvement or to deflect criticism away from police in schools. These participants rejected the safety narrative because this narrative ignores or misrepresents the lived experiences of BIPOC communities in the LRSD.

> "A teacher in my school, when I spoke to them on the subject, said they [the SRO] will protect us in case there is a dangerous person in school. I do not think this is a valid reason to have a school resource officer in school... putting someone there to watch for danger is essentially asking for it in my opinion." (Black student)

> "It seems a false/positive experience unless the cop is also ensuring context is being provided at all times. Namely - they will always protect themselves/each other over that of the public." (Indigenous parent)

> "I think it is shameful and an embarrassment that we have a police officer carrying guns and weapons in schools. So much research out there that shows it makes white people feel safer and that is about it. It is always a Eurocentric view that police make school safer, and I think it makes things 'safer' from a colonial and capitalist, property and ownership [perspectives]. If we decenter those things, we see that police do not make this [school division] a safer space for students... I am critiquing arguably that propaganda or copaganda. Just thinking of the SRO program, how that continues to perpetuate the idea that police officers are your 'friend', for your safety, to build relationships and make community better and stronger." (White staff)

> "I would just like to say that one BIPOC voice expressing that they are harmed by this program should hold more weight than any white person's voice telling you they feel safer with an SRO. If you say you feel safer with an SRO in the school, why? What are you safe from? If there were no SRO in the school, how would you feel? Unsafe? If so, why? We need to get to the root of the issue." (White staff)

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[85] Kupchik, A. and Bracy, N. (2009). To Protect, Serve, and Mentor? Public Officers in Public Schools. In T. Monahan and R. Torres (Eds.). *Schools under Surveillance: Cultures of Control in Public Education*. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, p. 34-35.

Echoing the experiences raised by many BIPOC students and families in this review, recent reviews of SRO programs in Canada have consistently shown that BIPOC and other marginalized students critique the assumed correlation between police presence and overall school safety by raising other matters such as psychological, physical and emotional safety.[86] Police in schools "disproportionately affects minority children, acts as a form of net widening, and infringes on youth rights."[87] Research, as well as various calls for action, also show that policing is inherently violent and disrupts equity-seeking communities in ongoing ways e.g., over-policing and surveillance.[88] Even when looking at law enforcement related to criminal matters, only a small proportion of law enforcement activity is related to criminal matters; most calls police receive do not pertain to incidents involving violence and physical harm, and when they "do respond to instances of harm, they often arrive too late to be able to interrupt harm in progress."[89] The problem is not police training or police methods. The problem is policing itself.[90]

From an equity or a "structural racism lens" the negative outcomes associated with policing have "served their intended purpose of social control of the Black [and Indigenous] population, which has long been enforced by violence."[91] In the school context, police involvement keeps BIPOC students under surveillance that has the effect of affirming their status as second-class citizens—or as non-citizens in the case of students with undocumented and temporary

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[86] Office of the Human Rights and Equity Advisor (2021). *Policy and Practice of Police Involvement in Schools*, OCDSB, p. 7; see also UGDSB (2021). *Police Presence in Schools Task Force Report*.

[87] Zahreddine (2019). "School Resource Officers: Not a Resource".

[88] See Kaba, M. (ed.) (2020). *What's Next? Safer and More Just Communities Without Policing*. Interrupting Criminalization: Research in Action, Project NIA. https://www.interruptingcriminalization.com/whats-next

[89] Kaba (2020). *What's Next? Safer and More Just Communities Without Policing*, p. 15

[90] Vitale, A. S. (2017). *The End of Policing*. Verso.

[91] Bailey et al. (2021). "How Structural Racism Works", p. 770.

migration statuses—and as people whose experiences are not as important as white and privileged students. For these reasons, various advocacy and community groups such as Black Lives Matter in the United States and Idle No More in Canada have argued that the public police are illegitimate and created through the oppression of BIPOC groups.[92] This is why police reform is "morally untenable;" reform measures do not address the conditions that continue to result in negative outcomes for BIPOC communities.[93]

To achieve effective change, we need to equitably address public safety "without necessarily requiring a police response."[94] The implementation of alternatives to policing that promote "real safety" for equity groups, such as drug legalization, regulation, and harm reduction instead of the policing of drugs, has led to declines in crime, police spending, and inequality.[95] For these reasons, earlier this year a coalition of over 250 organizations and 3,000 individuals from across Canada signed "A Historic Declaration to Divest from Policing and Prisons and Build Safer Communities for All."[96]

Despite this well-documented research evidence and community support, the police, and other dominant voices use the common misleading and silencing refrain that police promote "safety" by reducing, if not preventing, crime. As criminologists have argued, narratives like this are used by police in Canada "as mechanisms to flaunt social capital and to boost perceptions of legitimacy and benevolence."[97] These narratives advance the interest of police by justifying involvement of police in schools and humanizing individual officers while "obscuring the material reality" that is negatively impacting the interest of students.[98] For this reason, institutions such as the police are usually well regarded by privileged members of society as part of the "status quo." Any negative experiences with police, if they are even acknowledged, are not necessarily recognized as the intended outcome of policing, but rather as "unintended" or "accidental" outcomes.

Research also shows that while some newcomer families may not trust authorities like the police because of pre and post migration experiences with authorities, other newcomers may have normalized police response as an option in their lives. Some newcomer families also may not be aware of the violent history of policing in Canada and may assume that the police can provide 'safety' from racialized poverty. Many newcomer families who live in Winnipeg's inner

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[92] Walby (2019). "Exploring Police Violence" p. 366.

[93] Maynard, R. (2020). "Police Abolition/Black Revolt". *TOPIA*: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies, Number 41, p. 70-78.

[94] Bailey et al. (2021). "How Structural Racism Works", p. 770.

[95] Harm Reduction TO. *Drug* Decriminalization and Legalization. https://harmreductionto.ca/decriminilization-legalization

[96] Choosing Real Safety, https://www.choosingrealsafety.com

[97] Walby, K., and Gumieny, C. (2020). "Public Police's Philanthropy and Twitter Communications in Canada." *Policing: An International Journal* 43 (5): 755–68.

[98] Madan (2019). "I'm Just a Friend Now": Community Policing in Toronto Schools," p. 23.

city are concerned about safety in their neighborhoods, and despite living in proximity to Indigenous peoples and sharing common histories and experiences, sometimes express racism towards individuals who identify as Indigenous. They associate crime, mental illness, and poverty with Indigeneity.[99]

Consistent with this research, the survey data shows that white and POC participants are more likely to support the "safety narrative" of police involvement in schools. Referring to Figure 1, while over 40% of persons of colour and 30% of white student respondents agreed that having an SRO makes them feel "safer," only 25% of Black or Indigenous student respondents felt the same. Similarly, only 12% of Black or Indigenous student respondents agreed that having an SRO in schools made them feel "more comfortable with police," whereas 26% of persons of colour and 19% of white student respondents agreed with this statement. For more details see Figure 1 above (pg. 17).

Recommendations

End Police Involvement in Schools

Based on the findings of this review, it is recommended to end the SRO program in the LRSD. The evidence gathered through this review is clear. ████████████████████████████ ██ ████████████████████████ A safe and secure learning environment is a precondition for effective learning. Therefore, feelings of insecurity among BIPOC students due to police presence will have a disproportionately negative impact on their ability to learn. This is an unfair and unacceptable outcome for a public school system. ████████████████ ██████████████████████ and the negative perceptions toward policing, many participants strongly indicated that they wanted to immediately end the SRO program.

> "There's no place for police officers in the school setting especially considering the colonial impacts of policing brown and Indigenous bodies i.e., Indian agents." (Indigenous parent)

> "There won't be one community that would seek to reinforce any of the current law enforcement structure." (Indigenous parent)

> "I don't necessarily see that they are doing what they say they are doing... And maybe instead of coming to the students to change our perceptions they should just do better in general. It is not our fault that we see what we see." (Black student)

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[99] See Gyepi-Garbrah, J. et al. (2014). "Indigeneity, Immigrant Newcomers and Interculturalism in Winnipeg, Canada." *Urban Studies* 51 (9): 1795–1811.

"I would rather have it [SRO program] end." (POC student)

"Statistically schools in Winnipeg do not have security issues that warrants police presence." (Black parent)

"I recommend that they [the LRSD administration] terminate the program permanently, that they make a public statement regarding the evidence of harms, so that there is no equivocation in terms of the reasons for the termination of the program. I wouldn't want to see police involved in schools in some alternate form." (White parent)

"SROs in no shape or form do not belong to schools... [We need to work towards] abolishing police in society." (White staff)

Since the SRO program is harmful for some students and families, its continuation would violate the LRSD's own mission to "provide a safe, inclusive, and engaging environment."[100] Having police involved in schools will also have the effect of making any anti-racist statements or actions by the LRSD to ring hollow, since allowing police involvement in schools is associated with real harmful experiences.

Defund SRO Program and Reinvest in Social Supports for Equity Groups

Given the historic and contemporary harms of policing, as well as increasing police budgets, various community and advocacy groups in Winnipeg are demanding the defunding of the police and the reinvestment of those resources in community supports. An advocacy group, Justice 4 Black Lives Winnipeg, has received over 120,000 signatures on its petition that demands to make Winnipeg safer for BIPOC groups by defunding the WPS and reinvesting instead in "food, housing, transportation, healthcare, mental health support, harm reduction services, spiritual supports, addictions supports, free extensive community activities, etc."[101] There are also various community groups such as Winnipeg Police Cause Harm[102], the Police Accountability Coalition[103] (which consists of over 100 community organization in Winnipeg), and Police Free Schools[104] that are demanding a reduction or complete cessation of police involvement in community and school spaces. Similarly, scholars from the Department of Criminal Justice in the University of Winnipeg, including Dr. Bronwyn Dobchuk-Land and Dr.

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[100] LRSD. Our Vision, Mission, Values and Motto. https://www.lrsd.net/About-Us/Who-We-Are/Pages/default.aspx
[101] Justice 4 Black Lives Winnipeg's Demands to Make Winnipeg Safe for All BIPOC. https://www.change.org/p/the-city-of-winnipeg-justice4blackliveswinnipeg-s-demands-to-make-winnipeg-safe-for-all-bipoc
[102] https://winnipegpolicecauseharm.org/
[103] Police Accountability Coalition (2020). *Community Based Organizations Call for Police Accountability and the Reallocation of Resources.* https://spcw.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Community-Organizations-Call-for-Police-Accountablity-and-the-Reallocation-of-Resources-Updated-October-12-2020.pdf
[104] https://policefreeschoolswpg.ca/

Kevin Walby, have argued for the need to defund the police and reinvest in community-based alternatives.[105]

Consistent with the research findings, many participants want the SRO program to end and funds to be reinvested in social supports. Instead of investing in policing, investments can made into social and educational alternatives that promote the safety and well being of all students, especially for equity-seeking groups. Participants suggested supporting students and families by investing in helpers or professionals such as elders, peers, teachers, support workers, etc. who are safer for students and more appropriate people to advocate and offer guidance or education.

> "Get rid of it! Replace it with guidance councillors, social workers, people who provide legitimate emotional support because people don't become criminal. Young people don't grow up saying I am going to be a criminal, they become criminal because they are not receiving other kinds of supports whether it is psychological or emotional, just other types of support, self-esteem... There are steps long before crime becomes an issue, even before it becomes a thought. They need programs to address root cause. Having an SRO in school does not address the root cause." (Black parent)

> "Defund it [SRO program] and put money into wages [for school staff]" (Indigenous parent)

> "I don't understand the need for a police officer in a school environment. Empathy to others should be taught instead. Individuals with different backgrounds and experiences should be brought from time to time to give the kids an opportunity to open their minds to other aspects of life." (POC parent)

> "Even school fights, when you have this adult [not from the police], you connect with and know him for three or four years, they know how to better help you and it help[s] our kids [to] avoid jail and avoid these problems in the future and get back on the right track..." (Black student)

> "If the goal is to provide counselling, or help, then employ professionals trained in mental health — not pepper spray and handcuffs." (POC student)

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[105] See Dobchuk-Land, B. (2021). *Defunding the Police: Who defines Safety?* [Video], Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCLYNiS82_I; Walby, K. (2019). "Exploring Police Violence: A Review Essay." *Crit Crim* 27, p. 363–367.

"Lots of problems can be handled in other ways that doesn't involve arms, which can cause unnecessary action. All of that could have been avoided if there was a psychologist or like a social worker." (POC student)

"Some of the things listed in the job description, internet safety, bullying and gang education… can all be offered through better qualified professionals." (Indigenous parent)

"Shameful waste of money. There is absolutely nothing that a police officer is trained to do that is not already being done better by professionals with more training than a police officer has. They are… not trained in [interventions] other than hitting people with sticks. To [the] school principal, hire an occupational therapist. Engage in floor time. Hire a psychologist. Use that resource or dollar value for any professional who are trained to help children that are not an SRO. To the administration, [I say] get rid of them [the SRO]." (Indigenous staff)

"A lot of students can use counselling to learn skills to work through issues, but families can't afford it or access it easily. Maybe parents also have intellectual disabilities and government resources are lacking… that would be a better starting point than [school] resource officers. I assume when there is a legal problem, I assume police can come in and help rather than school hire an SRO or help fund that position." (Indigenous staff)

"It would be preferable to have a community organization because when they come in, if they already work in the field with a lot of experience, it almost becomes a professional development for the teachers themselves." (Indigenous staff)

"I would replace it with investment in social workers. We work heavily with the social worker with a lot of students who have truancy issues, poverty issues, making sure they are fed and meeting their immediate needs of hunger, and addressing those issues would make so much more of an impact than having a person with a weapon come patrolling the schools." (White staff)

"Totally cancel it and defund it. Put that money into far more productive health life giving equity seeking ventures. [Such as:] Student services, counselling, support, meals or food." (White staff)

"We can reach out to therapy counselling places that actually provide supports and resources to people in those situations. It is not really within the purview of law enforcement… what I would like to see: more therapy, counselling and outreach groups." (White staff)

"If I had a number to call for different people to come and deescalate certain situations, I would have obviously used that number... let us make a short list of other groups or people that can work with school communities that can accomplish the same things we are asking police officers to do" (White administrator).

Issues related to safety and well-being require "a systemic, well-funded and long-term poverty reduction strategy led by all three levels of government,"[106] not a reactive and counterproductive approach to crime that uses up resources and funds that could be used for pro-active and preventative community-based solutions. The idea here is also to make sure schools, teachers, students, and families are well-resourced to be able to address issues that arise in the early stages before they become crises. The people best positioned to do this are the people closest to the "problems."

To empower all students and families it is crucial to "always pay extra attention to laws that contain the word "safe" and ask whose safety is being addressed."[107] If SROs are presented as the solution to school safety, they may create a sense of safety for some at the expense of already-marginalized students and families. To seriously consider safety for all students and families, the LRSD must pursue alternate routes to school safety that do not rely on police. There may or may not be ready-made alternatives, but in developing alternatives, the experts should be the students, teachers, and families who are invested in student success and well-being; *not* the police whose investments lie elsewhere.

Create Accountability Measures for Police Involvement in Schools

In addition to cancelling SRO programs, recent reviews of SRO programs have recommended limiting or eliminating any police involvement in schools, given the current and historical harms of policing. These reviews also recommend school boards establish monitoring and accountability processes for when police do need to be involved. As recommended by other reviews of SRO programs, the LRSD needs to:

Revise and harmonize all relevant contractual commitments, policies and procedures to limit police involvement at schools to necessary involvement, introduce accountability and transparency mechanisms for all police involvement and embed Indigenous rights, human rights and children's rights and survivor-centred practices.[108]

Currently, the LRSD does not have an existing policy on police involvement in schools.[109] How and when to involve police is often left to the discretion of the school administrator. A clear

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[106] Ibid, p. 29.

[107] Cole, D. (2020). *The Skin We're In: A Year of Black Resistance and Power*. Doubleday Canada, p. 25.

[108] Office of the Human Rights and Equity Advisor (2021). *Policy and Practice of Police Involvement in Schools*, OCDSB, p. 11.

[109] Based on conversation with LRSD administration.

policy with guidelines can result in more consistency and may reduce bias when decisions are made about when to use police and what consequences will be enforced. As one parent of colour said, this will help staff not to "be wishy washy. If staff intervention is inappropriate, then proceed with law enforcement involvement." Ultimately, the best practice is not to involve police at all, since they cause harm. However, if police are involved there are ways to limit harm or ensure accountability by implementing harm reduction or anti-racist guidelines and policies for staff. For example, school administrators can emphasize the following practice:

> The importance of initially removing oneself from the incident and de-escalating and then unpacking the incident by asking a few basic questions: What is the type of incident? What are the assumptions being made about the student and the student's behaviour? And after walking through the version of events from the teacher's perspective and the student's perspective, what makes sense?[110]

It is also important when police are giving a presentation in the LRSD to vet the presentation according to school guidelines to ensure that the message is reviewed with an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens. All students and parents need to be notified in advance of all police presentations at school, and feedback should be collected from students and staff after all police presentations in schools.[111]

Anti-Racism Training for School Staff

Given that participants experience discrimination by police and school staff, it is important for all school staff, especially administrators, to receive ongoing and thorough anti-racism training, not a one-day session. As the recent review of an SRO program recommended for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board:

> This starts with a more intensive professional development program for educators and administrators focusing on identifying and addressing implicit biases, understanding trauma, and in-depth anti-racism training, including looking at how anti-racist practices should be incorporated into the discipline process. This training should be reinforced by checks and balances as well as transparent accountability mechanisms to hold employees accountable for meeting… [the school division's] competency expectations.[112]

Other reviews of school boards in Ontario "suggests that school administrators need greater familiarity with de-escalation and restorative techniques to reduce recourse to police

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[110] Chadha et al. (2020). *Review of the Peel District School Board*, p. 10.

[111] UGDSB (2021). *Police Presence in Schools Task Force Report*, p. 84-85.

[112] Office of the Human Rights and Equity Advisor (2021). *Policy and Practice of Police Involvement in Schools*, OCDSB, p. 60.

involvement."[113] This will ensure staff are more familiar with harm reduction and prevention approaches that avoid criminalization and harsher forms of discipline. As discussed above, administrators often play a key role in involving police in schools, and since they are more likely to identify as white and are prone to bias in the use of policing (e.g., weaponizing police against students), it would be beneficial for them to receive anti-racism training on an ongoing and long-term basis. In addition to evidence of racial bias in using police against students, the review also documented several cases of racial bias against families.

> "In [school] meetings they keep talking about how safety and stuff like that, but I think one thing about the things they are looking at their white perspective, they are not willing to look at other peoples' perspectives... Sometimes I try to talk, and they shut me down. I remember this one time I asked a question, and they were like okay move on. And I was like why did you ignore my question? And then someone else asked the same question and she was white, and they answered her on the spot. I am the only black person..." (Black student)

> "They [school staff] do not really act. I have been bullied before and sometimes they didn't really act on it. They just brush it off." (Black student)

> "If [name of school redacted] as a community wants to keep the school environment a safe place where kids can learn, then I would start with caring about issues rather than doing absolutely nothing... I would say start with staff. Some people attending school come from abusive, toxic households, and I for one was talked down badly by MANY staff and that's not right." (POC student, emphasis in original)

Anti-racism training can also benefit the larger community of the LRSD.[114] Some students noted that "racial bullying" is common in schools, in spite of attempts by school staff to address it.

> "I've had a lot of racial bullying and it seems all the schools do is talk to the student and the student goes back to saying the same things." (POC student)

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[113] Chadha et al. (2020). *Review of the Peel District School Board*, p. 8. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/new/review-peel-district-school-board-report-en.pdf

[114] While community education can be helpful if done from an equity and anti-racist approach, addressing systemic racism requires justice, including social and economic redistribution of resources.

> "My daughter got told many times that she was Indian and there were memes in the class that the other students would use to make fun of her. There needs to be education for students on how to be respectful to others and that their microaggressions can cause harm to others." (POC parent)

Some of the participants criticized the equity focus of this report, at times using explicit racist language, because they did not see a need to focus on "certain racial groups" of students, which may result in criticism to police and school policies.

> "Mainstream media creating a culture around police that they're bad and target minorities. Glad to see this 'independent researcher' fuels the fire." (Indigenous parent)

> Why was there a question [in the survey] regarding a positive impact only on [Indigenous people, racial slur removed] and other equal [sic] seeking ethnic groups? Don't we all want our children to feel safe or only those?! This survey is disgusting! (White parent)

> "The impact of the SRO towards the black, indigenous students... shouldn't be any different than that of a Caucasian student." (White parent)

> "I find it offensive that the first question on this slide asks the impact on certain racial groups." (White parent)

> "Making this [review] about race and only considering what "minority's" think is absolutely disgusting!... By excluding white people's opinions in this is just RACIST... You should be ashamed of yourselves!" (White parent, emphasis in original)

Training staff and the general community on anti-racism can help provide a more supportive environment for families in the LRSD. As scholars argue:

> What needs to be done is for teachers and police – as well as members of society generally – to come to understand and repudiate the ways in which through racial profiling, educational and justice institutions undermine the educational achievement, law-abiding living, and well-being of Black [and Indigenous] suburban youth.[115]

Having said this, training staff and community can be challenging. As one parent expressed, "I also believe there are a lot [of officers with the] WPS living in the LRSD, and many officers are married to people in the school system. This compounds the problem and inhibits positive change." For similar reasons, it is important to note a few issues with this recommendation:

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[115] James (2018), p. 21.

- First, even if an "intensive" training process is established in the LRSD, it cannot be implemented separately from other equally important considerations such as the need for equity hiring and anti-racist curriculum.

- Second, this report does not recommend providing anti-racism training for police because most BIPOC families wanted the police, as an institution not as individuals, out of schools. Training police officers will not end the disproportionately negative impact of policing on BIPOC communities.[116] As experts and advocacy groups argue:

> Training is not a solution to the [racial and sexual] crisis [in policing]. It is not an adequate or appropriate response to acts of sexualized violence by police, nor is it the answer to failures to protect and investigate. Crimes should be treated as such, and perpetrators removed from police forces; standards and protocols must be in place to ensure that appropriate disciplinary measures can be taken when those standards are not met.[117]

Suggestions like this are consistent with the evidence provided in the WPS's operational review report which suggests SROs, like other police officers, often lack training to work with and to "avoid offending" racialized families. However, it also suggests that any increased training, like other reform measures, are not necessarily effective.[118]

Collect Data on All Police Involvement in Schools

Currently the LRSD does not collect information on police involvement in schools. This data is only collected by the WPS, who shares this information in aggregate, excluding any demographical information including race, gender, and student grade due to "privacy" concerns.[119] However, as research notes, SRO programs put at risk student rights to safety and privacy. Placing an SRO in a school can potentially result in unfair searches and seizures, and unlawful distribution of personal and confidential information. The placing of SROs in schools can harm student rights and further contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.[120]

To ensure greater transparency and to monitor the impact of school policies on all students, it is important to collect more comprehensive and consistent race-based data. Community advocates have been urging school divisions in Manitoba to be more intentional and accountable about addressing equity in schools. This will ensure that the curriculum, programs, and activities are more appropriate and responsive to the education needs of BIPOC families.[121]

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[116] Anti-racism training can also be coopted by dominant institutions to protect it from liability and make it seem more inclusive in image.

[117] Palmater et al. (2019). *A National Action Plan to End Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls*, p. 83.

[118] Griffiths and Pollard (2013), *Policing in Winnipeg*, p. 93-94.

[119] Based on information presented by the WPS, SRO Management Committee, LRSD, March 23, 2021.

[120] Zahreddine (2019). "School Resource Officers: Not a Resource".

[121] See Newcomer Education Coalition (2020). *The State of Equity in Education Report.*
https://www.necwinnipeg.org/post/nec-launches-state-of-equity-in-education-report

Collecting and evaluating data on all police involvement in schools, will help push school administrators to avoid using a "colour-blind" approach or policies that marginalize the disproportionately negative experiences of BIPOC students and other equity-seeking groups. School administrators will not be able to say, "I don't know [the impact of the SRO or any school policy on equity families]. I haven't kept that data." This information will help create more accountability and allow administrations to evaluate and implement safer policies.

> "Auditing or collecting the information on what they are actually dealing with when they are called out to schools and deciding if it makes sense if it is always a police officer." (White staff).

Continuing with the status quo would make it more difficult to hold police officials and school staff accountable for their action(s) or lack thereof. For similar reasons, SRO program reviews have suggested for school boards to establish an "internal data collection system" to collect data on police involvement, discipline, and suspensions in schools. [122] The LRSD also needs to ensure that school staff participate in a yearly review of feedback and data collected. This information also needs to be presented to Board of Trustees and families.

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[122] UGDSB (2021). *Police Presence in Schools Task Force Report*, p. 86.

Conclusion

This review has found the SRO program to be ineffective at meeting its stated goals. The evidence of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism shows harm and suggests interference in the learning environment for these students. If police involvement continues, it will compromise the efficacy of education as a public service. The review shows that while many families may have not encountered SROs in the LRSD, ▮▮

Police involvement negatively impacts the school environment, creating a space where students feel targeted or directly experience racism; this can seriously impact student well-being and the ability to attain full educational and social potential in school. Police involvement can also create situations for students where they can experience increasing disciplinary measures that rely on surveillance or fear-based tactics instead of safer strategies such as anti-racism, de-escalation, and harm prevention. Thus, as has been argued by other research and reviews, SRO involvement in schools violates school policies around safety and educational well-being.

This review recommends the termination of the SRO program in the LRSD. If the status quo and the safety narrative is not challenged, many LRSD community members will continue to see and justify police involvement in schools as necessary. Failing to end the SRO program and limit police involvement in schools will perpetuate or even exacerbate existing inequities in the LRSD schools and its community areas. School safety can be enhanced by involving other trained professionals and community advocates instead of police officers. Similarly, training staff on anti-racism can be helpful, however the LRSD needs to also consider issues related to community representation in staffing and curriculum. Any future involvement of police in the LRSD schools should be done with greater accountability: under revised policies that prioritize the safety of BIPOC students and with the collection of data on all police-related encounters.

Through an equity focus, this review has paid attention to the voices of people who have endured the negative impact of the SRO program in the LRSD. The recommendations presented in this review provide an alternative path to the current status quo of police involvement in schools and a vision for a safer school environment for all members of the LRSD.

Appendix 1 – Proposal for Reviewing SRO program in the LRSD
by Fadi Ennab, Feb. 2021

Purpose: To conduct an equity-based review of the School Resource Officer (SRO) program in the Louis Riel School Division (LRSD) to assess its impact on students, families, and the school environment. The review will focus on the experiences of families from equity-seeking groups (communities that face significant collective challenges in participating in society). In addition, the review will include surveys sent to all students and school staff (teachers and administrators) and focus group interviews to give more context to perceived value and impact of the SRO program.

Methods: Feedback from students, parents and school staff will be obtained using a mixed-method approach using surveys, one-on-one and focus group interviews as follows:

- Surveys to all students, parents, and school staff (Microsoft Forum or another platform).
- One-on-one interviews with 20 students from equity-seeking groups (with a focus on students who had an encounter with an SRO).
- One-one-one interviews with 10 parents or legal guardian from equity-seeking groups.
- Five key informant interviews with SRO, school staff and/or community organization.
- Two focus groups with 10-20 students total.
- Two focus groups with 10-20 school staff total.

Literature Review: The report will include a literature review of evidence-based research on SRO programs and what other school divisions throughout Canada are practicing and recommending. The review will also include analyzing existing data with LRSD related to SRO involvement and equity indicators (e.g., ethnic background, grade, disciplinary issues). It will also review any existing policies and/or procedures related to SRO involvement.

Time frame: March to July 2021 (with aim to finish conducting interviews and surveys by mid-June).