



Board of Trustees' Board Meeting

Date: Monday, June 7, 2021

Time: 6:00 p.m.

** Committee of the Whole In Camera, if necessary, will precede or follow the Board Meeting, as appropriate.*

Location: Virtual

Attendees:

Board of Trustees:

Bill Conway, Manuel da Silva, Jeanne Gravelle, Wendy Price, Brian Schmalz, Melanie Van Alphen (Chair), Tracey Weiler

Student Representatives:

Abby Barbosa, Kate Morrison

Senior Administration:

Loretta Notten, Jason Connolly, Gerald Foran, Maria Ivankovic, John Klein, Shesh Maharaj, Judy Merkel, Richard Olson

Special Resource:

Recording Secretary:

Alice Figueiredo

ITEM	Who	Agenda Section	Method & Outcome
1. Call to Order	Chair		
1.1 Opening Prayer & Memorials	Board Pastoral Team		
1.2 Territorial Acknowledgement I (we) would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather today is the land traditionally used by the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Neutral People. I (we) also acknowledge the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge, laws and philosophies of the Indigenous People with whom we share this land today.	Chair		
1.3 Approval of Agenda	Board of Trustees		Approval
1.4 Declaration of Pecuniary Interest	Individual Trustees		
1.4.1 From the current meeting			
1.4.2 From a previous public or in-camera meeting			
1.5 Items for Action:			
1.5.1 Private, Private, Private meeting of May 31, 2021 regarding HRS matters.	Board of Trustees	--	Approval
2. Consent Agenda: Director of Education (e.g.: day –to – day operational matters from the Ministry of Education that the Board is required to do)			

ITEM	Who	Agenda Section	Method & Outcome
3. Consent Agenda: Board (Minutes of meetings, staff report)			
4. Delegations/Presentation			
5. Advice from the CEO			
5.1 Budget Presentation 2021-2022 Budget Book	S. Maharaj/ L. Isaac/R. King	pp.4-6	Information
5.2 SRO Review at WCDSB	L. Notten/J. Merkel	pp. 7-77	Information
6. Ownership Linkage (Communication with the External Environment)			
7. Reports from Board Committees/Task Forces			
8. Board Education (at the request of the Board)			
8.1 OCSTA/CCSTA Communications	Chair	pp.78-108	Information
9. Policy Discussion			
10. Assurance of Successful Board Performance			
11. Assurance of Successful Director of Education Performance			
11.1 Monitoring Reports & Vote on Compliance			
12. Potential Agenda Items/Trustee Inquiry Report (CEO)			
13. Announcements			
13.1 Upcoming Meetings/Events (all scheduled for the Catholic Education Centre unless otherwise indicated): •Jun 9: Audit •Jun 14: Board of Trustees' Meeting	Chair		Information
13.2 Pending Items: 13.3 Pending Items for OCSTA Consideration	<u>Committee/Task Force</u>	<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Action Taken</u>

ITEM	Who	Agenda Section	Method & Outcome
14. Items for the Next Meeting Agenda	Trustees		
Board (June 14, 2021) Interim Financial Reports MYSP Report Monthly COVID Update Linkages Report Pastoral Report Governance Report Work of the Board Report Financial Planning/Budgeting – Monitoring Report IV – 007 General Exec Limitations - Monitoring Report IV – 001 General Governance Commitment Board Committee Principles Board Committee Structure Student Trustee Recognition Committee assignments Huron Brigadoon Boundary Review French Immersion			
15. Adjournment Confirm decisions made tonight	Director of Education		
15.1 Confirm Decision made tonight	Recording Secretary	--	Information
15.2 Move into Private, Private	Board of Trustees	--	Approval
15.3 Move into Private, Private, Private	Board of Trustees	--	Approval
16. Closing Prayer			
17. Motion to Adjourn	Board of Trustees	Motion	Approval

CLOSING PRAYER

O Risen Lord, you have entrusted us with the responsibility to help form a new generation of disciples and apostles through the gift of our Catholic schools.

As disciples of Christ, may we educate and nurture hope in all learners to realize their full potential to transform God's world.

May our Catholic schools truly be at the heart of the community, fostering success for each by providing a place for all.

May we and all whom we lead be discerning believers formed in the Catholic faith community; effective communicators; reflective and creative thinkers; self-directed, responsible, life-long learners; collaborative contributors; caring family members; and responsible citizens.

Grant us the wisdom of your Spirit so that we might always be faithful to our responsibilities.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Rev. Charlie Fedy, CR and the Board of Trustees, 2010



Date: June 7, 2021
To: Board of Trustees
From: Director of Education
Subject: Proposed 2021-22 School Year Budget

Type of Report:

- ☐ Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring
- ☐ Incidental Information concerning day-to-day operations

Type of Information:

- ☐ Information for Board of Trustees Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring Information of Board Policy
- ☐ Information only of day-to-day operational matters delegated to the CEO

Origin: (cite Education Act and/or Board Policy or other legislation)

Trustees are required to approve a budget based on estimates of enrolment, revenues, and expenses on an annual basis. Management is proposing a budget which is outlined in the Budget Book and presentation materials.

Policy Statement and/or Education Act/other Legislation citation:

IV 007

["Financial Planning/Budgeting"](#)

Education Act

[232 "Estimates"](#)

May 4, 2021

B11

[Learning Recovery and Renewal](#)

May 4, 2021

B10

[2021-22 Priorities and Partnerships Funding \(PPF\)](#)

May 4, 2021

B09

[Capital Funding for the 2021-22 School Year](#)

May 4, 2021

B08

[2021-22 Grants for Student Needs Funding](#)



May 4, 2021	B07	<u>Planning for the 2021-22 School Year</u>
May 4, 2021	SB10	<u>2021-22 Applications for Approval of ECPP Education Programs for Children and Youth in Government Approved Education and Community Partnership Program (ECPP Allocation)</u>
May 4, 2021	SB09	<u>2021-22 Estimates Forms for Section 68 School Authorities</u>
May 4, 2021	SB08	<u>2021-22 Estimates (District School Boards)</u>
May 4, 2021	SB07	<u>Student Transportation - Grants for Student Needs, 2021-22</u>
May 4, 2021	SB06	<u>Special Education Grant and Mental Health Funding Changes for 2021-</u>

Alignment to the MYSP:

The proposed budget aligns with the strategies and goals outlined in the 2018-21 MYSP. A new MYSP will be developed during the 2021-22 school year. Budget priorities are outlined in the budget report book and presentation documents.

Additional Resources:

2021-22 Budget Presentation
2021-22 Budget Report

Both can be found at <https://www.wcdsb.ca/financial-information/>

Background/Comments:

Trustees are required by legislation to approve a school year budget on annual basis, based on estimates of enrolment, revenue, and expenses.

For the 2021-22 budget, this approval is required by the end of June 2021.

The Ministry of Education provided budget planning information on May 4, 2021. Based on this information, a projection of enrolment was adopted by the Budget Advisory Committee for upcoming year, other revenue sources were identified, and expense projections were gathered from stakeholders. After deliberation and adjustments, a proposed budget was developed, which will be presented to Trustees on June 7, 2021.

The proposed budget is balanced without the use of uncommitted reserves.



It meets all legislative requirements, government directives, and honours existing contracts and agreements.

Allocations to support operational and strategic goals have been incorporated into the proposed budget.

Finally, the proposed budget aligns with all elements of Board Policy IV 007 “Financial Planning/Budgeting”.

Trustees can ask questions regarding the proposed budget between June 7th and June 14th.

On June 14th, management will present a monitoring report on Board Policy IV 007, seeking approval on compliance with the Policy, and on the budget itself.

Recommendation:

The budget will be brought forward for consideration on June 14, 2021.

Prepared/Reviewed By:

Loretta Notten
Director of Education

Shesh Maharaj
Executive Superintendent of Corporate Services + CFO

*Bylaw 4.2 “where the Board of Trustees receives from the Director of Education a monitoring report that flows from a responsibility delegated to the Director under Board Policy – **except where approval is required by the Board of Trustees on a matter delegated by policy to the Board** – the minutes of the Meeting at which the Report is received shall expressly provide that the Board has received and approved of the Report as an action consistent with the authority delegated to the Director, subject in all instances to what otherwise actually occurred.”





Date: June 7th, 2021
To: Board of Trustees
From: Director of Education
Subject: SRO Review at WCDSB

Type of Report:

- ☐ Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring
- ☒ Incidental Information concerning day-to-day operations

Type of Information:

- ☐ Information for Board of Trustees Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring Information of Board
- ☒ Information only of day-to-day operational matters delegated to the CEO

Origin: (cite Education Act and/or Board Policy or other legislation)

Executive Limitation IV 003 Treatment of Students
Executive Limitation IV 012 Communication to Board

In the spring of 2020, on the heels of the Black Lives Matter movement and the global call for police reform, a decision was made to initiate a pause on our WCDSB SRO program and to engage in a comprehensive review to assist in a determination as to if and how the SRO program should continue with the WCDSB community.

Policy Statement and/or Education Act/other Legislation citation:

Bullying Prevention and Intervention APC 034
Code of Conduct APC 018
Equity and Inclusive Education Policy APC 037
Suspension and Expulsion APC 012
School Police Protocol

Alignment to the MYSP:

Strategic Priority: Nurturing Our Catholic Community

Strategic Direction: Promote a culture of belonging and respect, that supports success for all

Strategic Priority: Student Engagement, Achievement and Innovation

Strategic Direction: Foster maximum opportunity for success for all

Strategic Priority: Building Capacity to Lead, Learn and Live Authentically

Strategic Direction: Nurture the well-being of all students and staff

Background/Comments:

Context

In January of 2021, the Waterloo Catholic District school board contracted Turner Consulting Group to review the School Resource Officer Program after the Waterloo Region Police Services halted the program in the region due to expressed community concerns. The WCDSB committed to undertaking a review of the SRO program to determine its efficacy in our secondary schools in relation to its stated goals. We sought to answer the following questions:

1. How effectively the original mandate of the SRO program – related to relational proactive policing – is being realized in the WCDSB?
2. How (if at all) is systemic racism experienced within the context of the SRO program?
3. Whether there an overrepresentation of racialized groups that are being suspended/expelled where SRO involvement was also included?
4. Whether racialized students see/experience police differently within the SRO program versus those they encounter in their community?
5. How the police need to work in schools to ensure equity of outcomes for all students?

Introduction

Globally, calls for police reform have focused attention to the experience of racialized youth and the disproportionate and negative impact police have had on Black communities. Most recent concerns have been voiced in the wake of the killing of George Floyd in the US and the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Paquet and Chantel Moore during a mental health safety check in Canada. The movement which rightfully promotes, “Black Lives Matter” has been the foundation for well attended rallies and voices of discontent in the Waterloo region. There has been significant research to support the idea that Black and Indigenous youth, in particular, perceive the police and criminal justice officials to be biased against members of their racial community ([Black Experience Project, 2014](#); [Cao, 2014](#); [Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2016](#)). In fact, Black students not involved in delinquent behaviour are much more likely to be stopped and treated as suspects by the police than 30 White youth who actually admit involvement in illegal activity (Fine et al., 2003). With a context of concern for our students and community, this research has been conducted with particular attention to the experiences of racialized and marginalized youth, who are most likely to feel targeted by SRO officers. Understanding that the mandate of the WRPS SRO program is to develop a positive relationship between youth and police, reduce youth victimization, and partner with school staff to proactively address student, family, and school issues. This perceptual research endeavors to understand the implementation of the SRO program in the Waterloo Catholic District School board. The report was authored based on work that took place from January 2021 to May 2021. See Appendix 1 for full report.

Methods and Sample

Turner Consulting Group designed a racial equity lens when developing and discerning results of the review. This approach is set to ensure adequate attention is paid to the experiences of racialized youth. This study also recognizes that Indigenous students may also have differing perspectives and experiences of SROs, and therefore these results were analyzed independently. WCDSB secondary school students were invited to participate in the voluntary survey, as were staff and community members. Additionally, at the end of the survey students, staff, and community members were invited to register for one of 10 virtual discussion groups. One-on-one telephone interviews were also conducted with school administrators, school board staff, as well as members of WRPS.

Promotion of the study and invitation to participate was facilitated using WCDSB sponsored social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook, information about the survey was posted on our board website and all secondary parents were contacted through our School Messenger system, which delivers messages directly to them.



Additionally, invitations and information about the study were shared through our system Newswire and were sent on multiple occasions with intent to reach as many stakeholders as possible.

Who Participated:

There was a 19% response rate to the Secondary Student Survey. Of the 1,328 survey respondents.

Race	
Indigenous	86
Racialized	311
White	729
No Answer	417
Prefer not to answer	97
Total	1616

Grade	
9	222
10	419
11	407
12	280
Adult Education	6
No answer	282
Total	1616

* Identified as both Indigenous and racialized and are counted in both groups **24**.

There were 103 (18%) WCDSB teaching staff, who participated in the survey. Both the students and staff were asked to respond to at least one of the following questions:

- Their perspectives about School Resource Officers (SRO) at WCDSB
- Their experience with individual SROs
- How they rate SROs and police in general on a number of characteristics (Approachable, trustworthy, rude, racist)
- The impact of SROs in their school

A total of 87 community members, including former staff and school administrators and formers, parents of current students, and former students responded to the **Community Survey Questions**:

- Their perspectives about School Resource Officers (SRO) at WCDSB
- The impact of SROs in WCDSB schools.

Unfortunately, and perhaps notably, there was not a lot of interest for the virtual discussion groups. Only 5 people registered for the opportunity to join in small group discussions.

Finally, 10 WCDSB secondary school administrators, superintendents, and the Director of Education were invited to participate in a **one-on-one telephone interview**. A total of 18 WRPS staff were interviewed including SROs, those who supervise the SROs, as well as other senior leaders in the organization, including the Chief of Police. These open interviews centered on personal perspectives of the SRO program.

Report Findings

The review of the WRPS School Resource Officer program has been a valuable endeavor as we now have a deeper understanding of stakeholder perceptions of the program and its impact in relation to views of safety and equity. What was clear, as we considered the results, was that there were themes that were readily identified.

Themes:

1. Lack of fulsome knowledge of the existence of the SRO program at WCDSB.
2. Lack of sufficient understanding of the program impact.
3. There may be a lack of awareness of the lived experience of racialized youth as reflected in “do not know” responses.
4. There may be a lack of Institutional awareness of bias and racial profiling,
5. Perceptions of SROs versus Police

Lack of Knowledge

To begin, a consistent theme that resided across all stakeholder groups that participated in the survey was the lack of fulsome knowledge of the existence of the SRO program and the specified role of the resource officer which differs from that of a regular police officer. Many participants were unaware of the program, including community members who are parents with children in our system. Additionally, many students, regardless of their grade, have no knowledge of the SRO Program and in fact indicated that this survey was the first time they have heard about the SRO Program. Their open-ended responses suggest that rather than responding based on their actual knowledge of, or personal experience with, SROs they were responding to a theoretical understanding of the SRO Program. This invites us to consider how we more definitively promote awareness of the program and its goals.

Lack of Sufficient Understanding of Program Impact

The lack of understanding of program impact may also be a contributing factor in the large incidence of “do not know” responses that have been attributed to grade 9 students. Grade 9 students would not have experienced the program and were unintentionally provided the opportunity to participate in the survey. Furthermore, there were some common responses across our Indigenous, Black, and White students that are worth noting in addition to others that will contribute to our ongoing dialogue. On the questions regarding the understanding of the SRO program, students in grades 10-12 submitted that 69% agreed they understand the role of the SRO and that the SRO contributes to school safety. However, when students are asked to reflect on their perceptions of safety for themselves and their peers the results showed fewer than half of grade 10 to 12 students agreed the program makes students feel safer (47%), makes racialized students feel safer (35%), makes them feel safer (47%), and has helped build positive relationships between the police and young people (41%). It is also important to note that when asked if the SRO program makes students feel safer in general, 32% of Grade 10-12 students responded with “I don’t know”. Additionally, 46% of students in grade 10-12 also responded with “I don’t know” when asked if the SRO program makes racialized or visible minority students feel safer. This invites a deeper probe as there is a disconnect between the perception of the SRO role and program, and the individual perception of safety for individual students. That said, it may also suggest students are not prepared to project how others feel about SROs, because it is not their own lived experience.

Lack of Awareness

Additionally, with this generalized data there were less instances of “do not know” perceptions. When we look to drill down to our Indigenous, racialized, and White student perceptions 55% Indigenous students feel the SRO Program makes them feel safer, 29% did not agree with this statement. Additionally, of our racialized students 49% said the program made them feel safer 27% did not know and 24% disagreed. Our White student perceptions



reflected that 44% of White students felt that the SRO Program makes students feel safer, a large proportion (38%) did not have an opinion, while 18% disagreed. It is interesting that it is White students who have a higher percentage of students noting this feeling, rather than Indigenous or racialized students. An even smaller proportion (32%) agreed that the SRO Program makes racialized students feel safer, with more than half (54%) reporting that they did not know, and 14% disagreeing. The “do not know” category for this population might suppose that either a lack of awareness of the program or lack of interaction with SRO’s has informed their perceptions.

The open-ended responses shed additional light on the mixed perceptions and understandings of the program wherein some students express wonderings why police are needed in their schools and expressed rather than make students feel safer, police in schools do the opposite, making students feel unsafe, uncomfortable. Opposing views were also expressed however as some students spoke to their positive interactions with officers and having had opportunities to learn from them in their classrooms. Some students who responded theoretically also responded favorably suggesting that when perhaps the SROs are in schools they may act as a deterrent to crime.

Lack of Sufficient Institutional Awareness of Bias and Racial Profiling

Students also shared varying perspectives and experiences with SROs in the open-ended questions. Some shared having negative experiences with SROs and felt rather than deescalating situations SROs contribute to a negative outcome. From a racialized student lens some did share positive experiences and perceptions however fewer positive experiences and reported cases of feeling targeted, intimidated, and unsafe. These views were also shared and supported by perceptions of Indigenous and White students. Contrary to this, administrators and SRO’s shared different perceptions of student experiences with SROs. While it was acknowledged that some newcomer students may have experienced trauma and therefore have a fear of police the perception that WCDSB racialized students may not feel safe was not overly considered. While some administrators did acknowledge a reluctance of students to speak to the police, racial profiling was not considered as a potential impetus. The consultant found this notable and suggested there may be an unconscious bias or a “colour blindness” as administrators clearly feel racial profiling is not something in which they engage. Additionally, SROs report having positive relationships with students and believe they have created conditions wherein students would feel comfortable approaching them if they had concerns or were in need. This is somewhat substantiated by the overall, students’ views of SROs as more positive than their view of police generally. On average, students rated SROs as less helpful than police, but as more trustworthy, friendly, fair, and approachable. Racialized students also do not generally perceive SROs as aggressive, racist, or rude, (with ratings averaging 1.7 out of 5 on these questions.)

Perceptions of SROs vs Police

The perceptions of staff also align with the preposition that perhaps there is a lack of full understanding of the SRO program and its impact within the school. While approximately 83% of the staff purport to understand the role and purpose of the SRO program when asked if the SROs made students and specifically racialized students feel safe their responses were heavily weighted in “do not know”. Staff also have a more favourable view of SROs overall as the perceptual data suggests 62% of staff say that students have a good relationship with SROs, compared with 52% of Indigenous students, 39% of racialized students, and 31% of White students who agreed that this was the case. Like the student perception SROs are rated high on characteristics of being trustworthy, friendly, fair, and approachable.

Of the 87 community members that contributed to the survey there was a similar surprise to the existence of the SRO program in WCDSB. While 63% of community participants agreed that the SROs make a school safer and overall make students feel safer there were fewer that believed they make racialized students feel safe with only 27% agreeing however it is important to acknowledge that 45% reported that they did not know. At the end of the survey, survey respondents were given the opportunity to register for a focus group. In addition, individuals could register for a small group discussion from the webpage about the SRO Program Review on the Board’s website. Unfortunately, there was not a lot of interest for these virtual discussion groups. Only five people registered for these small group discussions. The small group conversations with the 5 participants did however garner significant negative perceptions of SRO involvement and outcomes for racialized and disabled students, perceptions of racial profiling were shared. The prevailing perception was that the involvement of the SRO resulted in escalated consequences and issues that could have more appropriately been dealt with by school administrators

were instead made a criminal matter. SROs were perceived to contribute to diminished sense of safety for and equitable treatment of racialized students including a diminished sense of belonging.

SRO Program Perceptions of WCDSB and WRPS Staff

WCDSB staff and WRPS staff were interviewed to attain their perspectives on the overall perception and of the program as it resides in the secondary schools, the achievement of the program objectives and the perceived impact on racialized students.

The response of WCDSB staff was overwhelmingly positive regarding the contributions and nature of the relationships the SRO has within the school and broader community. SROs were praised for their positive approach, their understanding of school needs and efficacy in responding with a restorative lens when responding to discipline issues. School administrators share that SROs provide them with a consistent police officer when dealing with issues and add a consistent presence to the school when a situation does not warrant a 911 call. Administrators strongly believe that the SRO is better equipped to deal with students that might be dealing with mental health, trauma, and other significant issues as they have been trained, potentially know the student, and has a more fulsome perspective of the community that they serve. Part of the purpose of this review is to determine whether the SRO program mandates are being met.

When unpacking perceptions of achieved outcomes of the program there were mixed views of this success. The majority believe that while some objectives of the program have been met others have not. SROs reflect that their ability to be true to the mandate of the SRO program is often interrupted by administrator calls for support which has resulted in a reactive versus a proactive approach. Due to the frequency of interruptions in their programming SROs acknowledge that many students were not aware that there is an actual program. When they have had the opportunity to build relationships with student, they have perceived that barriers between police and youth were replaced with positive relationships. Unfortunately, the SROs note that many students will only have had contact when a safe school's issue arose. SROs admittedly recognized that the model became more responsive to policing issues than proactive community building. SROs consider that the administrator perspective that suggests the SROs are an important part of the administrative team has a negative impact on their role. While some perceive the presence of SRO in schools to potentially have negative impacts for students overall the staff from the WCDSB and WRPS believe a lot would be lost if the program ceased to exist.

Executive Summary:

It must be acknowledged we are at a moment of reflection and reckoning in terms of how our diversity of students perceive and interact with our law enforcement officers. The WCDSB was aware of the research and the more global concerns that have arisen that point to indications of societal racism. The purpose of hiring a third-party consultant was to provide WCDSB with a deep dive into both the perceptions and the reality of the lived experience of the SRO program in our schools and to assist us in determining if a) the program should continue and b) if so – what concrete steps could be taken to improve the attainment of the goals of the SRO program.

The consultant's report has leaned heavily into the research and has offered cautions about what the research would indicate about how racialized students experience law enforcement. The results of our own schools – and specifically through the eyes of our students would suggest that a good number to understand the purpose of the program, but do not necessarily indicate they feel safer as a result. That said – they do not, in the main, perceive SROs to be racist, aggressive, or rude. There were not substantial differences in how Indigenous or racialized students perceived the SROs versus the White students. In fact, in many cases the perceptions of Indigenous and racialized students were slightly better.

Staff were exceedingly positive about the program and its impact, but in their effort to offer support for the program, may have revealed there is room to grow in their understanding of the experiences of racialized youth in their schools. Similarly, our local SROs are indicating they feel they are perhaps being stretched too thin and they need to be used in a manner which allows them to have more fidelity to the goals of the program. With that said, there are also seems to be a strong indication that both the school board and WRPS must take the time to revisit the goals and ensure full alignment to both the goals and the strategic approach that will best support those goals.

Recommendations Moving Forward:

At the present time it is recommended the SRO program continue to be temporarily paused until a system level committee with representation from WRPS and WCDSB is established in the short term to address the following recommendations in an action plan.

1. Refine the goals of the program. There needs to be a shared understanding of the SRO program with all stakeholders (staff and community members) to ensure knowledge mobilization. The implementation of the program depends on stakeholder understanding.
2. On the go forward, utilize the information gleaned from the student census, to be initially administered in the fall, to further support the monitoring of the program and the goals it should establish. Further, we can better utilize suspension and VTRA data in connection with our census data to determine any required foci for action.
3. Consider additional resources to ensure the role of the SRO is dedicated to the definition and purpose of the SRO role only. If the goal is to build relationships, this takes time to ensure trust. The duality of the SRO role and role of police can cause confusion and mistrust when the roles of performed interchangeably, so a good examination of how the role should ideally perform within the school environment is needed and how to balance the two potential functions an SRO can fulfill.
4. As we re-examine now and on an ongoing basis the SRO program, it is imperative to utilize student voice, especially from minority and racialized youth to design a program that works for them.
5. In order to build trust and a culture of safety, reporting procedures/mechanisms should be established for students who believe they have been treated unfairly or inappropriately by someone in a position of authority.
6. As a system we need to continue our ongoing work on anti-bias training, equity training and responsive pedagogy for ALL staff.

References

(Fine et al., 2003). Fine, M., Freudenberg, N., Payne, Y., Perkins, T., Smith, K., & Wanzer, K. (2003). "Anything Can Happen With Police Around": Urban Youth Evaluate Strategies of Surveillance in Public Places. *Journal of Social Issues* 59, 1: 141-158.

Recommendation:

This report is for the information of the Board.

Prepared/Reviewed By: Loretta Notten
Director of Education

Judy Merkel
Superintendent of Education, Safe Schools

*Bylaw 4.2 "where the Board of Trustees receives from the Director of Education a monitoring report that flows from a responsibility delegated to the Director under Board Policy – **except where approval is required by the Board of Trustees on a matter delegated by policy to the Board** – the minutes of the Meeting at which the Report is received shall expressly provide that the Board has received and approved of the Report as an action consistent with the authority delegated to the Director, subject in all instances to what otherwise actually occurred."



SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER

PROGRAM REVIEW June 2, 2021



WATERLOO CATHOLIC

— DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD —



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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB) works with the Waterloo Region Police Service (WRPS) to administer the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program, with the goals of developing a positive relationship between youth and police, reducing youth victimization, and partnering with school staff to proactively address student, family, and school issues. While earlier versions of the program existed in the early 2000s, the program in its current form has been in existence since 2015.

In 2020, the WCDSB halted the program and committed to undertaking a review to more fully understand the efficacy of the SRO Program operating in secondary schools in terms of its stated goals and to determine if there is evidence of any or all of the following:

1. How effectively the original mandate of the SRO Program — related to relational proactive policing — is being realized in the WCDSB?
2. How (if at all) is systemic racism experienced within the context of the SRO Program?
3. Whether there is an overrepresentation of racialized groups that are being suspended/expelled where SRO involvement was also included?
4. Whether racialized students see/experience police differently within the SRO Program versus those they encounter in their community?
5. How the police need to work in schools to ensure equity of outcomes for all students?

Turner Consulting Group was hired in January 2021 to conduct this review.

1.2 About the Waterloo Catholic District School Board

WCDSB is currently Ontario's sixth largest Catholic school system and meets the educational needs of 24,000 elementary, secondary, and 13,000 adult/continuing education students through:

- 44 elementary schools (Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8)
- 5 secondary schools (Grade 9 to Grade 12)
- 6 adult education facilities.

WCDSB employs 4,100 full- and part-time staff.

In addition, 26% of area students attend Catholic schools, with 27% of local schools being Catholic schools.

1.2 About the SRO Program

The SRO Program is one of WRPS Youth Programs.¹ The program consists of 10 Constables who are specifically assigned to high schools and elementary schools in both the Catholic and public school boards in Waterloo Region.

Details of the agreement are included in the School Board-Police Protocol, effective July 30, 2016. This document helps establish a coordinated approach to violence prevention and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the parties for maintaining school safety. It also describes the role of the School Resource Officer:

The School Resource Officer (SRO) is a Police officer who is a resource for students, parents, staff and adjoining businesses and neighbours. The SROs will promote a safe learning environment in schools and their neighbourhoods through Police education, mentoring and enforcement. On a day-to-day basis, the SROs will not only represent the Police in its efforts to fulfill its mandate as a Police service, but also fulfills the role of liaison between Police and their assigned schools.

The brochure shared with schools about the SRO Program specifies that the goals of the program are to:

- Develop a positive relationship between youth and police
- Reduce youth victimization, and
- Partner with school staff to proactively address student, family, and school issues.

The SRO Program provides schools with a reliable and consistent point of contact with the WRPS, and an SRO will likely be the officer responding to calls for service at the school. The SROs also participate in schools in several ways, including conducting safety drills, suspension re-entry meetings, and violent threat risk assessment process. In addition, the SRO makes regular school visits to spend time with students and help develop awareness of community resources and safety issues such as bike safety, stranger awareness, bullying/respect, sexual harassment, criminal harassment, drugs, mental health, weapons, and policing as a career choice. They are also available to be included in the events that also take place throughout the year such as school BBQs, sports and art events, plays and concerts, and Remembrance Day events.

The brochure about the SRO Program indicates that the role of the SRO also includes elements of social work, counselling, and being a direct liaison or referral source for school

¹ Waterloo Regional Police. (n.d.). *Youth programs: School Resource Officer program*.
<https://www.wrps.on.ca/en/our-community/youth-programs.aspx>

staff, students, and their families to social and support services within the community. The brochure states:

Your SRO is a direct liaison to you and your school staff, and can act as a conduit for your students and their families to connect with support services within the community. Do you know of a child that comes to school hungry? Has a child come to you or your staff with thoughts of harming him/herself? Has a child experienced a trauma? Has a child's behaviour suddenly changed? There are agencies in the community that are able to support a family as they navigate this difficult time. Getting support for the student and family can improve their performance in school and prevent negative contact with police in the future.

In 2015, a process review of the elementary SRO Program was undertaken and a number of goals and program targets established for the elementary SROs. These program targets were consistently monitored and tracked throughout the school year. An evaluation of the program was conducted again in 2016, with annual surveys conducted since then with school administrators and all SROs.

A similar process review has not been conducted for the secondary SRO Program and no specific program targets are in place that would contribute to an assessment of whether the program is meeting its goals.

2. Context

2.1 The social context

The SRO Program emerged in Ontario as an outcome of a major policy implementation like the Ontario *Safe Schools Act* in 2000. The program is funded by police services, at no cost to the school boards.

In some school districts, the program entailed assigning full-time police officers in high schools to conduct daily interactions with the student body, with objectives ranging from reducing instances of bullying to preventing crime. The WRPS SRO Program takes a different approach, assigning one SRO to multiple schools.

Over time, the primary emphasis of the program has shifted toward building relationships between police and marginalized youth, an approach rooted in the model of community policing. Decades after the program's inception, SRO programs had become normalized as a natural part of the high school experience, leaving many educational stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and students, to uncritically accept the presence of dedicated school-based police officers rather than to question the need for them in the first place.² The presence of SROs in schools has also continued while the budgets of school boards have declined, impacting their ability to provide social work, counselling, and other supports for students.

Over the years, and across Canada, communities have continued to raise their concerns about SRO programs and their impact primarily on racialized students. The killing of George Floyd by a police officer outraged Black and other communities not only in the United States, but also in Canada and around the world. Anti-racism protests were held across the globe, and people took to the streets to raise their voices against racial injustice and to call for police reform. Throughout Canada, protests were held in response to not only the killing of George Floyd, but also the death around the same time of an Indigenous Black woman, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, who fell from her 24th-floor apartment balcony while police were in her home, as well as in response to other Black people who have been killed by police or who died after police were called for a wellness check.

These incidents resulted in renewed demands for the ending of SRO programs across North America, as well as the defunding of police programs in general and investment instead in mental health, housing, and other social services. These calls also came from the African, Caribbean and Black Network and members of Black Lives Matter Waterloo Region,

² Madan, G. R. (2016). *Policing in Toronto schools: Race-ing the conversation* [M.A. thesis]. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/71685/1/Madan_Gita_R_201603_MA_thesis.pdf

which advocated for a minimum defunding of \$29.3 million from the WRPS's budget.³ One of the largest BLM protests in Canada was held on June 3, 2020, near Kitchener's Victoria Park, with an estimated 20,000 people attending the event.⁴

These protests have helped to refocus attention on the impact of police on racialized, and in particular Black, communities. The disproportionately negative impact of police has long been studied and been a longstanding concern for Black communities.⁵ These protests have also focused on the impact of police in schools on racialized and Black students. As a result, both the Waterloo Region DSB and WCDSB committed to reviewing their SRO programs.

2.3 The demographic context

The Regional Municipality of Waterloo is a growing community, with more people, jobs, and services expected to come to the municipality in the coming years. Residential construction is on the rise, which will increase not only the city's size but its racial diversity. This increase has been fueled by house prices in Toronto, with many people moving further away from the city of Toronto in search of affordable house prices. This has been further fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic as Toronto is experiencing record population loss, with more people moving from Ontario's largest and most expensive city as work-from-home options become available to them.

Fuelled largely by immigration, Ontario's racialized population is growing at a faster rate than the provincial population and comprises an increasing proportion of the provincial population. As Table 1 shows, the racialized population in Waterloo Region is also growing at a faster rate than the city's total population. This puts added pressure on all public

³ Hill, K. (2020, June 26). *Group calls for Waterloo Region to pull \$29 million from police budget*. CTV News. <https://kitchener.ctvnews.ca/group-calls-for-waterloo-region-to-pull-29-million-from-police-budget-1.4999056>

⁴ Doran, C. (2020, June 4). *KW Solidarity March organizer calls turnout 'incredibly overwhelming'*. Kitchener Today. <https://www.kitchenertoday.com/local-news/kw-solidarity-march-organizer-calls-turnout-incredibly-overwhelming-2409416>

⁵ See for example: Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2020, August 10). *A disparate impact: Second interim report on the inquiry into racial profiling and racial discrimination of Black persons by the Toronto Police Service*. <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/disperate-impact-second-interim-report-inquiry-racial-profiling-and-racial-discrimination-black>

Wortley, S., & Jung, M. (2020). *Racial disparity in arrests and charges: An analysis of arrest and charge data from the Toronto Police Service*. Ontario Human Rights Commission. <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Racial%20Disparity%20in%20Arrests%20and%20Charges%20TPS.pdf>

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2018). *A collective impact: Interim report on the inquiry into racial profiling and racial discrimination of Black persons by the Toronto Police Service*. <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/public-interest-inquiry-racial-profiling-and-discrimination-toronto-police-service/collective-impact-interim-report-inquiry-racial-profiling-and-racial-discrimination-black>

institutions, including WCDSB, to consider the ways in which its policies and programs impact the racialized communities they serve.

Table 1. Rate of Population Growth, Racialized and Total Population (2006–2016).								
Year	Indigenous Population			Racialized Population			Total Population	
	#	% of Population	Rate of Growth Since 2006	#	% of Population	Rate of Growth Since 2006	#	Rate of Growth Since 2006
ONTARIO								
2006	242,490	1.8%		2,745,200	21%	—	12,851,821	—
2016	374,395	2.8%		3,885,585	29%	42%	13,448,494	5%
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WATERLOO								
2006	4,810	1.0%	—	61,980	13%	—	478,121	—
2016	8,985	1.7%	87%	100,025	19%	61%	535,154	11%
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006, 2016.								

As Table 1 shows, between 2006 and 2016 the racialized population in Ontario grew by 42% (from 2,745,200 to 3,885,585), while the population of the province grew by only 5% (from 12,851,821 to 13,448,494). As such, the racialized population increased from 21% of Ontario's population in 2006 to 29% of the provincial population in 2016.

The table also shows that Waterloo Region is a fast-growing community, growing by 11% between 2006 and 2016, while the provincial population grew by only 5% during this time.

This data shows that Waterloo Region's racialized population is growing at an even faster rate. Between 2006 and 2016, the racialized population in Waterloo Region grew by 61%, increasing from 61,980 to 100,025 individuals, accounting for 67% of net population growth during this time. The racialized population grew from 13% of Waterloo Region's population in 2006 to 19% in 2016.

During the same period, Waterloo Region's Indigenous population grew by 87%, from 4,810 to 8,985 individuals, increasing from 1.0% of the community to 1.7%.

The Indigenous community has been identified as one of the fastest growing in Canada. Statistics Canada projects that the racialized population will continue to grow at a faster rate than the general population, resulting in racialized people representing a larger proportion of the population over the coming years. While the growth of the racialized population will be fueled largely by immigration, a growing proportion of racialized people are Canadian-born. In 2011, about 31% of racialized people in Canada were born here.⁶

⁶ Statistics Canada. (2016, September 15). *Immigration and ethnocultural diversity in Canada*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm>

Statistics Canada projections show that the provincial population will approach 18 million by 2036, with the racialized population increasing to 48% of the population.⁷ These projections show that the racialized population of Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo will grow from 17% in 2011 to between 32% and 38% in 2036.

3. Approach and Methodology

3.1 Our approach

Despite their popularity, few Canadian studies have evaluated the effectiveness and impact of SROs on racialized students. These studies have been descriptive in nature, focusing on what SROs do on a daily basis and the perceptions of people involved with SRO programs. Others that have attempted to quantify the impact of the SRO program have failed to focus their attention on the impact on racialized students.⁸ Given the lack of quantitative data on the involvement of SROs in school discipline matters and the outcomes for racialized students in particular, these studies have not been able to focus on the impact of SROs on racialized students. The lack of quantitative data also impacts the ability of this review to assess the effectiveness and impact of the SRO program, particularly on racialized students. As such, the focus will be on the perceptions and experiences of students, staff, and the community.

In addition, given that research has consistently shown that racialized communities are disproportionately impacted by police, this review has endeavoured to use a race equity lens. This approach allows us to amplify the voices and experiences of racialized youth, parents, and communities, and not allow their perspectives and experiences to be drowned out by the larger White population. This approach will ensure adequate attention is being paid to the experiences of racialized youth, who are most likely to feel targeted by SROs. This study also recognizes that Indigenous students may also have differing perspectives and experiences of SROs, and will also examine these separately. We also recognize that the popularity of a program does not necessarily mean that it is effective or that it helps the collective good.

3.2 Methodology

The review adopted a mixed method approach to collect the data from a number of stakeholders for this review. Surveys were conducted with secondary school students and staff and community members, who were also invited to participate in small group

⁷ Statistics Canada. (2017, January 25). *Immigration and diversity: Population projections for Canada and its regions, 2011 to 2036*. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-551-x/91-551-x2017001-eng.htm>

⁸ See for example: Duxbury, L., & Bennell, C. (2019, September 25). *An evidence-based look at the use of school resource officers* (1st ed.). Routledge.

discussions. One-on-one telephone interviews were also conducted with school administrators, school board staff, as well as members of WRPS.

These consultations focused on the subjective perceptions and experiences with SROs. Given the length of time the program has been in existence, 20 years overall, with the new program being re-established in 2015, students and many staff would not have an experience without an SRO to compare their experience to. As such, we don't have a baseline to understand their feelings of safety without SROs.

Online surveys

Secondary school student survey: Since most of the potential respondents were minors, on March 3 a notice was sent out to parents of secondary school students to inform them that the survey would be administered the week of March 8, and the steps they can take should they not want their child to participate in the survey. A few parents did contact the school to indicate that their child did not have permission to participate in the survey.

While only students with parental permission were allowed to participate in the survey, the survey was completely voluntary. Students with this consent still retained the right to decline to participate.

During the week of March 8, homeroom teachers were asked to provide students with 5 to 10 minutes to complete the online student survey, which asks about their perspective of the SRO program and their experiences with individual SROs. Of the 7,048 secondary students enrolled in WCDSB's five secondary schools, 1,616 participated in the survey by answering at least one question, a response rate of 23%.

By grade, student responses were as follows:

Grade	#
9	222
10	419
11	407
12	280
Adult Education	6
No answer	282
TOTAL	1,616

In addition, by grade, student responses were as follows:

Race	#
Indigenous	86
Racialized	311
White	729
No Answer	417
Prefer not to answer	97
Total	1,616
24 students identified as both Indigenous and racialized and have been counted in both groups.	

Students were informed, both verbally by the teacher and on the survey, that the survey is completely voluntary and anonymous, that the study is being conducted by an independent consulting company, and that their responses would not be seen by anyone at WCDSB.

The survey asked students about:

- Their perspectives about School Resource Officers (SRO) at WCDSB
- Their experience with individual SROs
- How they rate SROs and police in general on a number of characteristics
- The impact of SROs in their school

The online surveys used in this study are included in Appendix A.

Secondary school staff survey: During the week of March 15, an email was sent to all secondary staff from the Director of Education inviting them to complete the SRO Program Review Staff Survey to anonymously share their experiences with and perceptions of the SRO Program. The online survey was open until midnight on March 30.

The survey asked staff about:

- Their perspectives about School Resource Officers (SRO) at WCDSB
- Their experience with individual SROs
- How they rate SROs and police in general on a number of characteristics
- The impact of SROs in their school

Of the 586 secondary staff, 103 (18%) participated in the survey by responding to at least one question.

Community survey: On March 8, members of Parent Councils were sent an email from the Director of Education inviting them to complete the SRO Program Review Community Survey to anonymously share their experiences with and perceptions of the SRO Program. The online survey was open until midnight on March 30.

Information about the SRO Program Review was also shared via the Board's Twitter account and Facebook page. Members of the school community were directed to a webpage on the Board's website for additional information about the review and to access the various online surveys and register for a small group discussion.

Since the community is not involved with the SRO Program on a day-to-day basis, their survey was limited to gathering data on their understanding of the SRO program and their perceptions about the impact of the program on the school community. The survey asked community members about:

- Their perspectives about School Resource Officers (SRO) at WCDSB
- The impact of SROs in WCDSB schools.

A total of 87 community members, including former staff and school administrators and formers, parents of current students, and former students responded to the survey.

The surveys were put online by WCDSB's research staff using the Board's Qualtrics account. Qualtrics is an online survey tool that allows for the building, distribution, and analysis of surveys. Once the surveys were closed, the survey data was shared with the consultants for analysis.

Small group discussions

Students, staff, and community members were invited to register for one of 10 virtual discussion groups scheduled between March 29 and April 13. To create a safe space for participants, focus groups were organized separately for students, staff, and community members. Each focus group was limited to 6 people.

At the end of the survey, survey respondents were given the opportunity to register for a focus group. In addition, individuals could register for a small group discussion from the webpage about the SRO Program Review on the Board's website.

Unfortunately, there was not a lot of interest for these virtual discussion groups. Only five people registered for these small group discussions.

One-on-one telephone interviews with WCDSB and WRPS staff

In addition, 10 WCDSB secondary school administrators, superintendents, and the Director of Education were invited to participate in a one-on-one telephone interview to share their perspectives about the SRO Program.

An additional 18 WRPS staff were interviewed including SROs, those who supervise the SROs, as well as other senior leaders in the organization, including the Chief of Police.

All of those who participated in the interviews were assured that their input would remain anonymous, and that no information would be included in the report that would identify them.

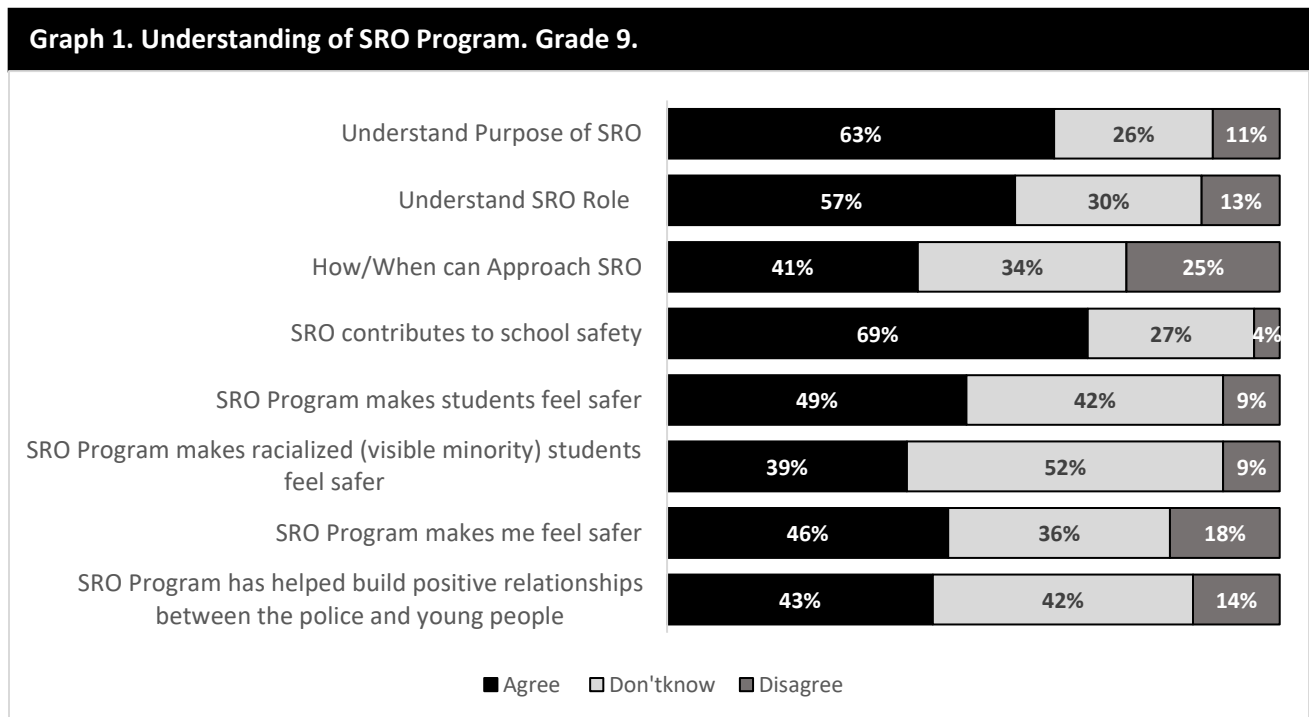
4. Findings

This section summarizes the student, staff, and community member input gathered through the online surveys, small group discussions, and online survey. We start with the perspectives of students, explored by their racial identity.

4.1 Student experiences and perspectives

Of the students who completed the survey, 86 identified as Indigenous (i.e., First Nations, Métis, Inuit), 311 as racialized, and 729 as neither Indigenous nor racialized, i.e., as White. In addition, 514 students did not identify their race.

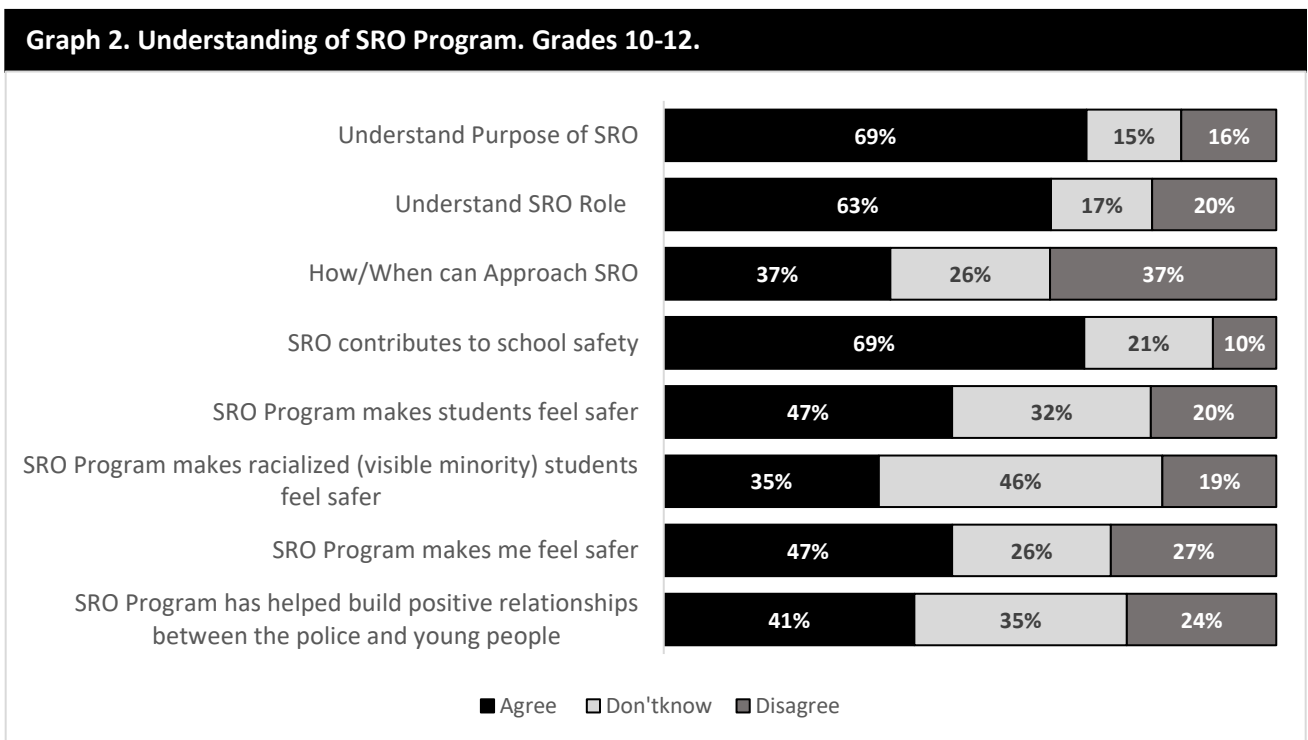
When their responses are explored by grade, it is evident that a largest proportion of respondents from Grade 9 students responded “Don’t Know” to these questions. This is understandable given that they entered high school during the year the COVID-19 pandemic began and during which the SRO Program was suspended.



As Graph 1 shows, despite having little knowledge of, or experience with, the SRO Program many Grade 9 students shared their opinion of the program. Sixty-three percent agreed that they understand the SRO Program, 57% agreed that they understand the role of the SRO, and 69% agreed that the SRO contributes to school safety. Smaller proportions agreed that they know how and when they can approach the SRO (41%), that the SRO Program makes students feel safer (49%), makes racialized students feel safer (39%), or makes them feel safer (46%). In addition, 43% agreed that the SRO Program helps build positive relationships between the police and young people.

Grade 9 students also shared their negative perceptions of the SRO Program, with 18% disagreeing that the SRO Program makes them feel safer, and 14% disagreeing that the SRO Program has helped build positive relationships between the police and young people.

As shown in Graph 2, students in Grades 10 to 12 were less likely to not have an opinion to these questions and more likely to disagree.



As Graph 2 shows, similar proportions report that they understand the purpose of the SRO Program (69%), understand the role of the SRO (63%), and believe that SROs contribute to school safety (69%). As with Grade 9 students, fewer than half of Grades 10 to 12 students agreed that they know how and when they can approach the SRO (37%), that the program makes students feel safer (47%), makes racialized students feel safer (35%), makes them

feel safer (47%), and has helped build positive relationships between the police and young people (41%).

A notable difference in the responses between students in Grades 9 and those in Grades 10 to 12 is that those in the later grades, who have more knowledge and experience of the SRO program, are more likely to disagree with these statements. For example, 20% disagree that the program makes students feel safer, 19% disagree that the program makes racialized students feel safer, and 27% do not agree that the program makes them feel safer (compared with 9%, 9%, and 18%, respectively, for Grade 9 students).

Their responses to the open-ended questions indicate that many students, regardless of their grade, have no knowledge of the SRO Program and in fact indicated that this survey was the first time they have heard about the SRO Program. Their responses suggest that rather than responding based on their actual knowledge of, or personal experience with, SROs they were responding to a theoretical understanding of the SRO Program. As some students shared:

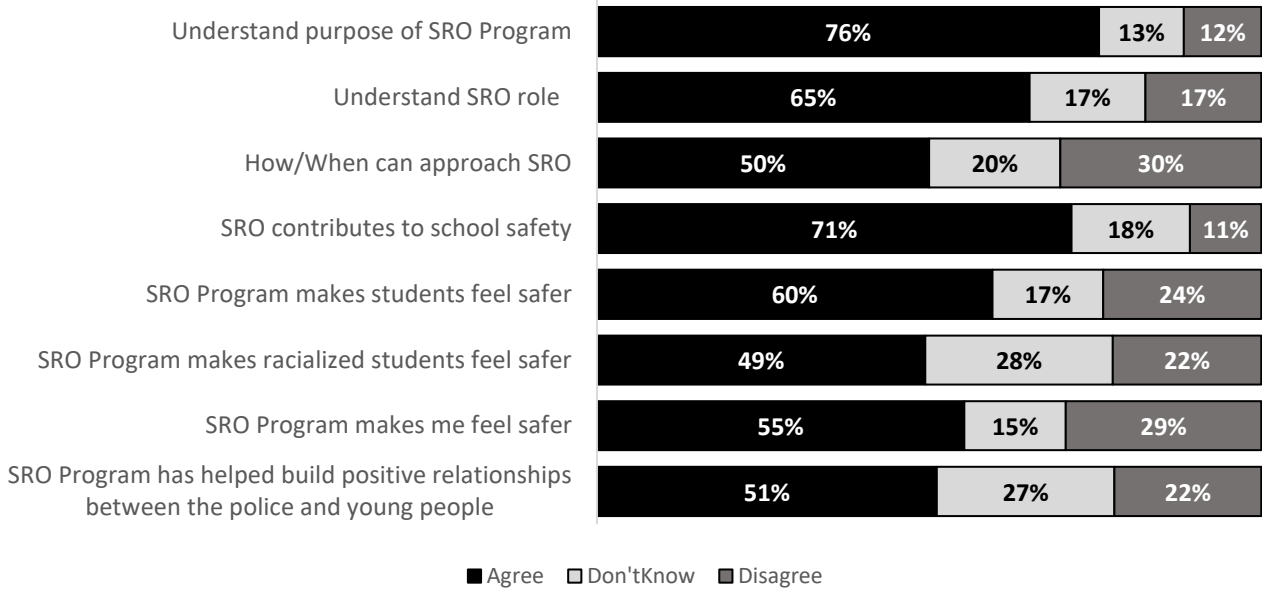
In have never interacted with the SRO and was unaware of his presence, so I can't speak to their contributions.

To be honest, I didn't even know the SRO Program was a thing before this survey. It sounds like a really good program, but I don't know anyone that's used it.

Graph 3 shows the responses of Indigenous students to the questions about the SRO Program overall.

As Graph 3 shows, 76% of Indigenous students indicated that they understand the purpose of the SRO Program, while 12% disagreed with this statement. Despite this, only 65% agreed that they understand the role of the SRO, with 17% disagreeing. Only 50% reported that they understand how and when they could approach the SRO, and 30% disagreed with this statement.

Graph 3. Understanding of SRO Program. Indigenous Students.

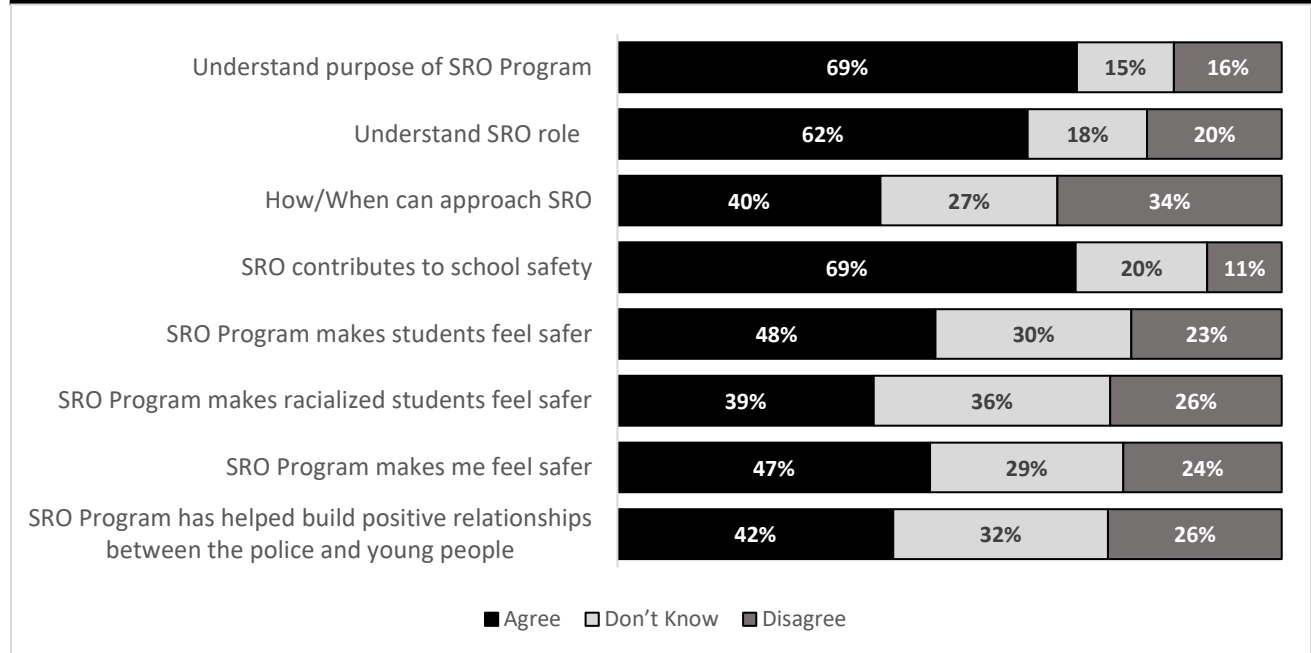


Furthermore, while 71% of Indigenous students agreed that the SRO contributes to school safety (11% disagreed), and a smaller proportion (60%) report that the program makes students feel safer, with 24% disagreeing. Fewer still agreed that the SRO Program makes racialized students feel safer (49%), with 22% disagreeing. While 55% feel that the SRO Program makes them feel safer, 29% did not agree with this statement.

Only 51% of Indigenous students reported feeling that the SRO Program has helped build positive relationships between the police and young people and 22% did not agree that the SRO Program has helped build positive relationships between the police and young people.

While a significant proportion of students indicated that they “Don’t Know” in response to these questions, a significant proportion also disagreed with some of these statements. For example, close to a third (29%) of Indigenous students did not agree that the SRO Program makes them feel safer, while a quarter (24%) did not agree that the SRO Program makes students feel safer, and 22% not agreeing that the SRO Program makes racialized students feel safer.

Graph 4. Understanding of SRO Program. Racialized Students.



As Graph 4 shows, racialized students were less positive about the SRO Program than their Indigenous peers. Sixty-nine percent of racialized students agreed that they understand the purpose of the SRO Program, with 16% disagreeing with the statement. While 62% agreed that they understand the role of the SRO, 20% did not agree with this statement. Less than half of racialized survey respondents (40%) agreed that they understand how and when they can approach the SRO, with 34% disagreeing.

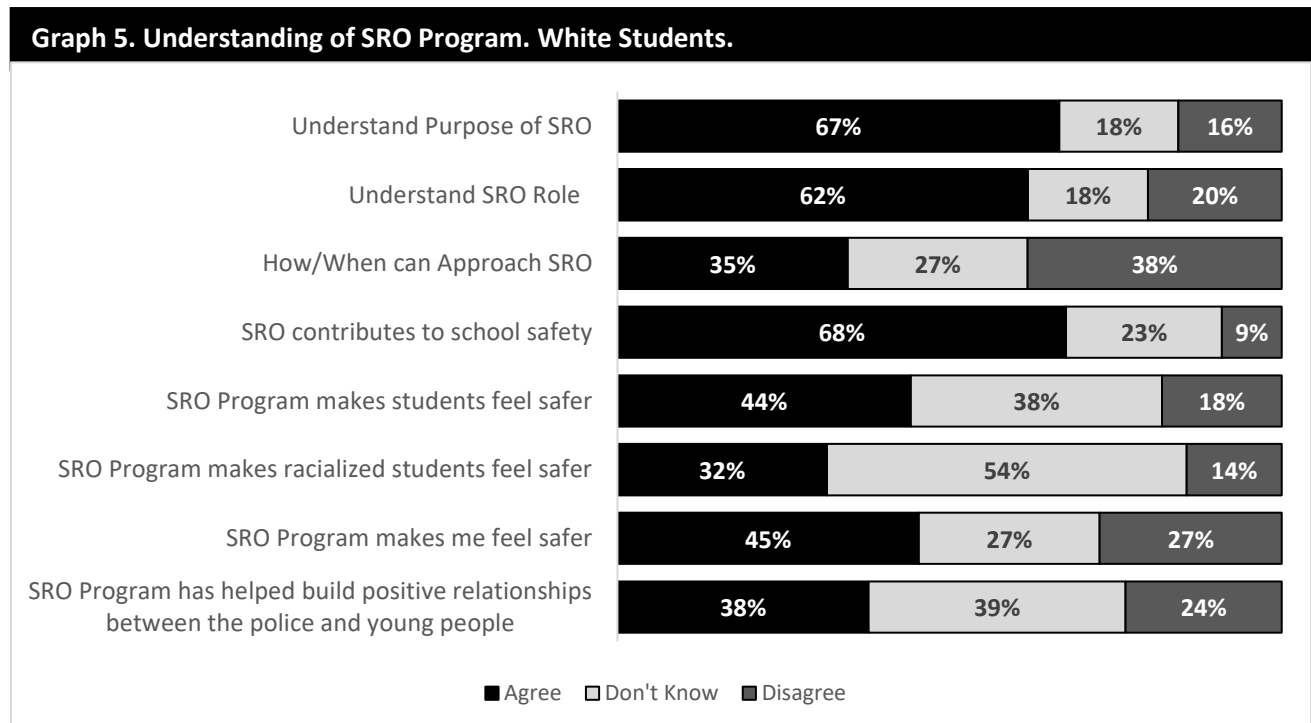
Despite this, 69% of racialized students agreed that the SRO contributes to school safety, and fewer than half (48%) reported that the program makes students feel safer. Only 39% reported that the SRO Program makes racialized students feel safer, with 47% reporting that the SRO Program makes them feel safer and 42% reporting that the SRO Program has helped build positive relationships between the police and young people. About a quarter of racialized survey respondents did not agree that the SRO Program makes students feel safer (23%), makes racialized students feel safer (26%), makes them feel safer (24%), or has helped build positive relationships between the police and young people (26%).

While one would expect that White students would be more positive about the SRO Program than their Indigenous and racialized counterparts, their responses to the survey, as shown in Graph 5, show that not to be the case. However, when exploring their responses, it appears that White students are not less positive (or more negative), but that a larger proportion did not have an opinion. For example, 54% did not know whether the SRO Program makes racialized students feel safer, versus 28% of Indigenous students and 36% of racialized students.

As the data shows, 76% of Indigenous students and 69% of racialized students reported understanding the purpose of the SRO Program, while 67% of White students reported the same. A similar proportion of White students reported that they understand the role of the SRO (62%).

However, only 35% of White students reported that they know how and when they can approach the SRO, compared to 50% of Indigenous students and 40% of racialized students, with 38% of White students disagreeing with this statement.

While only 44% of White students felt that the SRO Program makes students feel safer, a large proportion (38%) did not have an opinion, while 18% disagreed. An even smaller proportion (32%) agreed that the SRO Program makes racialized students feel safer, with more than half (54%) reporting that they didn't know, and 14% disagreeing.



Fewer than half of White student respondents (45%) agreed that the SRO Program makes them feel safer, with about one-quarter disagreeing, and another quarter expressing no opinion. An even smaller proportion (38%) agreed that the SRO Program has helped build positive relationships between the police and young people.

Student comments to the open-ended questions allow us to further explore student perceptions of the SRO Program. One theme expressed through these comments is their concern about, and lack of understanding of, why police are needed in their schools. Some also expressed their perception that rather than make students feel safer, police in schools actually do the opposite, making students feel unsafe, uncomfortable, and criminalized. Some of the comments that highlight these concerns include:

I do not believe an officer is necessary to make students feel safe. All these officers do is instill fear upon students.

While a great program, in theory, I as a student have never once seen or communicated with a School Resource Officer. The few times I have seen officers they have made me feel uncomfortable as they just stand and observe the students as we go about our day.

Having a police officer just adds to the feeling that school is like a prison and now we need to have officers in order for our school to function which I think is pretty ridiculous. If we stopped policing kids and telling them what not to do and instead showed them examples and lead by example of what to do, taught by adults students see regularly, there would be some sense of community and caring in the school.

Sure if a person with a knife or gun walks into the school, its nice to have an officer on stand-by, however this is not America...having a fully uniformed officer, gun, taser, and all, walking through high schools is the most stupid idea anyone could have... Many people's reaction when seeing police cars or even that uniform itself is to leave, to get away, and that feeling is for both minorities and non-minorities. This feeling doesn't come because we are doing something wrong either, it's genuine fear of police officers.

I personally do not think that it is a good idea to have a police officer within the school building. It makes students on edge and nervous. It also makes us feel as criminals and that the educators do not trust us, or we are so bad we

When asked about the impact the SRO has on school culture, a number of students shared that seeing police in their school and police cars parked at the front of the school

contributes to perceptions of an unsafe school environment. As some students commented:

Over all I think when students see the officer they think their school is not safe and that something is going on.

I think they make students think they are being watched, or that somebody did something bad.

I think they make school look like a scary place because what other reason would we have to have police in our school then to try and prevent violence and issues in the school that interfere with the law.

They cause distrust in the school system because we need to have police officers around.

In addition, seeing police in their hallways, armed and in full uniform can cause anxiety and fear in students. Racialized students themselves shared the negative impact that having SROs in schools has on them:

I think the police in general make people afraid because of all the "bad apples" seen online. And with police officers in schools, I think its giving kids bad anxiety now.

They make us more afraid. All students of colour need to watch ourselves and every action we do, every choice we make, in fear of being suspended or even worse.

Dr. Natasha Browne, a Toronto-based psychologist, explains why this can have a profoundly negative effect on some students:⁹

When you have an authority figure in a learning environment, who, for our youth, has been a symbol of trauma, abuse of power and fear, it can evoke symptoms within the youth that may hinder their ability to succeed.

The response by students can be increased anger, social withdrawal, or a reduction of self-esteem and self-worth. So, rather than creating safe environments, SROs could undermine the feelings of safety as well as their ability to learn. These students may then turn to coping strategies like skipping school, becoming disengaged, or numbing the fear and bad

⁹ Boampong, J. (2018, January 24). *Pencils down, hands up*. Shameless. <https://shamelessmag.com/blog/entry/pencils-down-hands-up>

feelings with drugs and alcohol. So rather than creating a positive climate, SROs may be having a negative impact on some students.

Some students also shared that SROs focus on small issues, such as vaping in the bathrooms, and that they are not addressing issues that other adults in the building could and should be addressing. There were also those who indicated that one officer cannot be addressing all the issues within a school of hundreds of students. As such, they note that even with the SRO Program in place fights and bullying still occur.

Alternatively, there were students who shared positive feelings about the SRO Program. They shared that the SRO has spoken to their class about policing as a career, have stopped fights from occurring, act as a deterrence to those who might behave inappropriately, and have an increased sense of safety knowing that an SRO is in the school should any issues arise. There were also those who had no experience with the SRO Program, but shared a support for the program in theory:

Good that they are here to help if someone breaks into the building.

If there are fights I guess they can get things somewhat sorted.

The SRO can help prevent things such as bullying, fights, and other forms of violence and harassment.

I think it helps to deter school fights and bullying because SROs are police officers and that role with the uniform is intimidating on its own and has more "preloaded" authority.

I believe that they allow students to feel safer from potential threats. Knowing that America deals with school shootings all of the time, maybe having officers in our schools is not a bad thing.

Other students shared their unwavering support for the police, with some taking offense to the survey conducted for this review. They shared their perspective that only those who are engaged in criminal activity should be uncomfortable around police. Some of these sentiments include the following:

I find it extremely offensive that the police are being viewed as a whole when one officer in the United States made a stupid decision. The police should NEVER be viewed negatively when they risk their lives to keep our community safe. Just that this survey is being shared with students really hurts my heart. Discrimination — to unfairly treat a person or group differently from other people or groups. We are treating the police unfairly when only a small percentage is creating problems. Stop this madness. Do better.

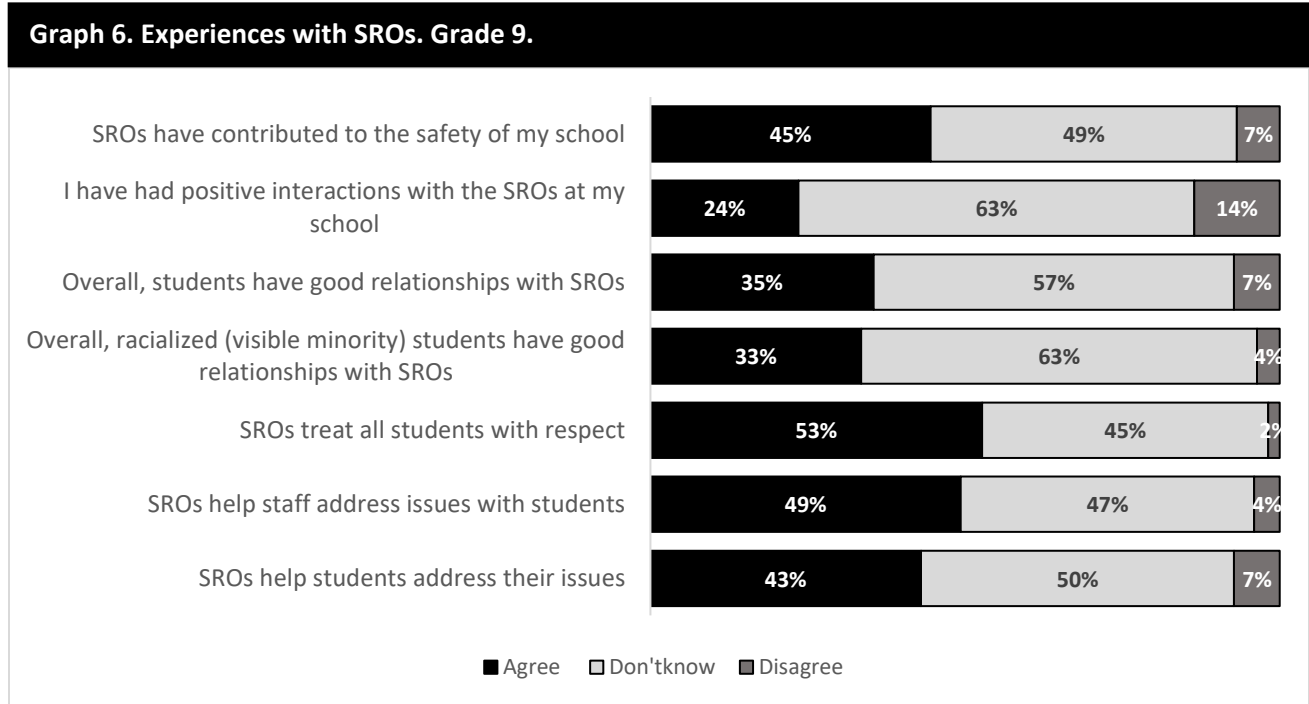
The interactions I have had with SRO demonstrates that a majority of cops are decent people. The mainstream media as attempted to demonize cops and portray them as corrupt racists. I reject defunding the police and all associated narratives. I am not convinced by the negative portrayal of cops in popular culture. I know that corruption within the police exists and that there are bad apples out there. But I trust that there are measures in place to ensure that the Police to do their job properly... I know that, a police officer at school will detour any possible threats of school shooters. (A good guy with a gun stops a bad guy with a gun.) ... I support Law enforcement... I am sorry that the SRO is concerned with accusations of racism, and feels the need to address it in these surveys. Perhaps it would be better to inform students of how the SRO trains cops to be the best, and how they 'throw away' bad apples and deal with corrupt officers. Instead of accepting the ill-conceived notion that cops are racist.

The only people that are afraid of police are the people that are planning on criminal activity or people with prejudices against the police. Police officers are not the problem. People that irrationally fear the police are the problem. There is no evidence that suggests that cops as a whole are systemically racist or corrupt.

The police are important and not realizing it's important will be the downfall of our cities and a sharp increase in crime rates.

The survey asked students to reflect on their interactions with the School Resource Officers in their school and what they have heard from other staff or students.

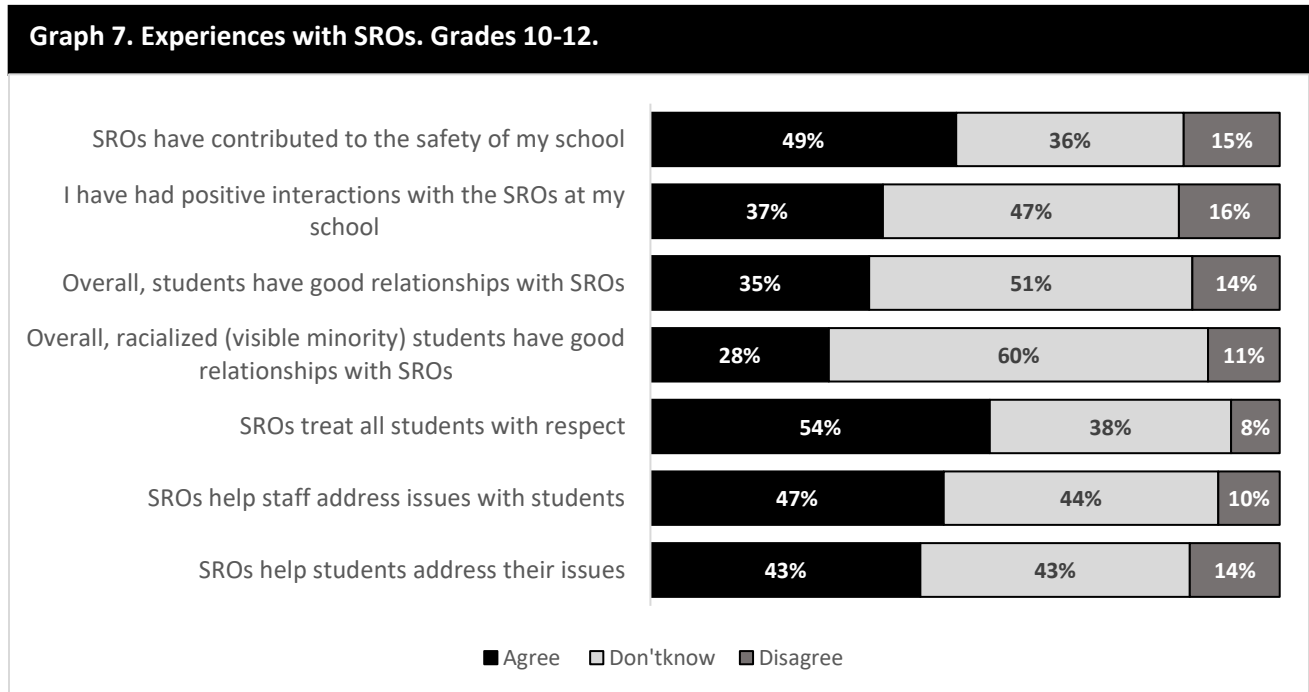
Graph 6 shows the responses of Grade 9 students to the questions about the SRO Program overall.



Again, what is notable in the responses of grade 9 students to these questions is that the majority replied that they do not have an opinion. Yet, despite their limited knowledge of and experience with the SRO Program, many grade 9 students did express an opinion about the program. Forty-five percent of grade 9 students agreed that SROs have contributed to the safety of their school, with one-quarter (24%) agreeing that they have had positive interactions with the SROs at their school. About one-third agreed that students have good relationships with SROs (35%) and that racialized students have good relationships with SROs (33%).

Larger proportions report that SROs treat all students with respect (53%), help staff address issues (49%), and help students address their issues (43%).

Graph 7 shows the responses of students in Grades 10 to 12 to the questions about the SRO Program overall.

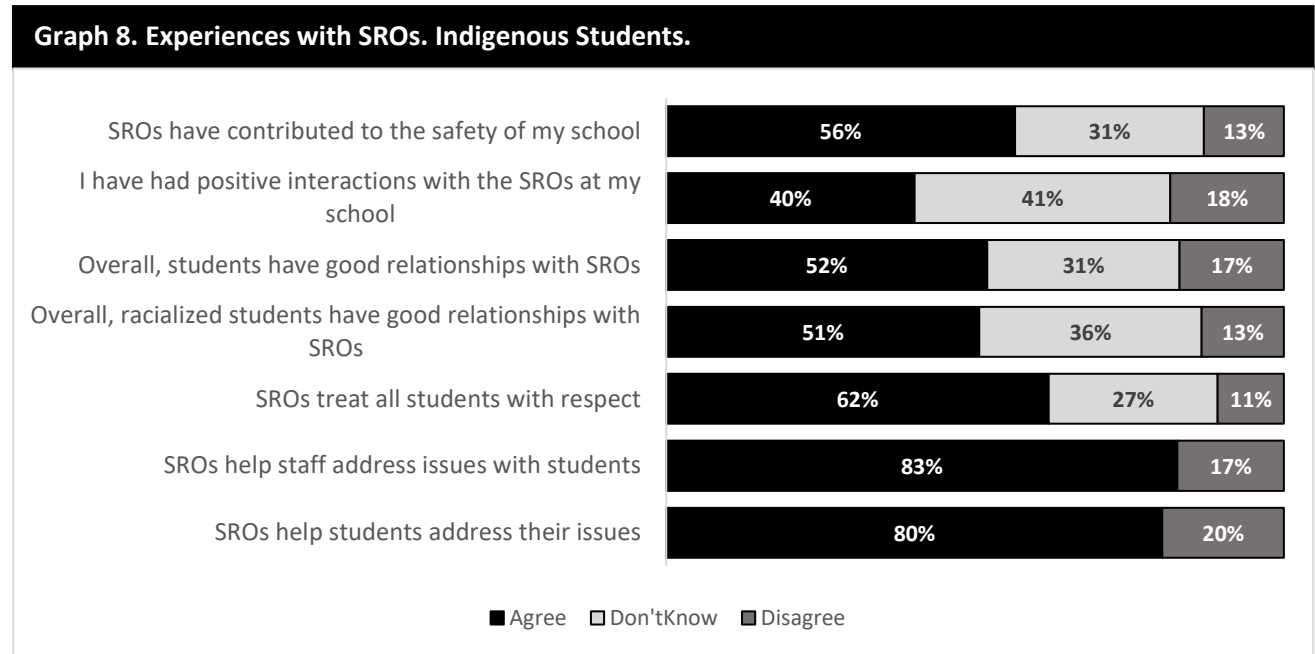


As the graph shows, significant proportions of these students also reported “Don’t Know” to these questions — from a low of 36% to a high of 60%. While the proportion which agreed with these questions were similar to that of Grade 9 students, the proportion of those who disagreed was higher, suggesting that students with more knowledge of and experience with the program are more negative about it.

Just under half (49%) agreed that SROs have contributed to the safety of their school, with about one-third agreeing that they have had positive interactions with the SRO at their school (37%), that students have good relationships with SROs (35%), and that racialized students have good relationships with SROs (28%).

Larger proportions agreed that SROs treat all students with respect (54%), help staff address issues with students (47%), and help students address their issues (43%).

Graph 8 shows Indigenous students' responses to these questions.



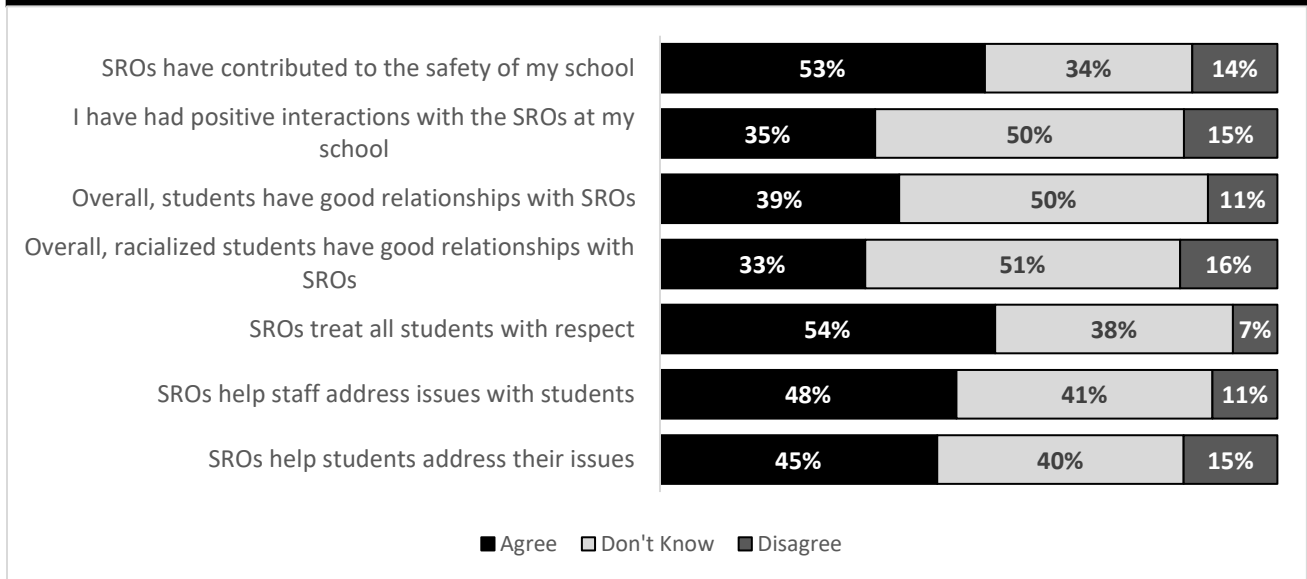
As Graph 8 shows, 56% of Indigenous survey respondents indicated that the SRO at their school has contributed to school safety, with 13% disagreeing and 31% not expressing an opinion. Forty percent report that they have had positive interactions with the SROs at their school, while 18% disagreed, and 41% indicating that they did not know.

Just over half (52%) agreed that students have good relationships with SROs overall (17% disagreed), with a slightly smaller proportion (51%) agreeing that racialized students have good relationships with SROs (13% disagreed). About a third did not have an opinion.

When asked about the behaviours and role of SROs, 62% agreed that SROs treat all students with respect, with 11% not agreeing and 27% not expressing an opinion.

Overall, however, Indigenous students were quite positive when asked about whether SROs help staff and students address issues – 83% agreed that SROs help staff address issues with students and 80% believe that SROs help students address their issues (17% and 20% disagreeing respectively).

Graph 9. Experiences with SROs. Racialized Students.



As Graph 9 shows, racialized students were less likely to report positive experiences with individual SROs than their Indigenous peers, and more likely to not express an opinion. With respect to these questions, about half of racialized survey respondents (from a low of 34% to 51%) indicated that they did not agree or disagree with these statements.

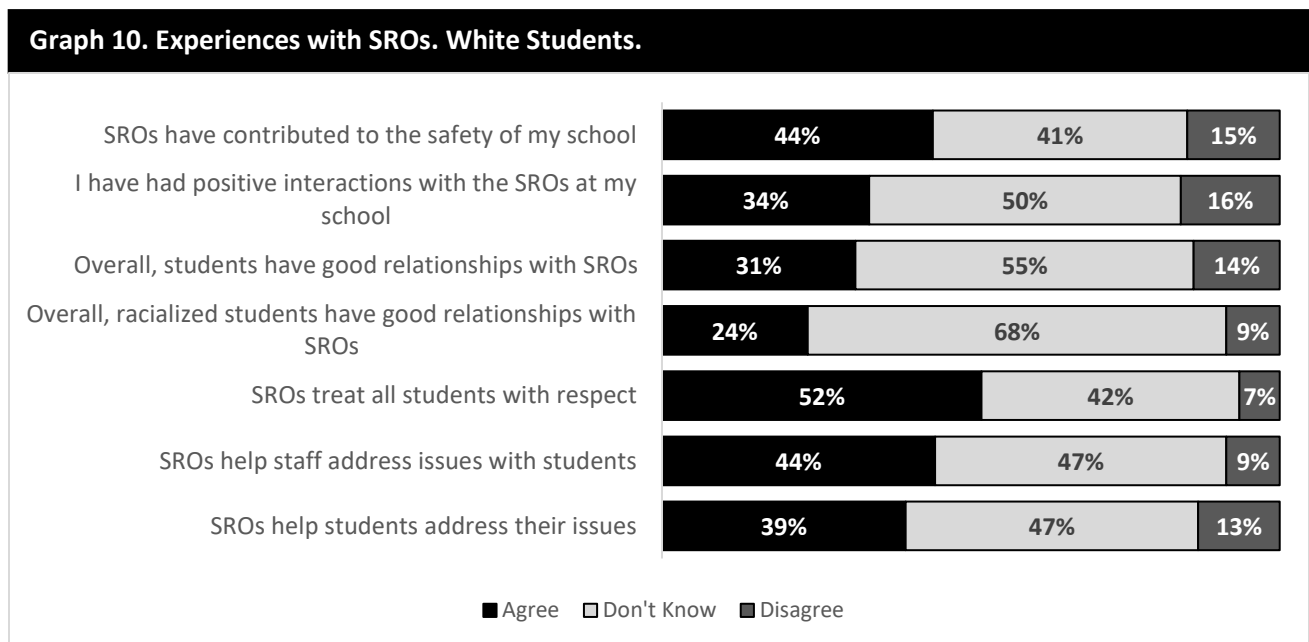
Just over half (53%) believe that SROs have contributed to the safety of their school, with 14% disagreeing and 34% that they did not know. When asked if they have had positive interactions with the SROs at their school, 35% agreed, with 50% reporting that they did not know, and 15% disagreeing. Similar responses were given when asked whether students have a good relationship with SROs (39% agreeing; 11% disagreeing) and whether racialized students have a good relationship with SROs (33% agreeing; 16% disagreeing).

A larger proportion, 54% agreed that SROs treat all students with respect, help staff address issues with students (48%) and that SROs help students address their issues (45%). Again, a large proportion did not have an opinion.

Graph 10 depicts the responses of White students to these questions. Again, while White students were less likely to agree with these statements than their Indigenous and racialized peers, they were more likely to not have an opinion.

Fewer than half of White respondents agreed that SROs have contributed to the safety of their school. Even small proportions agreed that they have had positive interactions with an SRO at their school (34%), that students have good relationships with SROs (31%), and that racialized students have good relationships with SROs (24%). However, between 41% and 68% of respondents to these questions indicated that they did not know.

Just over half (52%) agreed that SROs treat all students with respect, while 44% agreed that SROs help staff address issues with students, and 39% agreed that SROs help students address their issues.



Students also share varying perspectives and experiences with SROs in the open-ended questions. Many students shared that they have never had any interactions with any SRO nor knew of the existence of the SRO Program. Others shared that the SRO presented in their class, or that they have had friendly conversations with the SRO in their school. Other students shared that SROs have been helpful in addressing particular issues:

The SRO that I personally talked to was very approachable and understanding. He handled the situation very carefully and properly, without the officer I believe the situation would've ended up very differently.

WCDSB SRO PROGRAM REVIEW

Helped my sister with issues that were not being resolved by teachers - dealt with the situation in a fair way -were very friendly

My older brother got in some very serious trouble, and was at risk of getting expelled. The resource officer was patient with him, and talked him through the process of what was going to happen next, and what his options were.

One day my friends wanted to fight someone and the SRO helped to calm her down.

When I was having a rough time with my mental health my school recourse officer was one of the people that approached me to make sure I was alright. As well as had a little conversation with me to help me feel better.

There were also some students who shared that they find SROs intimidating, don't find them to be approachable, and avoid interactions with SROs:

I don't have any direct experiences, I can only say that they are intimidating to me and many students.

Most were very rude and scary I didn't like them at all. Made me so uncomfortable because they seemed to come off as angry not very friendly at all.

I do feel uncomfortable around them when I don't have direct interaction with them. I do feel and see them watching me a lot and since I am a part of the visible minority, I do take that into consideration.

There were some students who shared having negative experiences with SROs, including SROs not addressing issues that they witnessed or became aware of:

If I can be 100% honest with you, I have never had a positive experience with an SRO officer even though I have never been in significant trouble at my school nor have I ever been in trouble with the law.

A student was being attacked by an adult outside the main doors, the officer watched and did nothing as students tried to help him.

One SRO didn't talk much, was rude to the students and just in general was bad at their job.

I've tried to talk to them about problems at school that I can't share on this and I've been blown off and was treated rudely.

Last year, a student was caught saying racial and homophobic slurs. We brought this to the principal's attention and he brought in a cop. NOTHING happened to this kid. The cop listened to a few stories and left.

They were also those who shared their perspective that SROs addressed minor issues in the schools, but not the more significant issues. While students may not be privy to all that the SROs are involved with in the school, they shared that they see them attending to certain issues, while more serious issues continue unaddressed in the school. As some students shared:

At my school there are many people who can be dangerous. There is a lot going on that everyone is aware of, but I have never heard of the SRO program taking care of issues like that. From what I have experienced and have seen, they just check the washrooms to see if people are vaping, or pick on students for mundane things. The SRO program does has not done anything that a teacher can not.

They monitor the activity outside of washrooms and in the hall ways.

Some felt that rather than deescalating situations SROs can make situations worse for some students and may pressure teachers and administrators to take certain actions:

I believe that SROs rapidly escalate conflicts when students are visibly having a problematic time. I think in extreme cases, when students are acting out of hand and are threatening other students, police can effectively deescalate issues in schools. But, when students are not in a dangerous state and are just having a tough time with their lives, the position of police is more intimidating than helpful and make the student feel outnumbered and targeted.

I feel like SROs are much more strict and will not have the ability to tolerate a students mistake. I believe that they do contribute, as well as teachers and administrators might be intimidated by them or pressured to take certain actions

While very rare, a few students shared troubling experiences of male officers commenting on their appearance and body, making them feel uncomfortable, and in one case following the female student into the washroom.

There have been reports of male officers eyeing up and inappropriately speaking to girls who are teenagers. These men are old enough to know better than to do this. As a person of colour and a feminine presenting person, I do feel unsafe around these officers.

One day I went to the washroom and an SRO came in and told me "you look lost sunshine". I felt very strange being called sunshine, it was almost like he was talking down to me. Sunshine is something you would call a child and it is a feminine term. I felt uncomfortable being called that.

My appearance and body have been commented on by my male officers. I do not have curves and am usually in my school uniform with layers on. There is nothing there to comment on and if there were, these people are old enough to be my parents. I should not be blamed for their wandering eyes and minds while at school in a very modest Catholic high school uniform.

It is important to note that all three of these students are racialized, and that no White students reported similar experiences. None of the students who shared troubling experiences with SROs shared that they told a teacher, a parent, or a school administrator. They did not share that they used any of the complaint mechanisms to raise their concerns and have them addressed.

While there are certainly Indigenous and racialized students who shared their support for the SRO Program, whether or not they previously knew about or had experience with an SRO, many also shared having had positive interactions with SROs:

I have talked to our SRO one time and it was to talk about my career plan and she was very helpful and gave me very good advice on becoming a police officer.

The most I have had was a couple of conversations when they have come up to me and just had a simple conversation and they were very nice and seemed quite approachable in general.

I was sitting in the hallway doing a group project and the SRO officer checked in with each of us if we were doing alright and watched our practice.

However, there are also students who shared their perceptions and experiences that racialized students feel unsafe around SROs, are targeted, and are the focus of the attention of SROs. For some racialized students, it partly attributed to a generalized fear of police. For some, however, their negative experiences with SROs have formed their perspectives. As some racialized students shared:

From what I remember from pre-COVID school days, officers would target students of colour more than anything. White kids would start a fight with a BIPOC student and it would be the BIPOC student that was taken to the principal's office to face consequences while the White student was taken to a nurse... I have so many friends who are people of colour and are terrified to even walk past these people or make the slightest mistake.

At my school I don't believe we have an SRO (if we do I've never been given notice). The idea of SROs could definitely give students a feeling of safety from outside harms and dangers, however for some students the fear is in the officer. While the SROs are here to promote safety, the atmosphere of being around police officers can be intimidating (specifically minority groups who have experience with being targeted by police officers).

Putting police officers in the school, especially with what's going on in the world right now is scary.

I understand the police are meant to make us feel safe as students. But when the students are people of colour or are disabled, it does the exact opposite. We are targeted every single day no matter where we go. Adding more people to do who are not properly trained makes it worse. Remove police officers from schools.

In addition, many White students echoed the experiences of their racialized peers, sharing their perspectives about this survey and the experience of racialized students with SROs. They recognize that White students do not have the same experience with police and SROs as racialized students do, highlighting the need for this review to be conducted through a race equity lens:

I just wanted to say I think this survey is biased. You should only be asking people of colour to complete it. If the school is around 85% white and the school is asking everyone to complete it, it's going to completely drown out the input that the POC are saying (which matters most because they are the ones who are affected racially by the police). I have no negative experiences with police but I am also white. If this survey is filled with white people responding it's going to be filled with bias information.

I have seen a minority student singled out and punished by SROs for something that many other students (not part of a minority) had also been equally involved.

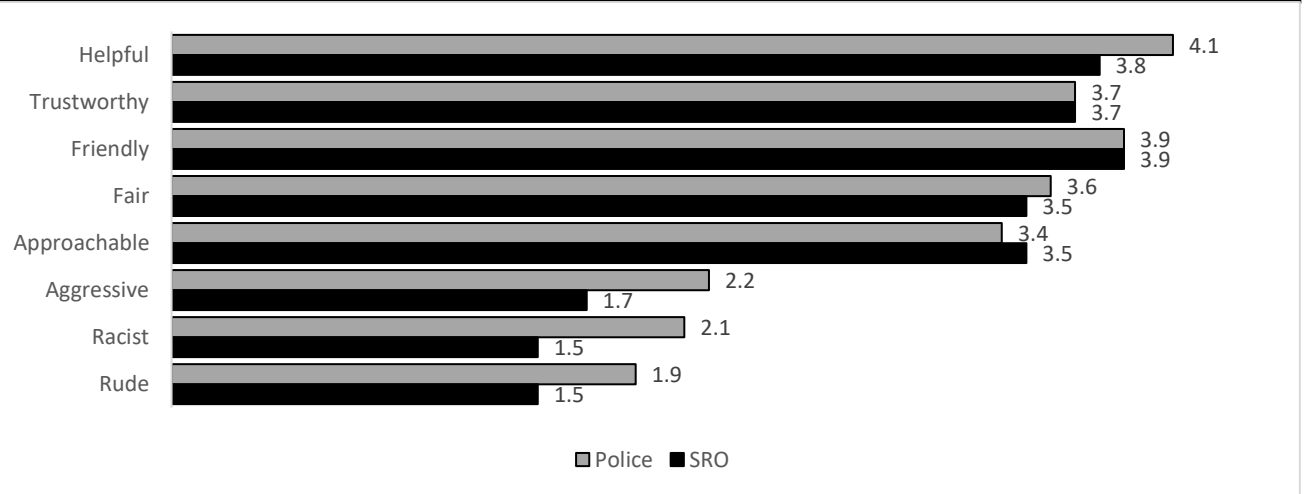
When I talked to them, they were nice but when my Black friend needed to talk to them, they started being rude and threatening her with stuff.

I have not had any negative experiences personally. People of colour who are discriminated against by these officers should not have to live on edge in a school setting.

All of my friends who are people of colour are not “friends” of the police. It is tone deaf to think bringing in a cop to a safe space is a good idea. A social worker would be a much better option.

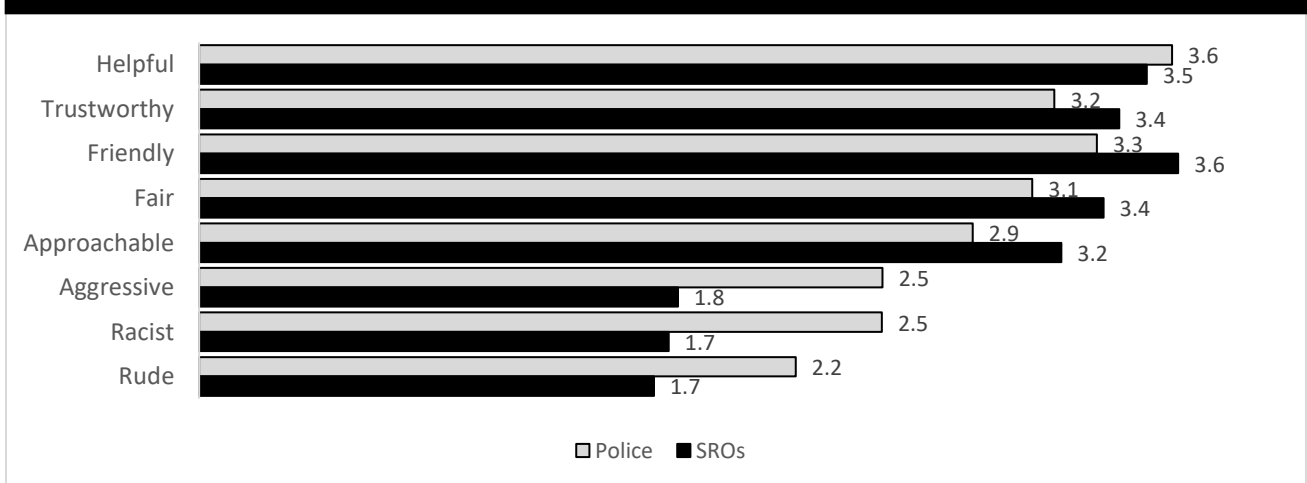
Students were also asked to rate the police and SROs from 1 to 5 for various characteristics.

Graph 11. Views of Police and SROs. Indigenous Students.



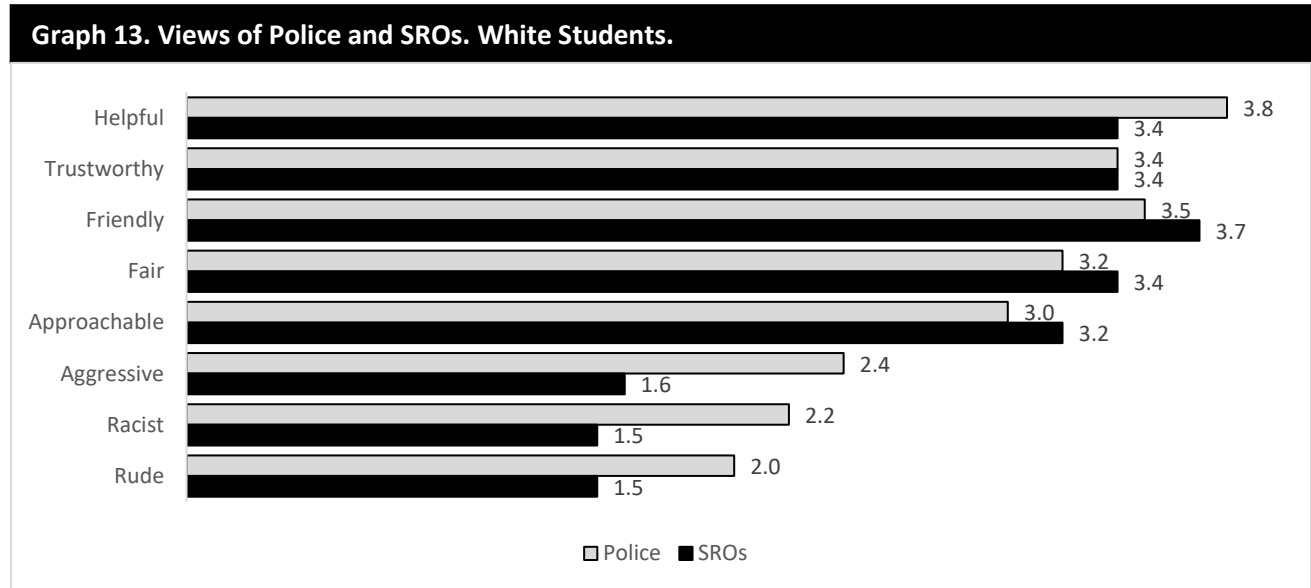
As Graph 11 shows, Indigenous students rated police as slightly more helpful and fair than SROs, while they rated SROs as equally trustworthy and friendly. They rated SROs as slightly more approachable than police. They also rated SROs as less aggressive, racist, and rude than police generally.

Graph 12. Views of Police and SROs. Racialized Students.



As Graph 12 shows, racialized students rated SROs as less helpful than police, but rated SROs as more trustworthy, friendly, fair, and approachable than police. They also rated SROs as being less aggressive, racist, and rude than the police.

Graph 13 shows White students' ratings of the police and SROs from 1 to 5.



As the data shows, White students rated SROs as less helpful than police. White students also rated SROs as similarly as trustworthy, and more friendly, fair, and approachable. White students also rated SROs as less aggressive, racist, and rude than the police generally.

These graphs show that overall, students' views of SROs are more positive than their view of police generally. On average, students rated SROs as less helpful than police, but as more trustworthy, friendly, fair and approachable. They also rated SROs as less aggressive, racist, and rude.

While one argument in favour of SROs is that police officers assigned to schools have unique access to students, teachers, and parents and can therefore fundamentally change their perceptions of police. Of note here is that many students report not having any interactions with SROs and therefore that the program has not had an impact one way or the other regarding police. There were also those who shared having positive experiences with SROs and that these interactions have shown them that police are people, thereby giving them a different perspective of police:

I think that SROs are a little different to a normal police officer in a way that they are less intimidating. I guess they are more approachable and can talk to easier.

It has shown me that police are still people to and deserve respect like everyone

I found that SROs are more approachable than the police, they relate and understand to students more than I think the police in general are.

It has made me realize that not everyone is aggressive or mean or rude.

However, there were also those who shared that their interactions with SROs have had a negative impact or have not changed their negative view of police:

Yes, I view the police as a luring presence seeking to accuse you of something.

Hasn't changed my perception. These officers are specifically for the school board and work with students. In an outside-of-school scenario, that isn't the case and my opinions on the police remain the same.

My interactions with SROs are not surprising and if anything simply worsened my perception of police. I liked police as a child, believing in the false narrative that they are trained to keep the community safe. As I grew older it is clear that is not true--unless you have white skin to protect you.

Students also shared their understanding that SROs are different from regular police officers and also that they also see individual officers as distinct from the overall system of policing. They shared their feeling that positive interactions with SROs or an individual police officer doesn't fundamentally change their perception of the overall system of policing and the fact that police represent a system of oppression that deeply impacts the daily lives of racialized people. As some shared:

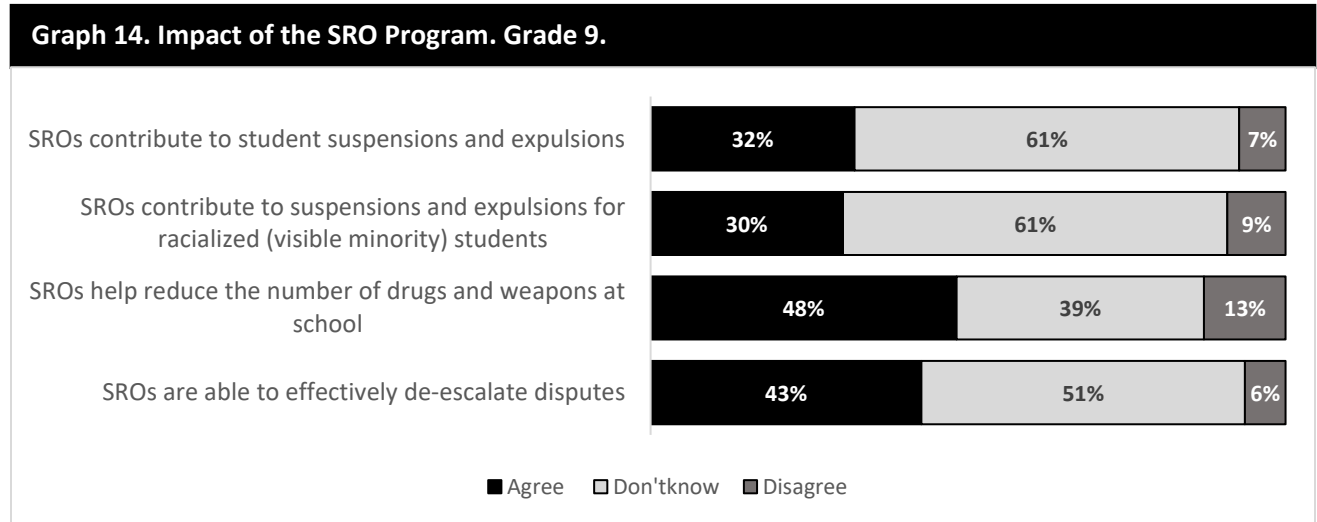
Nothing has changed it. I still, and always will, believe that the system is what needs to be changed, not the people. Police as humans are generally good.

I don't think my interactions with SRO's have changed my perception of police because one cop can't vouch for the entire force. I haven't had bad interactions with SRO's but I've met an officer who was very intimidating and unfriendly even though I did nothing wrong.

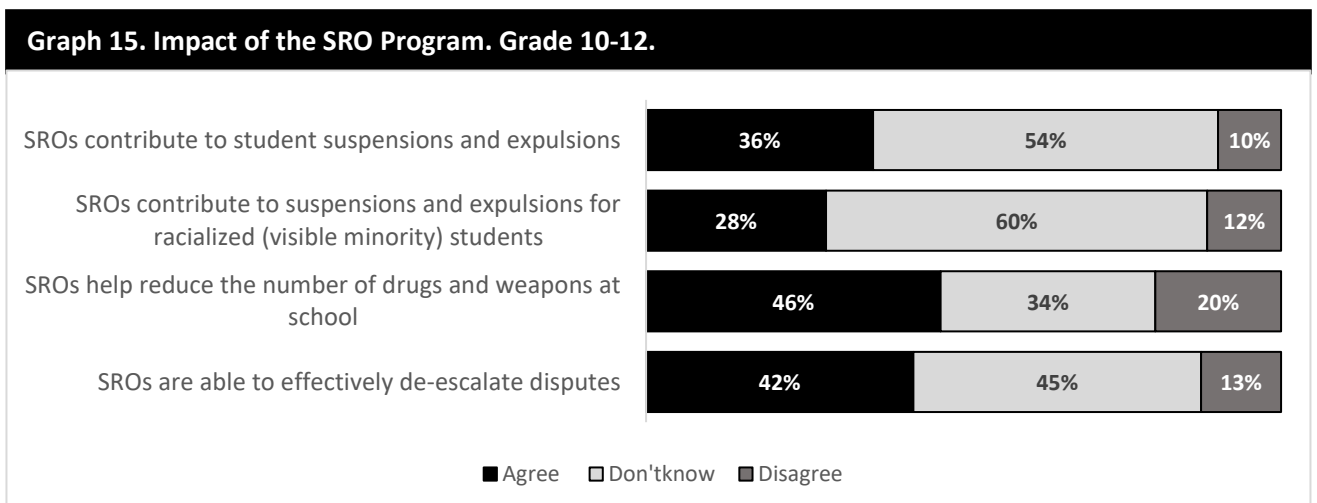
These interactions have not exactly changed my perspective on police. I view police more as a system more than its individual officers, so one good experience with a friendly officer won't change much.

I believe that the SRO program is a good thing and employs good officers, however my view of the police as a whole remains separate from the SRO. The issues with the police are systemic and many things in their order need to be rebuilt to drive out the racism and corrupt policies that the police currently enforce.

Finally, the survey asked students to reflect on the impact of School Resource Officers in their school.

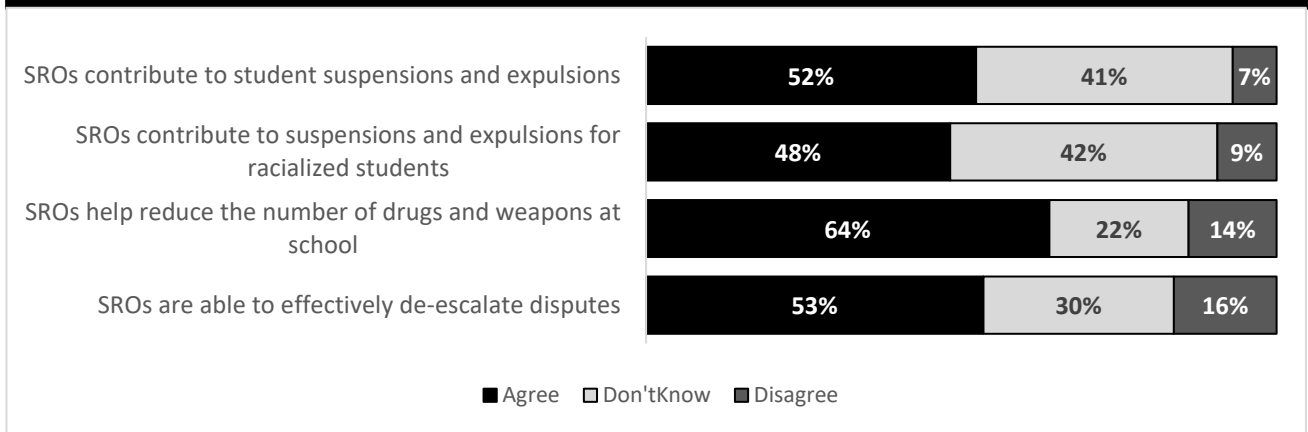


Again, the largest proportion of Grade 9 students indicated that they do not know about the impact of the SRO Program. When they did share an opinion, about one-third shared that SROs contribute to student suspensions and expulsions (32%) and contribute to suspensions and expulsions for racialized students (30%). Close to half agreed that SROs reduce the number of drugs and weapons at school (48%), while 43% agreed that SROs are able to effectively de-escalate disputes.



A similar proportion of students in Grades 10 to 12 agreed that SROs contribute to student suspensions and expulsions (36%) and that SROs contribute to suspensions and expulsions for racialized students (28%). About half agreed that SROs help reduce the number of drugs and weapons at school (46%), with 42% agreeing that SROs are able to effectively de-escalate disputes. Notable in the difference between the responses of students in Grade 9 and those in Grades 10 and 12 is that those in the latter grades are more likely to disagree that SROs help reduce the number of drugs and weapons at school (20% versus 13% for those in Grade 9) and able to effectively de-escalate disputes (13% versus 6%).

Graph 16. Impact of the SRO Program. Indigenous Students.

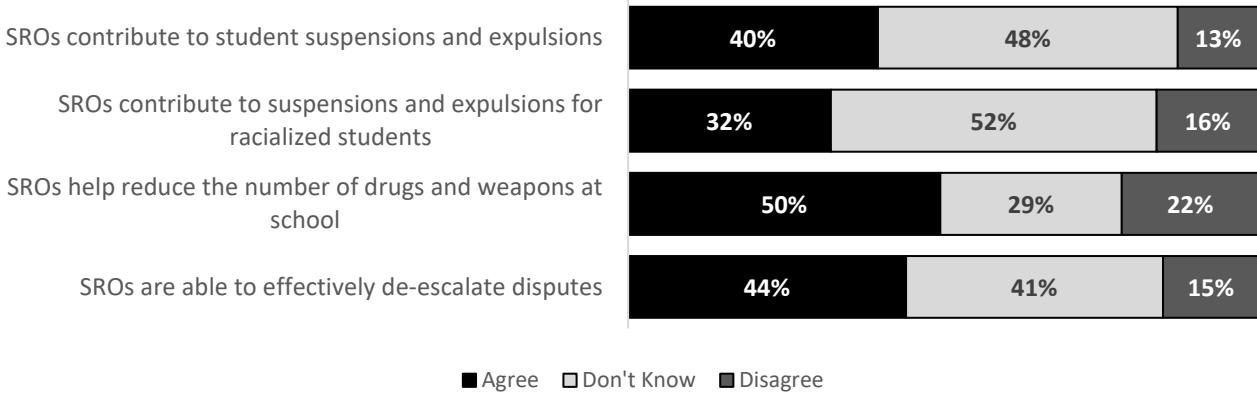


As Graph 16 shows, just over half (52%) of Indigenous students agreed that SROs contribute to student suspensions and expulsions, while a smaller proportion (48%) believe that they contribute to suspensions and expulsions for racialized students.

Sixty-four percent agreed that SROs help reduce the number of drugs and weapons at school, while just over half (53%) agreed that SROs are able to effectively de-escalate disputes.

As Graph 17 shows, 40% of racialized students agreed that SROs contribute to student suspensions and expulsions while one-third agreed that SROs contribute to suspensions and expulsions for racialized students. Half of racialized students agreed that SROs help reduce the number of drugs and weapons at school, while 44% agreed that SROs are able to effectively de-escalate disputes.

Graph 17. Impact of SROs. Racialized Students.

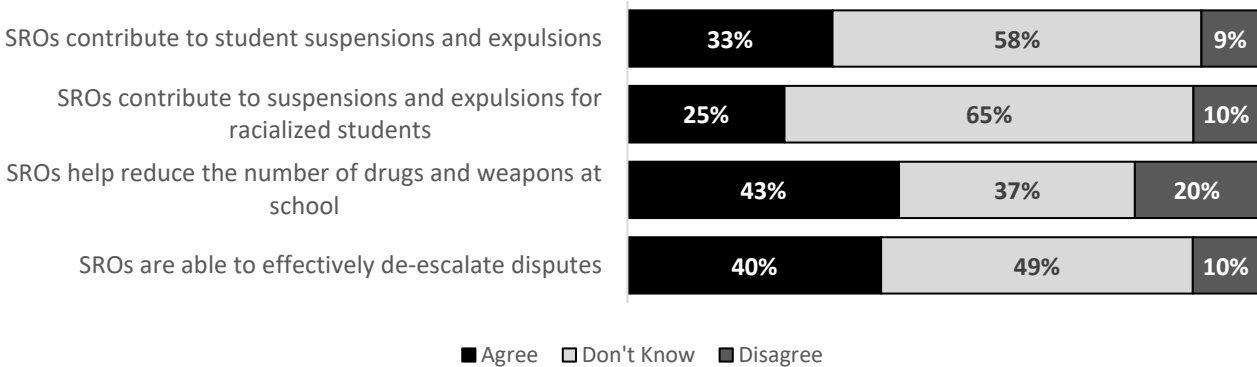


As shown in Graph 18, one-third of White students agreed that SROs contribute to student suspensions and expulsions while fewer (25%) agreed that SROs contribute to suspensions and expulsions for racialized students.

Forty-three percent of White students agreed that SROs help reduce the number of drugs and weapons at school, while 40% agreed that SROs are able to effectively de-escalate disputes.

For all three groups of students, the largest proportion of students reported that they did not know in response to these questions. For White students, the majority reported that they did not know whether SROs contributed to student suspension and expulsions generally (58%) and for racialized students (65%).

Graph 18. Impact of SROs. White Students.



Students were also asked about the impact they think that SROs have on the overall school culture. Again, many commented that they don't know because they weren't even aware of the SRO Program.

Considering myself and the majority of my classmates were unaware of the mere existence of SROs at our school, I don't think that they contribute that much to the school culture as they are not an integral aspect of it

Probably not a lot since I'm in grade 11 and this is the first time I'm hearing of them.

Some shared that the presence of SROs make them feel safer and has a positive impact on the school environment:

I think they are more of an "image" rather than an impact. They really just provide an idea of an impact.

They make all school events and daily school life easier and safer.

I think that the SROs have a great positive impact on our schools.

They make the school a safer environment for students since they prevent big fights from occurring often.

I think SROs impacted the school culture by promoting kindness, and fairness.

Some also shared that SROs act as a deterrence for students who may be considering inappropriate behaviours:

I feel like they put student on their best behaviour and help deter people from making trouble.

I think they can be intimidating to troubled students which hopefully makes them reconsider certain choice they are going to make.

While there were racialized students who feel positively about the program and feel that it contributes to their safety, there were also those who shared feeling afraid because of the presence of SROs. Some shared that the presence of police in their school has had a negative impact on some students or has had a negative impact on the school overall:

I have noticed that since the implementation of SRO officers into my school that a culture of secrecy and not telling anyone anything has grown rather large in my school as SRO officers are stationed at many areas of my school making it so that a lot of students are scared for no reason what so ever they will get in trouble from these SRO Officers.

I think that having SROs in schools makes the school feel more unsafe for visible minorities. I have never seen an SRO do any more to keep a school safe than teachers can.

Creates a more intense and pressured school environment, especially for minority students. Instills fear in students. Could also possibly be a sense of safety and a new resource for help for other students.

I think they probably make more privileged folks feel safer, I feel safer with one around, but I have a feeling a lot of minorities don't feel the same way.

Some expressed concern that the removal of SROs would create an unsafe school environment:

There would be less law and order at school and students will break more rules than usual,

In my perspective the school will be out of control, nobody to control the school.

Would allow more freedom for kids who are trouble makers to have less people watching what there doing. Depending on the student they may feel unsafe without the SRO there.

I think having the School resource officer around would be far more beneficial... I personally would feel safer knowing that there is a cop in the building or around so that in the case of a matter like a school shooting or even a stabbing occurs... we are safe because we have people that are trained to deal with such matters...

It would leave the school to be more fragile towards potential threats.

There were also many students who shared that the removal of SROs would have no impact on them personally or the overall safety of the school. There were also those who shared their perspective that the removal of SROs would improve the school climate, particularly for racialized students. As some shared:

I Don't think that there would be that big of an impact. There is a possibility that visible minority at the school would feel more comfortable.

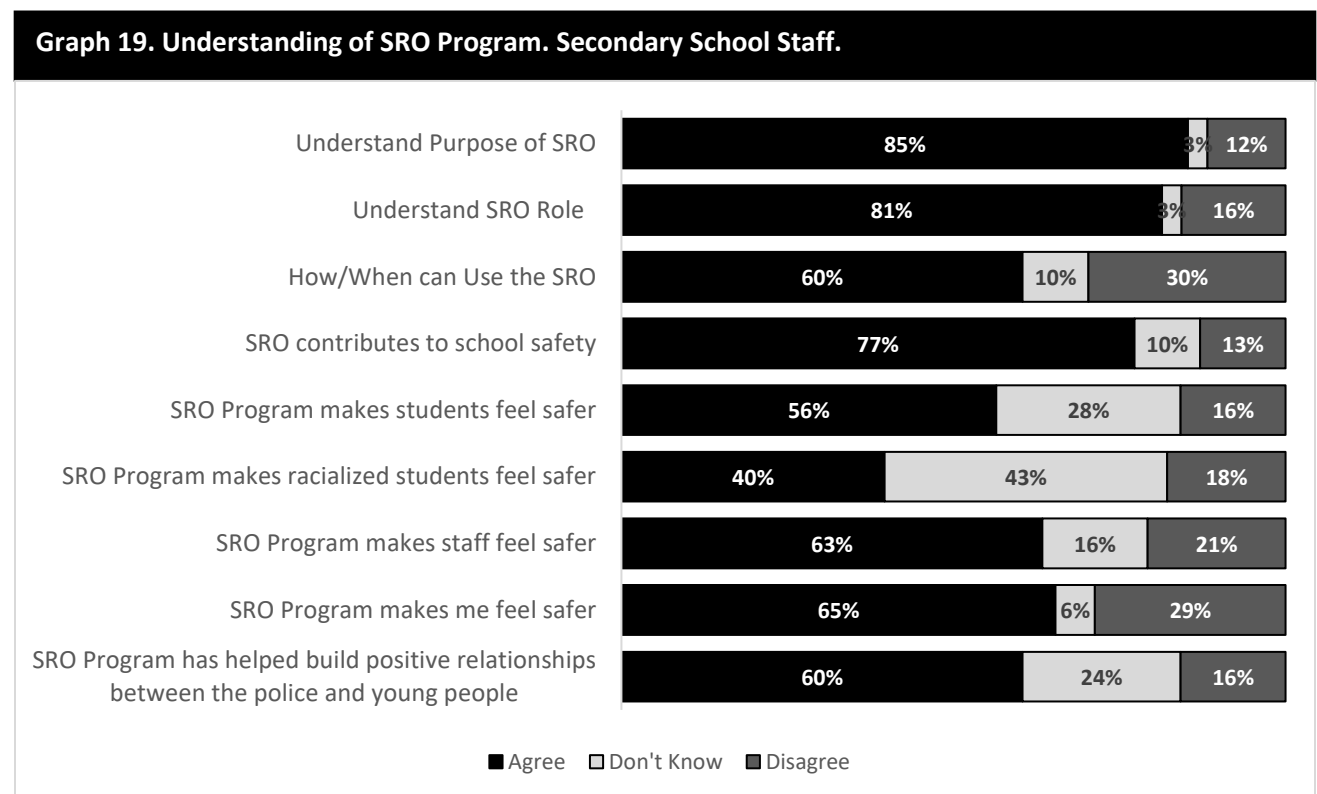
I know that if officers were removed from our schools, we would all feel so much safer. Though, I do not speak for any white students. With officers, they are let off the hook at the expense of BIPOC students and I would not be surprised to white kids wanted to keep them here. I understand the police are

meant to make us feel safe as students. But when the students are people of colour or are disabled, it does the exact opposite. We are targeted every single day no matter where we go. Adding more people to do who are not properly trained makes it worse. Remove police officers from schools.

Students will feel more safe and welcomed at the school. There will be less anxiety for POC. School would feel like a more safe and welcome place.

4.2 Staff experiences and perspectives

Ninety-three secondary school staff responded to the SRO Program Review survey. Graph 19 summarizes their responses to the questions about the SRO Program overall.



The vast majority of staff who completed the survey indicated that they understand the purpose of the SRO Program (85%) and understand the role of the SRO (81%). However, a smaller proportion (60%) shared that they know how and when to use the SRO.

Through the open-ended questions, a number of staff shared their lack of knowledge about the SRO Program, with many indicating that they have little contact with the SRO, and have only seen the SRO in the office. As they shared:

Their role is not discussed enough with staff for me to know. Beyond an introduction and a wave in the hallways I have very little knowledge of what they are doing at our school.

I have basically zero contact with SROs in a normal year. I don't work near the main office, area of the school so I don't see an officer in the building where I work. I also don't hear students talking about the SORs that I can recall.

Over three-quarters (77%) of survey respondents felt that SROs contribute to school safety. A number shared their perspectives of the positive ways in which SROs contribute to safety, such as:

The SRO provides each school with an essential service that allows students, staff, and building workers to feel like they are a part of a safe community. The relationships that the SRO creates with various students is much needed so that students do not have negative experiences with the law as minors. Knowing we work so closely with WRPS eases my mind and makes me feel like I have a safety net each day I enter our school premises.

As a guidance counsellor, the SRO is often involved in student conflict, violence or threats, and can access information that is needed for us to help student safety and provide counsel to victims of violence, threats, or bullying.

By seeing a uniformed officer in our school, students and staff are gently reminded we are still governed by the rule of law – even within our school bubble. They are never brash and simply attend to their business in the office. I cannot see how they would impede on anyone's sense of safety or security.

The SRO Program contributes to school safety because students see a regular presence of the police car and police officer at the school. Similar to when a police officer parks on the street near a school zone it has a visual affect on drivers to slow down. Having police at school makes students behave better. Administrators are not the law, and some school issues like drugs, harassment, and assault need to be dealt with by the law. School shootings/violence is a reality and we should have police officers stopping by the schools once in a while, at the very least, to keep a presence.

Staff shared a number of ways in which SROs contribute to their school community, such as:

- Discussing topics within the physical education curriculum such as substance use, injury prevention
- Training with physical education classes
- Presenting to staff and parents on a number of safety related topics
- Presenting on policing as a career

There were also school staff who shared their negative perceptions of the SRO Program and the impact on the school:

I fail to see the value of this program. Officers present themselves in an intimidating way, in full body armour, carrying weapons... it seems like a strange way to "build positive relationships."

I believe they are in once a week and when issues arise. I don't believe that this contributes to school safety.

Only 56% agreed that the SRO Program makes students feel safer, and only 40% of staff respondents agreed that the program makes racialized students feel safer. For these questions, the largest proportion of respondents replied "Don't Know" — 28% did not know if the SRO Program makes students feel safer, and 43% did not know if the SRO Program makes racialized students feel safer. Their responses to the open-ended questions suggests that few school staff have considered the impact of police in schools on racialized students. Only one person commented on the negative impact on racialized, particularly Black, students:

The School Resource Officer Program creates an environment of policing versus counselling for at-risk students. It increases the likelihood that Black students and students of colour will be involved in the legal system early and often. Racial profiling and police violence against students needs to be addressed. It is imperative that the SRO Program be discontinued and more SOCIAL WORKERS be hired in their place to support students in need.

Some also suggested that the survey by asking about the impact on racialized students was biased or that the impact on the minority of students should not take priority over the wants of the majority. School staff also shared the perception that only those who are engaged in criminal activity should be concerned about the presence of SROs. These staff shared a lack of understanding of racial profiling and its existence in Canadian policing, a lack of concern for the rights of the minority, and a lack of understanding of systemic racism. They commented:

The views of the few do not outweigh the safety of the many. Removing SROs would be a MAJOR step back.

SROs do not contribute to student suspensions or expulsions. Students who choose actions that are disciplined through suspension or expulsion should not blame the presence of SROs for the student getting the discipline that they brought on themselves. There seems to be bias in this survey that students face racism or marginalization from SROs. Students who get into trouble are doing so because of the actions they have chosen. If the schools are seeing a higher rate of minorities getting into trouble, perhaps they should direct their research into why these students are making poor choices. Studies should start at home and research the parenting that has raised these children. Reasons such as single-parent homes, poverty, and poor behaviour models are more likely to be reasons for children to get themselves into trouble than it is to say the SRO involved in implementing the discipline for the behaviour that already occurred is to blame.

Those who engage in activities that are unlawful may look at SROs differently. For the majority of staff and students, they are a valued asset.

A greater proportion felt that the SRO Program makes staff (63%) and them personally feel safer (65%). Twenty-one percent of staff survey respondents did not agree that the SRO Program makes staff feel safer, while 29% did not agree that the program makes them feel safer.

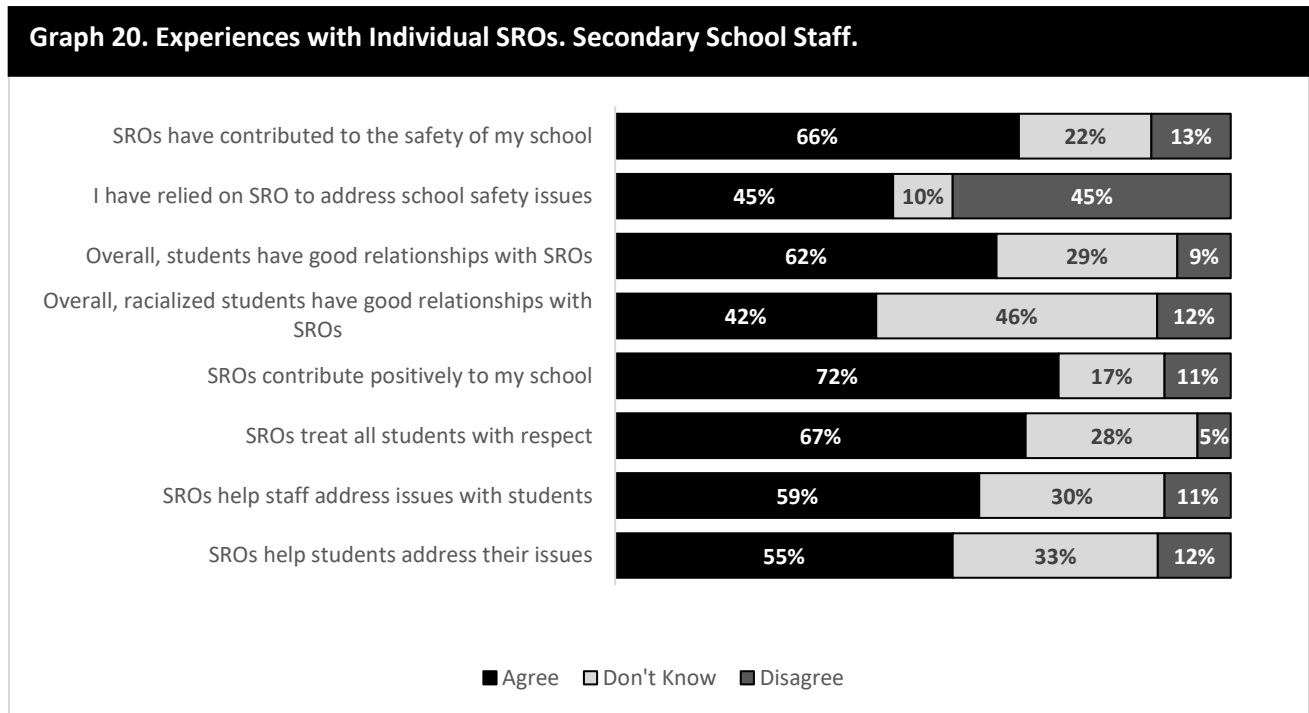
When asked to share how the SRO contributes to school safety, many staff shared that SROs serve as a visual symbol of safety, without sharing any actual ways in which SROs have increased the safety of schools.

Having an SRO present in the school brings comfort and reassurance when they are visibly present in my school. It's also really nice when an SRO is connecting with students as a friend not just a person of authority.

The visible presence of a police officer in the school contributes to the feeling of safety and security. Having a police officer available when issues arise and one that knows the school also provides a sense of safety.

Sixty percent of staff who completed the survey agreed that the program has helped build positive relationships between the police and young people; 24% did not have an opinion, while 16% did not agree.

Graph 20 shows secondary school staff responses to the questions about their interactions with the School Resource Officers in their school.



As the graph shows, secondary school staff are far more positive about the SRO Program than are students who completed the survey.

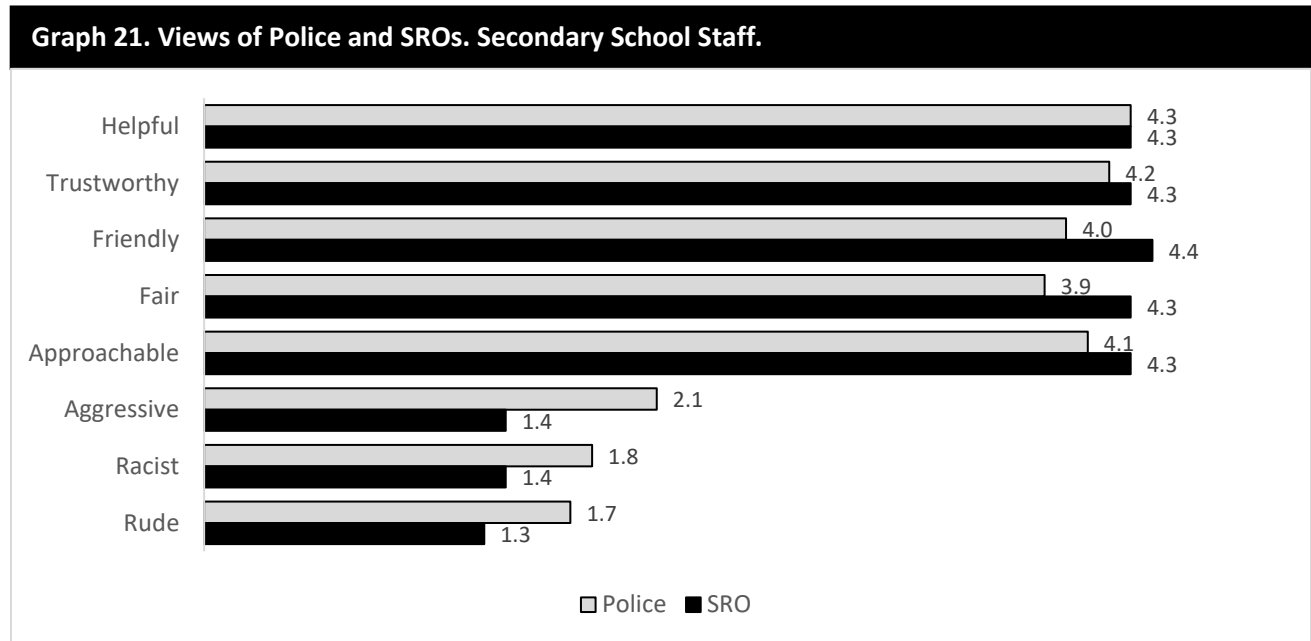
Sixty-six percent of staff agreed that SROs have contributed to the safety of their school, 72% agreed that SRO contribute positively to their school, 67% that SROs treat all students with respect.

Despite their overall positivity, fewer than half of respondents (45%) agreed that they have relied on SROs to address school safety issues, with a similar proportion disagreeing with this statement. Fully 62% agreed that students have a good relationship with SROs, while 29% indicated that they did not know, and only 9% disagreeing. While 42% indicate that racialized students have good relationships with SROs, a larger proportion reported that they did not know (46%), and only 12% did not agree with this statement.

Sixty-seven percent agreed that SROs treat all students with respect (5% disagreed), while 59% agreed that SROs help staff address issues with students (11% disagreed) and 55% agreed that they help students address their issues (12% disagreed). About one-third of survey respondents did not have an opinion.

When staff responses are compared to those of Indigenous, racialized, and White students, secondary school staff are far more positive than the students about the SRO Program. Most notable is that while 62% of staff say that students have a good relationship with SROs, compared with 52% of Indigenous students, 39% of racialized students, and 31% of White students who agreed that this was the case.

Graph 21 shows secondary school staff ratings of the police and SROs, from 1 to 5 for various characteristics.

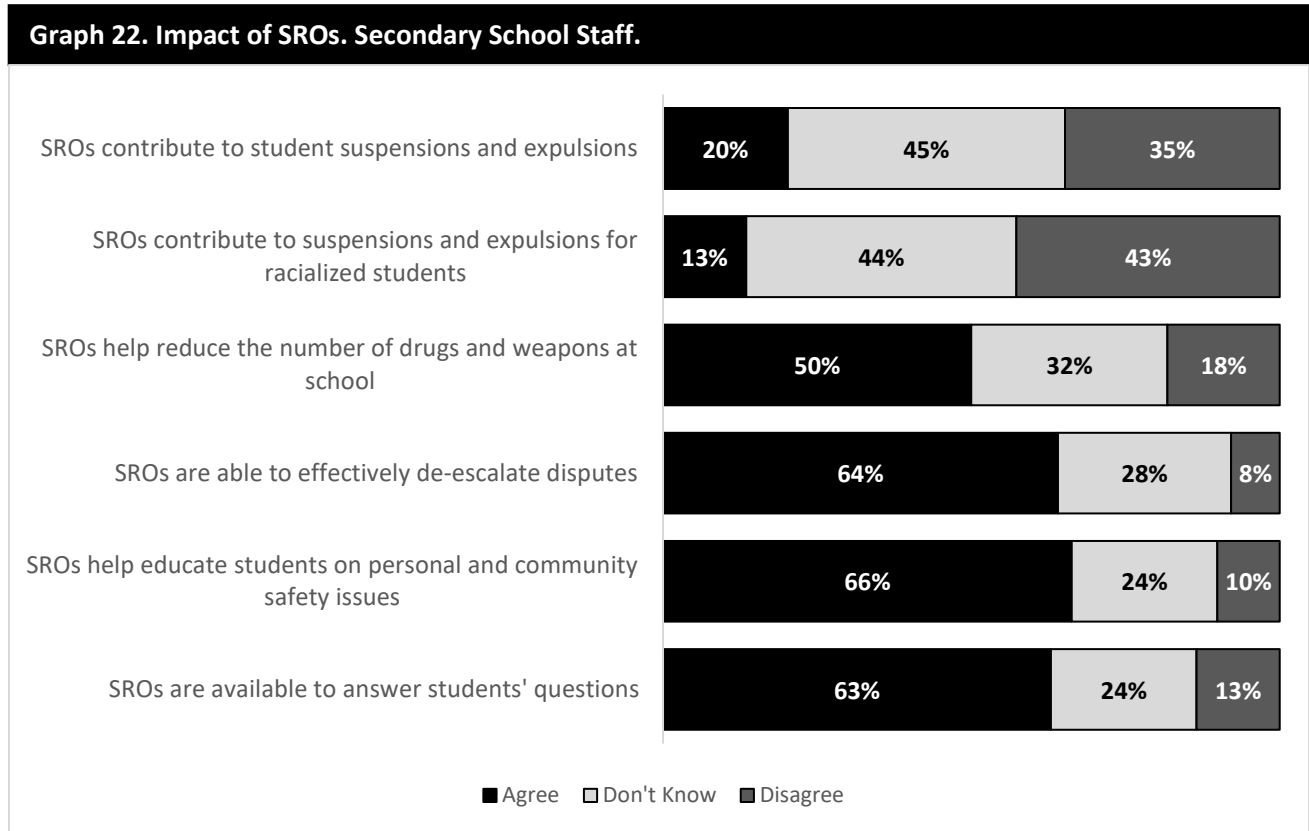


As the data shows, staff rated police as equally helpful as SROs, but rated SROs higher along the characteristics of trustworthy, friendly, fair, and approachable.

They were also more positive for SROs when asked to compare SROs to police generally for the negative characteristics of aggressive, racist and rude. They rated SROs as less aggressive, racist, and rude than police.

When commenting on interactions between SROs and students, staff shared mixed experiences. Some shared that because SROs know a student or have experience with youth, they have dealt with issues with compassion. Others shared that when police have been called, they have been more aggressive with students and feel that an SRO would have been better equipped to handle the situation. There were also a few staff who shared experiences of SROs being disengaged from the school, being rude or making derogatory comments about students, and racially profiling students.

Graph 22 shows the responses of staff when asked to reflect on the impact of School Resource Officers in their school.



Staff responses to the questions about the impact of SROs continues to show the stark difference between the perspective of staff and students.

Only 20% of staff believe that SROs contribute to student suspensions and expulsion and 13% believe that they contribute to the suspensions and expulsions of racialized students. This is far below the perceptions of Indigenous students (52% and 48%, respectively), racialized students (40% and 32%), and White students (33% and 25%). A larger proportion of school staff disagreed that SROs contribute to student suspension and expulsion generally (35%) or for racialized students (43%). In addition, a large proportion indicated that they did not know (45% and 44%).

The proportion of staff who agreed that SROs help reduce the number of drugs and weapons at school (50%) was similar to that of all students (Indigenous students 64%; racialized students 50%; White students 43%). But staff were again more positive in their perceptions of an SRO's ability to effectively de-escalate disputes (64% compared with 53% of Indigenous students, 44% of racialized students, and 40% of White students).

Sixty-six percent and 63% respectively agreed that SROs were available to help educate students on personal and community safety issues and to answer students' questions. Over a quarter of staff respondents indicated that they did know whether or the SRO had this impact in the school. In addition, 18% did not agree that SROs help reduce the number of drugs and weapons at school, while about 10% did not agree that SROs are able to effectively de-escalate disputes, help students on personal and community safety issues, or are available to answer students' questions.

The survey also asked staff to share their perspectives on the potential impact of removing SROs from schools. Those who feel that the SROs contribute to school safety felt that there would be a negative impact on school safety:

Removing SROs from schools would be a step back in safety. Administrators are not taken seriously by some misbehaving students and these students need to be dealt with by authorities. Parents of these students also need to be educated by these officers. I would like to see a greater use of SROs such as classroom visits to educate all students, not just the misbehaving ones, on important life information such as impaired or fast driving, drugs/alcohol, sexual abuse, domestic violence, etc.

It would leave students and staff feeling less safe. Giving students less access to immediate help they may need. Their presence ultimately makes everyone feel safer and them not being there allows for more bad behaviour.

I have witnessed the impact this school year and it is definitely a negative impact. There is a big gap when working with at-risk students as there is no WRP perspective and input. There is no bridging between at-risk students in trouble with the law and a friendly SRO to help reframe issues and behaviours.

Removing the SRO would be detrimental in many ways, namely community relations, school safety, and overall fostering of respect toward authority. Many students have been heard saying disrespectful comments about authority figures, including the police. Having them more involved in schools would help to develop a stronger relationship with young people.

Conversely, there were also a number of staff who shared their perspective that the removal of SROs would have a minimal or positive impact on the school:

In general their removal would have not much of an impact as I am sure the school would be supported by the police in the event of an incident.

Removing the SRO Program would eliminate the triggering of post traumatic stress in disenfranchised students who have experienced several harmful

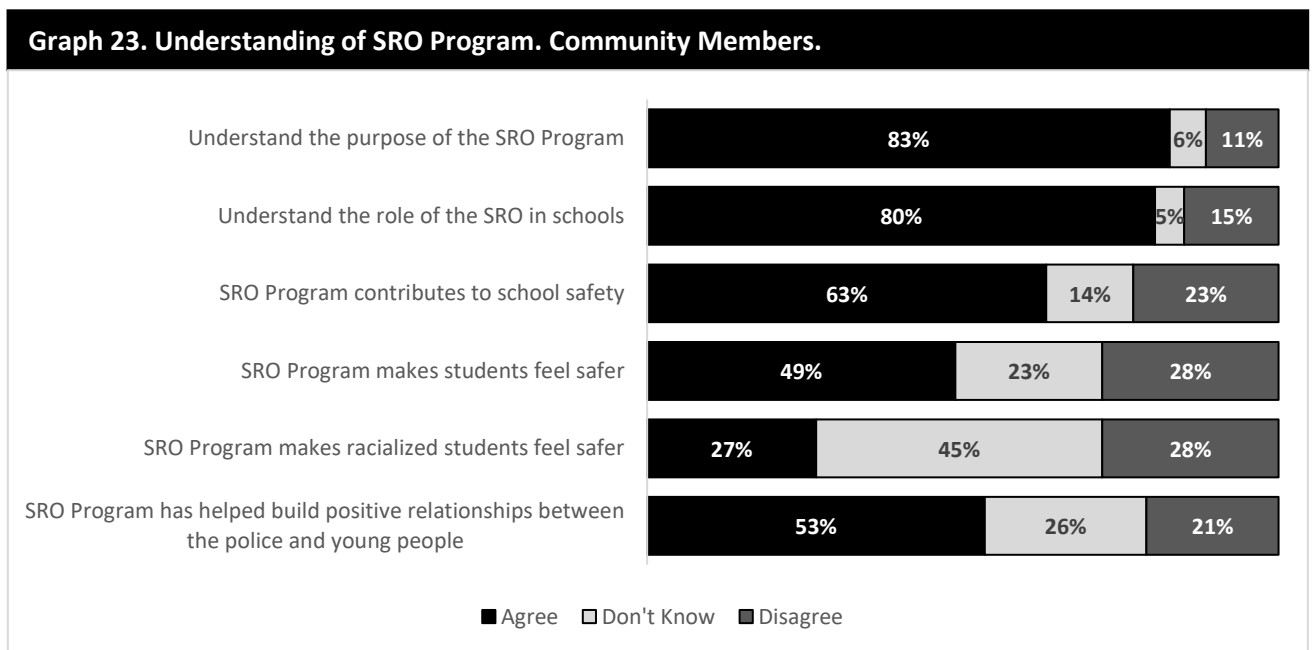
interactions with police officers. Removing the SRO Program would decrease the disproportionate tendency for disenfranchised youth to become involved with the legal system – ending the school to prison pipeline. Social workers not SROs!

Nothing but positive. Use those funds for a social worker in the building. Something mor effective and less confrontational than a cop. Even if we hired no one, it would be money saved.

The SRO does nothing but create tension. Remove police from schools now.

4.3 Community perspectives

Eighty-seven people responded to the SRO Program Review survey that was open to the community. Graph 23 summarizes their responses to the questions about the SRO Program overall.



The majority of community members who responded to the survey agreed that they understand the purpose of the SRO Program (83%) and understand the role of the SRO in schools (80%). However, fewer agreed that the SRO contributes to the outcomes of contributing to school safety, making students feel safer, and building positive relationships with young people. Sixty-three percent agreed that the SRO Program contributes to school safety and half agreed that the program makes students feel safer (49%). When asked whether the SRO Program makes racialized students feel safer only

27% agreed. Just over half of survey respondents (53%) agreed when asked if the SRO Program has helped build positive relationships between the police and young people.

While about a quarter disagreed that the program contributes to these outcomes, in some cases a larger proportion did not know.

In the open-ended questions, a number of survey respondents shared their surprise that WCDSB has an SRO Program, including parents of current students who shared that this was the first time they were hearing that WCDSB has an SRO Program. Based on the information shared in the introduction to the survey and information they gained from the internet, some shared positive feelings about having police in schools:

My child needs to identify safely with authority figures. This program assists with this. My child has already had involvement with police for mental health reasons and is also minority. This program is essential and much needed as early as possible as children are growing and maturing and learning.

I am not aware of the SRO role in schools but I like the concept and it think it would be really useful and impactful.

The SRO puts a community focused face on our police service. It is important that students are able to feel that they can approach police without fear of repercussion and see them as a helpful link to society.

Survey respondents also felt that having a police officer in the school and the police car parked out front was powerful symbolically to discourage negative behaviours and move illegal behaviours off school grounds. Survey respondents also noted what they perceive to be the value of having SROs in schools, such as:

- Educating students about the role of police in society
- Inspiring students to pursue a career in law enforcement
- Deterring bullying and fights
- Protecting students and staff if there was an intruder
- Helping parents and students see police as “partners, not opponents of youth.”

Many of these comments to the community survey were based on one’s theoretical understanding of the SRO Program, rather than any actual interactions with the SRO Program. When people shared their perceptions of the program based on actual experience with the program, they provided a mixed review of the impact of the program. Some of these comments include:

As a retired high school teacher, with children still in high school, I have never seen an officer anywhere in the school other than in the main office/main foyer. They were always accompanied by an administrator. While they have been introduced to staff at staff meetings, they were not introduced to the students at an assembly, or in videos/in announcements.

My child attended one of the more in/at risk schools. The community officer was very good at participating in school and community programs...school play days, assemblies, etc. He gained the trust of the students – there was a very violent student at the school and the officer had to intervene a lot – my child in particular felt safe because this officer took the time to talk and interact with the kids in good times and bad.

The SRO has helped my child feel safer at school as they were the only one that listened and helped when an incident occurred. It was nice not having to go outside of the school to get help from an officer.

It brings a sense of order and structure. It made everyone realize that there was somebody there who would make sure that everything was fine. I had seen kids prepare to fight the next day but refrain because it was a day that people saw officers. I noticed quite a few kids had good personal relationships with the officers and talked to them quite often. Overall, the safety and security was what really changed for the good.

There were also community survey respondents who voiced strong opposition to the program:

I think this program is an antiquated, poorly thought out idea whose time has long since passed.

People of colour are already disproportionately targeted by officers, and many of them have already had negative experiences within the community because of being racially profiled. By bringing officers into the school building, this removes the feelings of safety and belonging for Black youth, further placing them at social and educational disadvantage.

They further the feelings of mistrust based on maltreatment for the Black youth and other people of colour in the school. Their presence removes the feelings of safety and belonging, forcing BIPOC youth to keep their guards up, and not allowing them to have the same authentic social and educational experiences and their non-BIPOC peers.

I cannot support having police in schools. Social workers, teachers, food, extra-curriculars, school spirit events, almost anything but police. "Resource Officer" is a euphemism for "can't solve this problem without force", which is an absolutely inappropriate message to be sending to students who are being tasked with solving their problems without force. A police officer is nothing more than a legalized bully... Students are vulnerable under the law and officers can therefore only ever be intimidating. Our legal system is punitive in nature – and unbelievably distorted in its false belief that punishment is an appropriate reaction to offence.

Many of the comments in opposition to the program focused on the impact of SRO Program on racialized students and students with disabilities, with much of these perceptions have already been supported by research. These community members also raised a range of concerns about the impact on SROs on the larger school ecosystem and the impact of the SRO on their own children.¹⁰

While we only spoke with five individuals who expressed an interest in participating in a small group conversation, they shared experiences with SROs that were deeply troubling examples of racial profiling, which in some cases resulted in a lengthy legal battle with charges being dismissed due to lack of evidence. They also noted that once the SRO gets involved, the issue becomes a police matter, and the school administrators, superintendents, and even the Director of Education cannot intervene. As such, issues that could have more appropriately been dealt with by school administrators were instead made a criminal matter. They also shared the mental health impact and financial costs for lawyers and counselling that involvement with SROs has had, not to mention the impact on students' schooling. They reminded us what a number of students have already expressed, that police are not neutral and SROs are not neutral. In school systems that already disproportionately produce poor outcomes for Black¹¹ and Indigenous students in particular, SROs further contribute to poor outcomes for them. They questioned why, when research consistently shows that racialized students and students with disabilities are disproportionately targeted and harmed by police, the school board would continue with this program.

¹⁰ While those with whom we spoke shared in-depth their experiences with an SRO, they asked that the information be shared in such a way as not to identify their children who still attend a WCDSB school.

¹¹ James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2017). *Towards race equity in education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area*. York University. <https://edu.yorku.ca/files/2017/04/Towards-Race-Equity-in-Education-April-2017.pdf>

These individuals shared their personal negative experience and used that to critique the SRO Program benefit of having police in schools and the impact on racialized students. They shared their concern that:

- Police, who don't have expertise in working with children and youth, are relied on to do work that other professionals should be doing, such as social workers, child and youth workers, and mental health professionals
- Having police in schools makes racialized students and students with disabilities feel less safe, thereby negatively affecting their ability to learn
- SROs are able to question their minor children without their presence or consent.

Some community members, both in the small group discussions and the online survey, shared their perspective that reliance on SROs for school safety reflects a narrow perception of school safety. They felt that reliance on SROs therefore allows teachers and school administrators to abdicate the important role that they play in fostering inclusive environments, building relationships with students, and addressing issues when they do occur. As one person commented:

If there are no SRO officers the teachers and principals would have to fully do the job they were hired to do. Staff currently appear to 'hide' behind the SROs. They fail to resolve student conflict, fail to teach kids how to resolve a situation, and too often defer 'discipline' to an SRO who has no training with youth and children.

They also note that while there may be benefits to the police addressing criminal issues that occur in schools, they question the benefits of students and their learning when they have a continued presence in their school. They also shared their experience that the likelihood of physical violence occurring in a WCDSB school, coming from either an internal or external treat, is low. They are comfortable that if something did happen, there are protocols in place for police to address them.

Survey respondents were also asked what they think would happen if SROs were no longer in WCDSB schools on a daily basis. Those who feel that SROs are critical to school safety shared their perception that removing them would have a significant negative impact on WCDSB schools:

Bullying and drugs would not be stopped or even slowed. Teachers' hands are tied when it comes to discipline in schools.

There would be more potential for violence, fights, less resolution with problems and no one for youth or staff to approach and talk to about resolving issues.

The void left by removing SROs from schools would be detrimental. It has taken time to build relationships with the schools. The absence of these officers would remove an important resource for students and staff at a time where people are struggling with mental health and vulnerable because of the continuing problems around COVID.

More crime, more drugs, more bullying. I believe having an officer on school grounds is absolutely a MUST these days.

A number of respondents shared that the removal of SROs would have a minimal or even a positive impact on the schools

Very little, except for a small number of students, typically racialized students, who would not be subjected to singling out, prejudice, and in some cases, long protracted interactions with the legal system. Those students would be MUCH better off if the program simply disappeared.

I think that the average kid would be a little less stressed and the kids with problems or at risk of racial profiling would be a lot less stressed. No cops in schools. An SRO is simply a sign that the education system is broken. Full stop.

Nothing would change and the money could be put toward mental and other resources that would be preventative instead of punitive.

4.4 Perspectives of WCDSB and WRPS staff

In addition to the online surveys, 30 staff at both WCDSB and the WRP were interviewed. Those interviewed included the Director of Education, five principals at the secondary schools, eight vice principals at the secondary schools and the adult learning centre, the Chief Managing Officer, as well as two child and youth workers. We also interviewed the Chief of Police, two superintendents of police, two inspectors, two former SROs, six current SROs, and the Rural Community Resource Officer.

Purpose of the program

Those who were interviewed shared their perspective of the purpose of the SRO Program. They shared that SROs are assigned to a number of schools and are to work with the school community in both a proactive and reactive capacity. They noted that SROs are not there to police the schools, but instead are in a community outreach role, with the goal of building relationships between the police and the school community. Each patrol officer has their own zone and they are expected to get to know those zones and neighbourhoods. Similarly, SROs are assigned schools and get to know the geographical layout, school community, and the neighbourhood.

SROs also play both a proactive and reactive role in these schools. In their proactive role, SROs are to build positive relationships with the school community. They shared that SROs connect with the school community in a number of ways including educating school staff, parents, and students on a number of issues including human trafficking, cyberbullying, and drugs; participating in fundraising efforts; helping out with sports teams; and engaging in other such activities. SROs are also guest speakers in classes on a range of topics and also encourage students to pursue policing as a career. They shared that these officers are also a community resource for students and serve as a valuable resource for students and families. SROs may also be included in meetings with parents or guardians and in reintegration meetings which occur after a student has served a suspension.

As a member of the school community, SROs also work with school administrators to address school safety concerns such as reviews of lock down and safety procedures as well as conducting risk assessments. School administrators also shared that SROs have been a valuable source of advice on issues where a law was broken, safety concerns, and when students are involved in issues in the community.

They shared that in their role, SROs use a restorative justice model when youth engage in inappropriate behaviours and don't always resort to laying criminal charges for youthful behaviours that could have a significant negative impact on the lives of students.

In their reactive role, SROs are the conduit between the school administrators and the police service when police need to be called to the school. School administrators share that SROs provide them with a consistent police officer when dealing with issues, someone they can call directly, rather than going through dispatch for something that was not a 911 call.

SROs also work with the school administrators to address issues of a criminal nature such as threats, sexual assaults, as well as inappropriate behaviours and issues taking place outside of school grounds such as local stores, malls, and the surrounding neighbourhood. Some school administrators shared that because of the partnership with SROs they have not had to use suspensions to address certain issues as the SRO has worked with these students to address the underlying issues, thereby helping them not to repeat the behaviours.

Those with whom we spoke consistently spoke highly of the SROs. They felt that the WRPS pays a great deal of attention to who is selected to be an SRO. There is an application process that focuses on their interest and the soft skills needed to work with children and youth. Credit was also given to the one-week SRO Program course that they are required to take at the police college. As such, there was agreement that SROs were highly skilled at engaging with youth and working with school administrators to ensure that inappropriate behaviours are dealt with, with compassion and a focus on diverting youth from the criminal justice system.

School administrators shared that despite being stretched, the SROs have acted professionally and have helped to diffuse tense situations. They feel that they have the best interest of the students in mind and have been able to build important relationships with the students. They also shared that it has been a positive to students to see SROs from diversity backgrounds that reflect the diversity of the school communities. This has enabled students to approach and engage with SROs and see policing as a viable profession for themselves.

Those interviewed shared that because of their training, SROs can more effectively deal with issues at schools, rather than having a patrol officer come to the school. They noted that the SROs have a long-term involvement with the school and students, while the patrol officer's interaction with the school is incident based. They shared that some of the regular patrol officers who have been called into schools do not have the same background of working with young people. As such, it has not always been a positive experience for the school administrator, the student, or the family as the patrol officer typically wants to come to a resolution quickly, which often involves an arrest. The SRO on the other hand, understands the culture of the school and understands the students and the underlying issues they may be dealing with such as trauma, mental health, or disability, and are more likely to spend the time to find an alternative solution. As one school administrator noted:

I have seen situations turn sideways quickly when patrol shows up versus an SRO. The approach is different. The patrol officer had little patience for you and more likely wanted to arrest the student rather than have a conversation and work with the student. In some situations, often times, that would be escalated very quickly.

School administrators shared that much would be lost should the SRO Program be ended. They shared that they would be missing the relationship that has been established with the SRO and the understanding of the community that the SRO has. They also note that they would be missing the important partnership in addressing issues such as drugs, human trafficking, and mental health issues, which are not going away and which "are not the job for the teachers."

Achievement of program objectives

Those interviewed were asked whether the SRO Program had achieved the program objectives. The majority felt that while some aspects of the program have been achieved, the program has not fully achieved its objectives.

While many believe that SROs have been able to achieve the reactive part of their mandate, they don't feel that they have been able to achieve the proactive role. This is due in part to the number of schools each SRO is assigned to, including both WCDSB and WRDSB

elementary and secondary schools. Interviewees shared that prior to the program being put on hold, SROs are often busy responding to crises or immediate concerns of schools. Many of those interviewed shared that when they have been able to focus on the proactive aspects of their role, SROs have been able to build relationships with youth and breaking down barriers between youth and police by engaging positively with students.

The focus on responding to calls from schools has resulted in them being at schools infrequently, noting that the majority of students would not even be aware of the program nor would they have had the opportunity to interact with an SRO other than when issues arise. As such, many felt that the SRO Program has taken on less of an educational partnership role, with a focus instead on responding to requests for police.

SROs shared that they have been able to establish a good working relationship with school administration and less with the classroom teacher. School administrators shared that the SROs have become a valuable addition to the administration team. They value the relationship and shared that they have relied heavily on the police for advice in dealing with situations that have arisen at the school.

However, some SROs also shared that this has had a negative impact on their ability to be effective in their role. They shared that because they have become a familiar part of the school community and are seen as part of the administrative team, school administrators have taken advantage of them and have brought them in for things that the school administrators should be handling themselves or using other Board resources for, including school discipline, violations of the code of conduct, mental health issues, and even students having temper tantrums. They shared that rather than the teacher or school administration, they have connected students with the guidance counsellor, social worker, or the additional resources that students and parents can access in the community. They shared that because the SROs know a lot about the students who are experiencing challenges, they are able to make these connections to the resources that are available to them.

SROs did not always see that this was a good use of their time. They shared that there have been times when they have been called by school administrator and have had to tell them that the issue is not a police issue and that perhaps they should be contacting a school social worker or other school resources. They shared that they could accomplish more in their role and be more focused on the proactive aspect of their jobs if they weren't being called in to schools for things that school staff or a community agency should be handling.

This was echoed in the comments by some school administrators when commenting on their relationship with SROs and their contributions to the school community. One school administrator who shared that the SRO was a valuable referral source to other services, stated, "At times the SRO encouraged us to contact Family & Child Services, mental health

nurses or any other community supports when dealing with certain individuals or situations.” School board staff also shared valuing the direct line to the SRO for question or concerns, including “crazy people in the building looking for students.” Again, SROs felt that this was not a good use of their time given that often the unknown person in the building was a parent or a delivery person. They shared their frustration that they would be called away from making a presentation in the classroom or their engagement in some other proactive initiative, to handle a minor issue more appropriately handled by school staff.

Some also recognized the difficulty SROs have trying to maintain authority as enforcers of the law while at the same time preserving a helping relationship with students. They shared that walking this fine line was difficult because one day, they may be in the reactive role and arresting someone, while the next day they are expected to be engaged with students and trying to gain their trust.

Some of those interviewed commented on the perceptions that police in school can be harmful. They note that rather than fuelling the school-to-prison pipeline, SROs do the opposite by helping students by diverting them from the criminal justice system through the use of diversion programs or restorative justice practices. They shared that by becoming part of the school community they are able to gain the trust of students by humanizing “the badge” for students who may have negative feelings about the police. Through this relationship they feel that they have been able to help at-risk students turn around their lives and access the programs and services they need.

School board staff overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with the program. The only source of dissatisfaction is that the SROs are not available enough at their schools, in part because each one serves multiple schools. They in fact would prefer that more SROs be assigned to WCDSB schools so that they could spend more time in their schools.

School board staff also shared that when issues with students arise, the training received by SROs and the relationships they have established with students has allowed them to be more sympathetic and appropriately deal with the young person than would a patrol officer. They shared that if the school relies on calling 911 or dispatch when issues occur, the patrol officer which attends the school will likely arrest and charge the youth. They shared that patrol officers do not have the type of training that SROs have, and therefore interact differently with these youth. School administrators shared observing positive interactions between the SROs and at-risk youth who are sometimes relieved when the SRO shows up, a familiar face, rather than a police officer they don't know. They shared that SROs are able to deal with the issues without arresting the young person. Even if the issue does go to court, they shared that they have been able to influence the process so that the youth is diverted versus being sentenced.

Some shared that given the current issues with police, it is even more important for SROs to be in schools to foster positive relationships. As one person noted,

We are in a position in society right now where police are struggling with their reputation with the perception, we have of the role they fulfill. We might be losing an opportunity to redefine that relationship or perception of what police could look like.

To them, police presence in schools helps to address the safety concerns of the community and provides invaluable support to the school administration regarding drug use, sharing information on emerging issues regarding human trafficking and gangs, and by educating educators, parents, and students. They also shared the positive impact that SROs have had on particular youth who have benefited from the positive attention from an SRO. They feel that having someone with whom they are able to share their personal experience and who was willing to help them choose a different path, has been greatly beneficial to some at-risk youth. One SRO even recounted attending the graduation of one young person and receiving hugs from them and their parent because of the assistance they were able to provide.

Some also shared the positive impact that the sheer presence of a police officer and a police cruiser parked at the front of the school has. They shared that this presence may deter fights from happening and may put students on their best behaviour. There were school staff however, who shared their experience that the presence of police has often raised the concern of parents who would then call the school inquiring as to why the police have attended the school.

Overall, those interviewed from the school board and police service felt that a lot would be lost if the SRO Program ended. They shared that if the only time the police comes to school is when something is wrong, police would not be able to develop positive relationships with students. They also raised concerns about how police would be able to work with the schools to address criminal activity such as gangs, drug issues, and sexual assault. They note that these issues will continue to happen in schools and students may not feel safe if SROs are no longer in schools.

Impact on racialized students

The majority of those interviewed shared surprise when asked about the impact of SROs on racialized students, as this has not been something they had considered, with most indicating that they have not given much, if any, thought to the issue. School administrators shared that when they walk the hallways with the SROs, they don't observe negatively from any students. They shared that even when the SRO has had to intervene and break up a fight, the students have been respectful of the officer.

Both school administrators and WRPS staff shared understanding that newcomers may have had negative experiences with and perceptions of the police from their home countries. They understood that there are a number of students who have come to Canada as refugees and who have fled violent situations which have involved police. They feel that these students may bring with them negative perceptions of police and may be fearful and distrustful of police. They also shared some understanding of the issues from the United States may impact students' perceptions of the police. However, there was little understanding of the Canadian context and the issues that racialized students and communities may have with police. As one person commented,

Some see police officers as dangerous people and you don't want to cross them. In Canada it is so different.

As such, they saw racialized students' fear of police as an issue of perception that needed to be overcome by engaging positively with racialized students through the SRO Program, and the community's lack of support as being addressed through public relations. Some SROs shared that from their perspective, racialized students are not fearful of police, sharing that they have had positive interactions with racialized students.

Very few school board or police service staff who were interviewed shared an understanding of the mountain of evidence that shows that racialized people are more likely to be stopped and questioned by police when walking¹² or driving,¹³ more likely to be shot,¹⁴ more likely to be charged and more likely to be held overnight¹⁵ than their White counterparts. Instead, some shared a perception that hiring the right person in the SRO role was enough to change the youths' overall perception of police.

Principals and vice principals in particular appeared to not have a great deal of understanding that racialized students may not want to interact with the police and may have negative experiences with SROs. So, while school administrators viewed SROs as "part of the administration team", some expressed shock when students refused or were hesitant to speak to the police. As one administrator noted,

¹² Rankin, J. (2010, February 6). Race matters: Blacks documented by police at high rate. *Toronto Star*. <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/raceandcrime.html>

¹³ Foster, L., Jacobs, L., & Siu, B. (2016, October). *Race data and traffic stops in Ottawa, 2013–2015: A report on Ottawa and the police districts*. Submitted to Ottawa Police Services Board and Ottawa Police Service.

¹⁴ Marcoux, J., & Nicholson, K. *Deadly force: Fatal encounters with police in Canada: 2000–2017*. CBC News. <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-custom/deadly-force>

¹⁵ Rankin, J., Quinn, J., Shephard, M., Simmie, S., & Duncanson, J. (2002, October 19). Singled out. *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/known_topolice/2002/10/19/singled-out.html

Even those in danger would say 'no, we don't talk to police.' At the beginning it was a big negative, but it didn't occur to me that this was happening.

One SRO noted that even as some racialized students were in need of the help of police, they hesitated to seek out the SRO. They noted that,

The Black girl said to me that she did not think I would care because she is Black. I had an interview with her and explained options and she convinced the other girls to have a conversation with me. They were also Black girls.

The SRO felt that being able to build a relationship with these students made them feel comfortable coming forward with their issues.

Very few school administrators shared their observations of racialized and other students not feeling comfortable with police being in schools. As one person commented,

It was obvious that some students wanted nothing to do with the SRO, they would not even respond to the SRO. This never escalated to anything but from my viewpoint watching those exchanges, those situations did exist. Some students felt that the police did not belong in the school like a resource.

Few expressed an understanding that for some students the police are not a symbol of safety, but the opposite, and that the SRO Program could undermine the notion that school is a safe place for these students.

5. Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn based on the original research questions posed by the WCDSB.

How effectively is the original mandate of the SRO Program – related to relational proactive policing – being realized in the WCDSB?

The survey data collected reveal mixed feelings about the impact of the SRO Program. While many respondents had a positive impression of the program, there were also many students who were not aware of the program and report that they have never interacted with an SRO. Other students shared experiences of racial profiling, of themselves and their racialized peers, and being treated rudely by SROs. In addition, a few racialized female students also shared that comments and looks by male SROs have made them feel uncomfortable.

In addition, the responses of staff to the online survey, and the school board and police service staff interviewed, shows a disconnect from the experiences and perceptions of students, with staff being much more positive about the program and lacking knowledge about the negative impact of police on racialized students. While a good proportion of

students from all backgrounds are positive about the program, there are also those who shared not only negative perceptions of the program and SROs, but also negative experiences with SROs. When the data is explored by grade, it shows that with increased knowledge of and experience with the SRO Program, i.e., students in grades 10 to 12, are more likely to form an opinion about the program. However, that opinion is increasingly negative rather than positive. This data suggests that for some students greater exposure to SROs has not necessarily contributed to positive impressions of SROs but may instead be increasing the negative perceptions that students have about the program, its effectiveness, and police generally.

SROs themselves report that they have not been able to focus fully on proactive policing and that the program's mandate of proactive policing has not been met. SROs report that much of their proactive work has been put on hold because they spend much of their time responding to calls from schools. Contributing to their limited ability to engage in proactive work is the number of schools SROs are assigned to, and also the increasing calls that they get from schools regarding issues that are better addressed by school staff.

There were also students, school staff, and community members who questioned the mandate of the SRO Program itself and the need for police presence in their schools. They also shared that relying on police to ensure school safety also reflects a narrow perception of school safety and absolves school administrators, teachers, and other adults in the building from fostering inclusive environments, building relationships with students, and addressing issues when they do occur. They also shared their concern about how police in schools create a poor learning environment for racialized students and students with disabilities.

How (if at all) is systemic racism experienced within the context of the SRO Program?

Both White and racialized students, as well as some of the parents with whom we spoke shared not only perceptions of, but experiences of, racial profiling ranging from rude treatment to criminal charges being laid. Some White students also shared their observations of how they are treated differently than their racialized friends. Racialized students themselves shared feeling uncomfortable in the presence of the police in addition to rude treatment, being targeted by SROs, and inappropriate looks and comments. Some shared that the presence of police contributes to making school feel like a prison and that they are under surveillance, contributing to anxiety and fear among racialized students and impacting their ability to learn.

While we spoke to few parents and community members for this review, all expressed grave concerns about the SRO Program and the overall impact on racialized students, including personal experiences of criminal charges being laid without regard for the

evidence (charges which have since been dropped). They critiqued the concept of having police in schools and the impact particularly on racialized students.

While students, including White students, shared their perceptions and experiences of the disproportionate impact of SROs on racialized students, very few of the school board or police service staff with whom we spoke shared any similar understanding or awareness. Despite the growing conversation in the community about the impact of police on Indigenous and racialized, particularly Black, communities few staff at WCDSB or WRPS with whom we spoke shared an understanding of these issues and the impact the SRO Program could have on Indigenous and racialized students.

Furthermore, while parents and students shared some significant negative interactions with SROs, none of the school board or police service staff with whom we spoke shared any awareness of any negative interactions between SROs and racialized or other students. Those interviewed shared that they have never witnessed or heard of any issues in which SROs have acted inappropriately with racialized students. From their perspective, SROs do their job of engaging all students equitably and shared their praise of SROs and their complete support for this program.

Students also shared negative interactions with SROs with a few racialized female students sharing inappropriate comments or behaviours from SROs. None shared that they raised these concerns through any of the mechanisms available to them.

Whether there an overrepresentation of racialized groups that are being suspended/expelled where SRO involvement was also included?

Unfortunately, the Student Census data is not yet available to enable such an analysis to be conducted.

Whether racialized students see/experience police differently within the SRO Program versus those they encounter in their community?

Many students from all backgrounds shared positive experiences with SROs and rated SROs more positively than police generally. They shared their experience of SROs being more approachable than police and that through their interactions with SROs they have come to appreciate that police are also human beings.

However, some students also shared that positive experiences with an SRO or with the police in the community does not change their overall perceptions of police and the systemic racism embedded within the system of policing. Some students shared their differentiation between the people who occupy the job of police officer with the system of policing. While they may have positive interactions with SROs, may even like a particular SRO, or even have positive experiences with the SRO Program, they shared that it doesn't necessarily change their overall perspective of police. In addition, some students shared

that one positive experience with a “good” police officer, does not mean that the next experience with another police officer will also be positive.

How do the police need to work in schools to ensure equity of outcomes for all students?

Answering this question is more challenging as it assumes that equitable outcomes can be achieved for all students with police in schools. It implies that interactions with, and perceptions of, SROs can be severed from experiences with and perceptions of police generally. The students themselves have shared that given the larger context of systemic racism in policing, the mere presence of police in their school causes them to feel unsafe and anxious, particularly racialized students. In addition, students shared experiences of racialized students being targeted or being treated differently by SROs.

What the data does point to is a number of calls to action for both WCDSB and WRPS in order to create safe, welcoming, and inclusive learning environments for all students.

There is a need for youth to be provided with the social supports, counselling, and mental health supports they need to address their issues. While this appears to have been an important part of the role of the SRO, a fully armed police officer is not necessarily the best person to attend to a young person who is in distress, emotionally fragile, or experiencing issues at home. There is a need for more appropriate and fully trained school and community resources to address the needs of vulnerable young people. This is particularly important at this time as the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened the needs of students from various backgrounds, including Indigenous and racialized students.

There is a need for school board staff to better understand the experiences of racialized students, develop racial literacy, and develop their ability to apply a racial equity lens to their work. It is surprising to us that in the wake of global protests arising from the murder of George Floyd and a deepening discussion about systemic racism, including systemic racism in policing, that school board staff didn’t have a better understanding of the impact of police on racialized students. This “colour-blind” approach has not meant that racialized students are treated equitably, but instead that the harm that has come to racialized students has not been noticed or addressed.

There is a need to reimage school safety in consultation with Indigenous and racialized students and communities as well as others in the school community. In doing so, the school board needs to consider how it creates safe, welcoming, and inclusive learning environments without SROs. Part of this reimagining is to determine the best ways in which teachers, students, and parents should be educated about issues that put young people at risk, such as human trafficking, drugs, and gangs, and also a need to address crime when it does occur in schools.

There is a need for schools to ensure that students know about and feel safe to use the various complaints mechanisms in place when they have concerns about safety, including when any adult in the building makes them feel unsafe.

There is a need for school administrators, educators, and all school staff to better understand their role in supporting school safety including by fostering inclusive environments, building relationships with students, and addressing issues when they do occur.



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To whom it may concern:

I am writing today seeking your input on the possible safe return to schools before the end of this academic year. No one wants to see our schools reopen safely more than I do. Our government understands the benefits of having children learning in class. At the same time, our top priority is to ensure any decision we make on school reopening is based on sound scientific advice, consensus and considers potential or future risks faced by students and staff.

In recent weeks, there has been a wide range of advice and commentary around the reopening of schools in Ontario. There is consensus in some quarters on how, when and whether schools should reopen, and diverse and conflicting views in others. Keeping children safe is our foremost consideration, which is why as experts in health, public health and education we are seeking your perspective.

Thanks to the hard work of Ontarians across the province, public health indicators are moving in the right direction. Last week, our government, in consultation with our Chief Medical Officer of Health, released our three step Roadmap to Reopen. While we look forward to gradually reopening the province, we all must remain vigilant.

We know the mental health, academic and other challenges some students have faced with at-home learning, particularly those from low-income, racialized and high needs neighbourhoods. Those same neighbourhoods are often in COVID hotspots, and we know that school cases are amplified by what is happening in the community. The difficult decision to close schools is not far behind us and just prior to that, in April, schools were the sources of more outbreaks than workplaces or any other location. That is why we want to take a gradual approach to returning.

Ontario is not an island. Keeping our students and school staff, and their families, safe in a global pandemic must include global considerations, especially the impact of new, more dangerous variants that have now entered our communities through Canada's borders.

Recent modelling presented by the Science Table suggested that should Ontario reopen schools to in-class learning we could see an increase of six to 11 per cent in the number of new daily cases.¹ We are expecting new modelling this week that puts the range of new cases associated with school reopening between 2,000 to 4,000 cases by the end of July. This is concerning. At the same time we know other jurisdictions are seeing a rapid increase in new, more dangerous variants that are more contagious, make people and children in particular sicker, are potentially more deadly and are more resistant to vaccines.

¹ <https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/sciencebrief/update-on-covid-19-projections-8/>



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A recent study from Public Health England by the U.K. government indicated a single dose of either the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine was just 33% effective against the COVID-19 variant first identified in India. The study found “one dose offered 33 per cent protection against symptomatic infection from B.1.617.2, and 51 per cent against B.1.1.7. This suggests a single shot offers 35 per cent less protection against B.1.617.2 compared with B.1.1.7, according to Financial Times analysis.”² Other jurisdictions - including Singapore - have recently closed in person learning as a direct result of that variant.³ That variant is also on the rise in Ontario.

What makes all this new information concerning is that according to the most recent data in the provincial COVAX system, which tracks who gets vaccinated in Ontario and when, only 41 per cent of teachers and education workers are vaccinated compared to 62 per cent of the general adult population in Ontario.

Vaccines remain our best defence against COVID-19. To date, Ontario has successfully administered more than 8,530,000 doses. As of May 23, 2021, Ontarians aged 12 and up are now eligible to book a vaccine through the provincial booking system. We are getting doses into arms as quickly as possible, but due to lack of sufficient supply, children may not be vaccinated before a return to school in June.

As Premier, my priority throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has always been to protect the health and safety of Ontarians. We need now to ensure there is broad consensus from our medical, public health, and education experts that returning to school is the right thing to do. I've always said we have the best minds in the world right here in Ontario and that together we make the best decisions.

Ultimately, this is our government's decision, but in light of the foregoing, and the diversity of perspectives on the safety of reopening schools, I am asking for your views on a number of issues.

To help guide any decisions regarding schools, and ensure any decision on reopening in-class learning protects students and staff, I am asking for your perspective on the following questions that have been raised as concerns to our government:

1. Is the reopening of schools for in person learning safe for students?
2. Is the reopening of schools for in person learning safe for teachers and all education staff?

² <https://www.ft.com/content/a70d423a-7d7c-4736-8828-0a485d7c3a8e>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-warns-children-susceptible-virus-variants-shuts-schools-2021-05-17/>



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3. There are a growing number of cases in Ontario of the variant first identified in India (B.1.617). Does this mutation pose an increased risk to students and education workers?
4. The modelling from the Ontario Science Table has suggested that reopening schools will lead to an increase in cases in the province of Ontario, is this acceptable and safe?
5. Other countries are warning mutations including the B.1.617 variant⁴⁵ are putting children at much greater risk and are shutting schools down. Is this concern not shared by medical experts in Ontario?
6. Should teachers be fully vaccinated before resuming in class lessons and if not, is one dose sufficient?
7. Under Ontario's reopening plan, indoor gatherings won't commence until July. Should indoor school instruction resume before then?

I ask you to provide your responses to the specific question no later than 5:00 p.m. on Friday, May 28, 2021.

Sincerely,

Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario

CC:

Ontario Medical Association
SickKids Hospital
Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO)
London Health Sciences
McMaster Children's Hospital
Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
Empowered Kids Ontario
Children's Mental Health Ontario

⁴ abc.net.au/news/2021-05-17/singapore-warns-children-susceptible-to-covid-indian-variant/100144908

⁵ <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/india-deals-with-fears-about-a-third-covid-19-wave-affecting-kids>



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Ontario Hospital Association
Canadian Paediatric Society
Pediatricians Alliance of Ontario
University Health Network
Science Advisory Table
Dr David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
The District of Algoma Health Unit, Dr. Jennifer Loo
Brant County Health Unit, Dr. Elizabeth Urbantke
Chatham-Kent Health Unit, Dr. David Colby
Durham Regional Health Unit, Dr. Robert Kyle
Eastern Ontario Health Unit, Dr. Paul Roumeliotis
Grey Bruce Health Unit, Dr. Ian Arra
Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit, Dr. Shanker Nesathurai
Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit, Dr. Natalie Bocking
Halton Region Health, Department Dr. Hamidah Meghani
City of Hamilton, Public Health Services, Dr. Elizabeth Richardson
Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit, Dr. Piotr Oglaza
Huron Perth Health Unit, Dr. Miriam Klassen
Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Health Unit, Dr. Kieran Moore
Lambton Health Unit, Dr. Sudit Ranade
Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit, Dr. Paula Stewart Middlesex-London Health Unit,
Dr. Christopher Mackie
Niagara Region Public Health Department, Dr. Mustafa Hirji
North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, Dr. Jim Chirico
Northwestern Health Unit, Dr. Kit Young Hoon
Ottawa Public Health, Dr. Vera Etches
Oxford Elgin St. Thomas Health Unit, Dr. Joyce Lock
Peel Public Health, Dr. Lawrence Loh
Peterborough County-City Health Unit, Dr. Rosana Salvaterra
Porcupine Health Unit, Dr. Lianne Catton
Renfrew County & District Health Unit, Dr. Robert Cushman
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, Dr. Charles Gardner
Sudbury and District Health Unit, Dr. Penny Sutcliffe
Thunder Bay District Health Unit, Dr. Janet DeMille
Timiskaming Health Unit, Dr. Glenn Corneil
City of Toronto Health Unit, Dr. Eileen de Villa
Region of Waterloo, Public Health, Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang
Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Health Unit, Dr. Nicola Mercer
Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, Dr. Wajid Ahmed
York Region Public Health, Dr. Karim Kurji



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Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association
Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation
Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario
Education Workers' Alliance of Ontario
Ontario Council of Educational Workers

THE VOLUME OF OUR VOICES

Volume One: Learning and Living During a Pandemic

May 2021





CONTENTS

ABOUT OSTA-AECO

The Ontario Student Trustees' Association—l'Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario (OSTA-AECO) is a registered non-profit, nonpartisan organization, and the largest student stakeholder group in Ontario, representing approximately 2 million students. The general assembly is comprised of student trustees from public and Catholic school boards across the province. Members of the organization work tirelessly throughout the year to advocate for student voice, and strive to work with provincial partners in the education sector. Ultimately, OSTA-AECO aims to improve Ontario's education system for its students.

More information about OSTA-AECO's work can be found at osta-aeco.org.

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ABOUT

THE VOLUME OF OUR VOICES

The Volume of Our Voices is a three-part series by OSTA-AECO highlighting student stories. *Volume One* focuses on the impact that COVID-19 has had on public education; *Volume Two* centers on how students' race, ethnicity, nationality, or cultural identity have shaped their school experience; and *Volume Three* features how students' gender identity or sexual orientation have shaped their school experience.

Students in grades 7 to 12 across Ontario were invited to write and submit to *The Volume of Our Voices* between January and May 2021; the submissions in this publication were submitted at varying times in this months-long period. The online submission form was provided in English, and students could request to have their submission transcribed over a call or otherwise submitted through an alternate means to ensure accessibility in submission methods. Students were encouraged to freely share whatever they wished on the theme of each volume, and all submissions were anonymized to protect the students' safety and privacy.

We want to feature student voices discussing complex issues and their personal experiences within the Ontario public education system. Student voice will always be essential to decision-making and we hope these stories shift provincial and local discussions and decisions surrounding topics such as racism and homophobia in schools or learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The stories featured in each volume are followed by our policy recommendations for a variety of stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, school boards, schools, and teachers. Each volume also contains recommendations from previous OSTA-AECO publications, such as *Affording Our Students' Success: 2020-21 Pre-Budget/Grants for Student Needs Submission*, *The Students' Vision for Education: OSTA-AECO Vision Document*, and *eLearning: the Students' Perspective*.

Above all, we owe a debt of gratitude to all the students who courageously submitted to *The Volume of Our Voices* and shared their experiences. These stories and their openness and vulnerability are truly at the heart of this project. We hope that the people and stakeholders reading these volumes do their stories justice by critically examining our public education system and continuously working to serve the students of Ontario.

The ethos of this project simply comes down to this: Our voices matter. Our stories matter.

Welcome to *The Volume of Our Voices*.

INTRODUCTION

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the lives of billions were upended around the world.

Massive systems and institutions were disrupted, and the Ontario public education system is no exception. Students rode out the waves of invention and innovation from staff, schools, school boards, and a province attempting dozens of new local and provincial changes for the first time to adapt to the pandemic.

The pandemic continues into the 2021-2022 academic year. The Ministry of Education must strive to provide early and consistent directives to maximize stability of planning for all stakeholders in education, from school boards to families. Furthermore, the Ministry, school boards, and

schools to take lessons learned from the current school year and apply changes to improve upon plans and models for the upcoming one. It is crucial for all aforementioned major decision-makers within public education to listen to students' experiences and feedback and to shape ongoing and upcoming plans accordingly.

We invite you to ask yourself: what do these stories tell us? What have these disruptions and changes revealed and taught us about schooling both before and during a global pandemic? How do we use these experiences to teach us not how to revert back to what was "normal" for public education, but to rethink how things operate in the public education system as a whole?



MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is a consistent priority and point of advocacy for students across the province, with their school environment often being a dominant factor affecting their mental health. This is also evidenced by the submissions we received to Volume One: over 60% of students explicitly referenced their mental health.

“... My mental health has been through ups and downs since the beginning of the school year, however I really struggled before the summer [of 2020] during emergency learning as I tried to keep up and do my best in everything...However, I have had some amazing teachers this year that have tried their best to let me know I am cared for. . . My family is very worried about me going to school as some of them are immunocompromised and have been at home for a year. . . This has put a lot of stress on me as I am responsible for my family’s wellbeing, and has led me to avoid any friendships this year for fear of them wanting to hang out at some point. . . I think student health and safety is the most important thing this year and everyone should be pushing mental health resources. I am working with my school to make sure this happens as much as possible. Thank you for listening to my story.” —Grade 11 Student

“The COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive toll on my mental health. Staying inside for most of the day has made me feel very bad. I think a feeling that I have that is shared with many other people my age is that I feel like these should be some of the best years/time of my life when it is [not] shaping up to be that way. . . There has not been a lot of mental health support though. I am in the IB program so this has made it even harder on top of all this. I hope everyone out there is doing ok, and I hope we can get through this and be stronger for it at the end.” —Grade 11 Student

“... Not being able to leave the house has had a devastating toll on my already not great mental health. Before this pandemic I was already stressed out but at least I was able to see people who are important to me and I had sports, clubs and a regular routine to help me manage. Now that is all gone. I sit on my bed all day, normally rolling out of bed and logging onto class in my PJs then sitting there for three hours, I take a 30 minute break then return to my bed or the floor in my room for my next class. I then do my chores or other household tasks then finish my homework. Before remote learning I didn’t really procrastinate. Now I find myself procrastinating until the very last second. Even doing simple household tasks seems impossible. This has often [led] to me having sleepless nights, poor eating routines and lack of physical exercise as I feel so drained. I get such bad anxiety and the cut off from in-person socializing has [led] to me feeling quite depressed. . . I’m a very high achieving student with top marks but that was when I was able to get out and actually get on the bus early in the morning, go sit in a classroom, and see other people in person. I strongly think online learning is hurting students’ mental health and academic success.” —Grade 10 Student

“I am feeling great today. My mental health has been affected by being in lockdown and not being able to go anywhere which has made me feel lonely at times. . . I have gotten depressed a little bit because of COVID-19. I am worried about being around people and then eventually getting the virus. I am relieved that we were out of lockdown at one point. My mental health is being accommodated by my teachers and school because they give us breaks so we don’t overwork ourselves and they give us mental health resources to be get help for our health. The mental health resources are very accessible as they are posted on our school website.” —Anonymous Student

“... My mental health has been rather odd since the pandemic hit. I’ve been very happy as of late since I’ve started taking testosterone to help me transition, but I’m also incredibly paranoid because of the virus. COVID-19 has been absolutely terrifying to me, and I simply can’t get used to every single change going on. I don’t mind cleaning things all the time, or sanitizing my hands, or wearing a mask. I’m just constantly in fear that my school could get another case, maybe they won’t be able to control it again if it were to happen. I have been provided sessions with our school counselor, and it helps to talk to her about it, but whether or not I stop panicking is up to me. I believe I’m at a point where I don’t want to stop being paranoid. I think if I stop being paranoid, I won’t worry about how COVID-19, could affect other’s or myself. . .” —Grade 11 Student

“Overall, the combination of COVID-19 and school has been very detrimental to my mental health. I have been struggling a lot with motivation, self-esteem and my grades have dropped significantly. I have also found myself extremely overwhelmed with school and unable to cope with it at times. I have not really felt accommodated by my school, and I have not seen any support from them when it comes to mental health. . . I think that our schools should begin offering more mental health services to the students and making it public. I know they have guidance counselors already, but if I am being honest, none of the students feel that they can trust the guidance counselors with mental health or details about their home life. Many students I know who have gone to the guidance counselors for help came back with a negative experience. Maybe having therapist(s) at our schools would help some? Even if some kids do not necessarily take that opportunity to see the therapist, just having that service there would help make the kids more comfortable in [and of] itself. It would let them know that the school actually cares about their mental health. If having a therapist isn’t possible, then maybe the schools should make mental health services more visible to students (e.g. actively posting therapy services, people to contact if they need help, etc. on platforms like Edsby).” —Grade 12 Student



Students have learned to be resilient over the course of this pandemic, but this resilience and well-being must be supported. Schools exist as a support system and are an essential hub for students to seek internal and external mental health resources. Now more than ever, it is crucial to commit resources and strategies to support mental health. OSTA-AECO recommends:

1.1: The Ministry of Education specifically outline the role of guidance counsellors to ensure that they can perform their job to the best of their abilities, and students can have a solid understanding of who to turn to for assistance in mental wellbeing and academic success;¹

1.4: School boards proactively inform students of school mental health resources (e.g. school psychologist) via proactive outreach;

1.2: The funding provided for guidance counsellors in Ontario be increased in order to properly support the needs of Ontario students, and the funding provided at the elementary level should match the secondary level;²

1.5: School boards proactively inform students of community mental health resources using proactive outreach, including resources responsive to identities and lived experiences such as cultural background, gender identity, or sexual orientation; and

1.3: The Ministry work to develop the infrastructure to allow and work with school boards to digitize the booking of guidance counsellors and other mental health worker appointments through online systems that fits their local needs;³

1.6: School boards seek opportunities to collaborate with mental health organizations to increase support for student mental health.



ANTI-ASIAN RACISM

Anti-Asian racism includes beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed to people of Asian descent. A shadow pandemic of anti-Asian racism, violence, and hatred has spread across Canada—not leaving Asian students in Ontario unscathed—in conjunction with the global pandemic of COVID-19.

“Ever since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I’ve dealt with racism at my school simply because I am Asian, and this has caused me to feel less comfortable at school. People have told me that it ‘it makes sense to stay away from as many Asians as possible’ during this pandemic without thinking that those words are extremely harmful.”—Grade 9 Student

“COVID-19 has amplified the racist micro-aggressive behaviors in my school. While personal attacks have been uncommon, **some students have taken to social media to share attacks on the Asian population or blame towards Chinese people.** I’ve noticed subtle comments towards Asian students like myself, notably **one instance where two students coughed and joked [that] they had coronavirus after I walked into a bathroom.** I’ve become more frustrated with the education system as a result of the pandemic, but not because the changes have caused these problems, rather because they pulled back the curtain hiding these issues.”—Grade 11 Student

Anti-Asian racism has drastically increased during the pandemic as a result of inflamed political rhetoric. The roots of anti-Asian racism itself go back centuries, but it continues to manifest today in the perpetual othering and scapegoating of Asian people. This ideology and rhetoric, no matter its often mundane disguise, is violent and still reproduces itself in the words and actions of people as young as high school students. In turn, this racism cuts deep for Asian students already trying to navigate the uncertainty of coming-of-age, a school life, and a global pandemic. These experiences stay with Asian students for their entire life. This racism often creates deep insecurity, self-hatred, and internalized racism that often require years, if not decades, to learn to work through and rebuild from.

To be told at such a young age, in such a visceral way, that you do not belong is devastating. The only way to prevent children from experiencing this form of racist violence in its myriad forms is if all stakeholders in public education commit themselves to actively combatting it. Until then, Asian students will continue to experience this harm as microaggressions, intimidation, harassment, and assault reinforce a culture of fear and violence in schools. The shadow pandemic and anti-Asian racism will continue—even after the COVID-19 pandemic ends—unless all members of society, including public education, work to combat its spread. OSTA-AECO recommends:

2.1: The Ministry of Education and school boards provide training and resources (e.g. the Toronto District School Board’s *Addressing Anti-Asian Racism: A Resource for Educators*) to teachers on anti-Asian racism and addressing racist incidents;

2.2: The Ministry, school boards, and schools support the creation of communal spaces such as sharing circles, discussion groups, and affinity networks for students to learn and share about anti-Asian racism; and

2.3: The Ministry fund the creation of an Office of Human Rights and Equity in each school board to provide oversight to internal human rights complaints procedure, provide leadership and advice to school boards to identify and address systemically-based human rights and equity issues, and to increase capacity to ensure compliance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.⁴

These two stories are also be included in *Volume Two of our The Volume of Our Voices* series, where additional relevant recommendations are provided.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Education are written in blue, while recommendations for school boards, schools, and/or teaching staff are written in navy.

REMOTE LEARNING

All school boards have been delivering fully remote learning since April 2021 in conjunction with the declaration of a province-wide state of emergency; some school boards are experiencing these school closures for the third time since March 2020. This academic year, most students have received part-time in-person learning in coordination with cohorting schedules. Other students have enrolled in fully remote learning.

COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

“... As formerly mentioned, the vast majority if not the whole of the student body are resentful towards this lockdown **as the very little time they had for communicating with friends and extended family is now gone**. If students were already facing an increase of mental illness it has now surely become an epidemic. **The monotony of online school is overwhelming and downright depressing as you can hear the voices of your professors and classmates but are separated by kilometres in distance making the whole experience very alienating**. I have the feeling that I am just one in a group of endless blank Gmail accounts sitting in a meeting with a professor that only views their students as a picture and a voice removing all the emotion in learning as well as teaching. **The lack of being capable to emotional connect with a teacher and a teacher with their students creates a very bland and unappealing way of education**. Without schools being open students still are required to wake up early everyday and still do not obtain enough sleep to continually retain attention to a screen that's telling them to do more house work that they despise doing very much. Through this poor alternative to actual school, many students are actually wishing to go back to a real school. **The deprivation of emotional connection and a system that only perpetuates the former will lead to a student body of emotionally undeveloped, reclusive, uncooperative, and mentally ill individuals**. All I can hope for is that the future and that my generation can change and correct the fundamentally flawed system that educates us today.” —Grade 12 Student



“... I started the 2020-2021 school year online and **it was [very difficult] to adjust to [the] learning platforms and the lack of social interactions at first**. Lots of my friends were learning in school and it was strenuous on my mental health to consistently remind myself that I'm not missing out and that my value has not decreased as a result of less interactions with my peers. I'm extremely lucky because I did not experience any housing or significant technological issues, so I was able to connect when/if I wanted to. Also, **I had some pretty great teachers that checked in on us and valued our feedback**. Eventually, **I made special virtual connections with classmates and I am currently involved in multiple extracurricular activities**. **The virtual aspects have allowed me to take opportunities regardless of geography**.” —Grade 10 Student



“Being in virtual high school (VHS) I wish there was more of a way for students to still feel connected with their home school. I felt as though students who took VHS were pushed out of their home schools and were expected to be in a new school. For being in grade 12, I felt like I spent most of my years with people from my home school making friendships and getting to know everyone, just to be divided in my last year. I do like the way virtual high school runs, however, I found it easy enough to get the hang of.” —Grade 12 Student

“... During lockdowns I lose the motivation to put effort into my schoolwork. In remote learning, I enjoyed having breakout groups to give a sense of social interaction. My school board has just returned to in-person [learning] and I am very pleased, since I know my quality of education and life will increase.” —Grade 11 Student

“This past year has been excruciating. **It's [an] absolute pain to have to sit through 4-5 hours of hearing my screen talk to me**. I often found myself not paying attention as it was difficult to do so. **I also feel like the approach feels redundant as it appeals to a very specific group of students, those who listen**. **I myself and many others would consider myself a visual learner**. And without textbooks being present, I have to go through a plethora of information on the internet just to find a specific thing.” —Grade 11 Student

Schools are not merely environments for academic learning; they serve as vital social environments for students to engage with friends and peers—engagement crucial to students' emotional development and well-being. With Ontario currently experiencing its worst wave of the pandemic, and with school shutdowns potentially becoming necessary again during the current and next academic year, it is clear that shutdowns are no longer short periods of time during which the shortfall of social connection should only be mitigated with short-term solutions. With students spending longer and longer stretches in fully remote learning (for fully virtual learners, this stretch represents the entire academic year), it is imperative to develop robust, long term, sustainable structures to support students' social engagement and interaction online. OSTA-AECO recommends:



3.1: The Ministry and school boards create and/or maintain structures and social environments (e.g. affinity networks) with sufficient funding that are accessible to students;



3.2: The Ministry and school boards engage community organizations and institutions in providing virtual extracurricular opportunities and events to students;



3.3: The Ministry refrain from implementing a permanent remote learning pathway at school boards due to the intrinsic shortfall of opportunities for social engagement and emotional development in a virtual learning environment; and



3.4: School boards provide students and staff flexibility in operating on virtual platforms that best facilitate social interaction, understanding that stringency in approval processes often restricts students from engaging on platforms that allow them to effectively interact with each other.

OPTIMIZING VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

“Remote learning is very challenging. I feel so distracted during my classes and **I lack the proper environment to get through my schoolwork**. When my Wi-Fi goes out I'm disconnected from my class. Other members in my household are also normally on the Wi-Fi and it is quite frustrating for everyone when it disconnects. I was supplied with a free, unlimited data iPad but typing out documents, creating slides and changing tabs on it is very frustrating compared to a laptop or Chromebook, especially as all my courses require [a lot] of typing. **Conflict among household members is also a challenge as some people don't understand that all of my schooling is now online. Sometimes my internet is taken from me purposely because my time management has become difficult.** . . . I don't even know what some of the teachers look like from classes I've been in. **The whole possible situation with online/remote learning becoming a permanent part of some education is definitely stressing me out** as it's only made things much more difficult for me. I never saw leaving the house as a luxury but after this whole situation is over, I'll definitely never take any in-person learning for granted.” – Grade 10 Student



“ . . . As for online classes, **I do have a comfortable environment at home to work in** and I have had little issues connecting to classes **(it isn't the same for other students - some of my peers have issues with their internet, their computers, printing notes, or their home environment)**. My teachers have been trying their hardest to maintain the attention of their classes. Although I can't say I have been engaged all throughout the classes, I can say the teachers have been putting in the most effort they can and it is the most they can do given the situation we are in. I really appreciate the school's and the teacher's efforts to get resources to us and keep our classes going.” – Grade 12 Student

“ . . . I'm someone who needs to be inside a classroom and interacting with my peers or else I fall into a state of mind where **I can't get anything done because there is so much distracting me at home. My mental health has plummeted, and I no longer have the patience to do most of the things I used to love.** The plan they have [implemented] for my school is so horrible, **learning [a] four month curriculum in 40 days has put so much stress and anxiety on me,** I don't even want to do good anymore[,] I just want to get the school year over with.” – Grade 9 Student

Virtual learning environments should not be understood as merely the online platform students use for learning. Rather, virtual learning environments also consist of the physical space and academic environment in which students learn; they should be equitable environments that allow all students to participate. Students must be supported as they try to optimize the variety of factors affecting their ability to participate in virtual learning, such as access to Wifi and quiet household space. OSTA-AECO's report eLearning: The Students' Perspective responding to the Ministry of Education's former mandate in 2019 to make four eLearning credits a requirement for graduation provides additional valuable insights from students (over 6000 survey responses from Ontario students) and recommendations on eLearning—this report's value and relevance has only increased with the prevalence of remote learning during this pandemic. OSTA-AECO recommends:

“ . . . In terms of doing online school because of the virus, schools need to understand that we're all just kids. Most of us don't have the motivation to do the work given and on top of that **a lot of us live in places where it's hard to get access to school given or there's too many distractions in our living environment.** Frankly I think **the way schools (or at least mine) have organized online school is very unorganized,** teachers are never using the same website whether that's Webex, Google Meet, etc, and it can be really confusing. Why not just have all the teachers use the same program so that everyone already understands what they're supposed to do[?]” – Grade 12 Student

3.5: School boards, schools, and teachers frequently collect and implement feedback from students on their virtual learning experience and structurally incorporate student voice in decision-making processes;

3.6: School boards advise schools and teachers to create equitable learning environments that accommodate the diverse personal circumstances that impact an individual students's ability to learn at home rather than a traditional classroom environment;

3.7: School boards provide adequate instructional support to students with special education needs during remote learning, soliciting student and parent feedback to do so;

3.8: School boards advise schools and teachers to proactively review, update, and implement students' IEPs and empower students' self-advocacy (e.g. creating processes that mitigate the teacher-student power imbalance);

3.9: School boards build a process to proactively assess students' technology needs and distribute devices (e.g. hotspots, Chromebooks) accordingly to ensure every student can participate in remote learning;

3.10: **Reliable broadband internet services be accessible to all schools in Ontario;**⁵

3.11: A considerable effort is made to retain critical learning skills such as time management and face-to-face interaction with remote learning teachers and students;⁶ and

3.12: The delivery of remote learning should accommodate the learning styles of all students within the platform's limitations.⁷

THE QUADMESTER AND OCTOMESTER EXPERIENCE

All school boards have been delivering the academic year under the quadmester or octomester. These models support public health measures such as cohorting and will be employed at most, if not all, boards for the upcoming school year. These new models have received mixed reception from students.

“My school has been using the [quadmester] layout where we have one week of one class then the next week [of another class], [this] layout has been stressful and not an amazing experience. **What I’ve found is this layout’s learning style is super condensed and doesn’t give you time to process information.** As much as [the quadmester system] allows less subjects to be on your plate I’ve found you have to learn all this information in such a short period of time where you have zero time to process any of it.” —Grade 12 Student

“**On top of that it’s [the quadmester’s] extremely fast.** I find myself online doing a unit every day, whereas at school it would take upwards [of] a month. Since exams are closed this leads to an even heavier amount of tests/quizzes/CATs etc. It feels like I’m running a marathon.” —Grade 11 Student

“In regards to school, I’ll admit that a lot is very different compared to what we were doing before lockdown. It’s not necessarily a bad thing either, in some ways, it’s become easier. We have two classes a day, both of them being just under three hours long. We switch to different classes every week. **I’ve been finding it much easier to keep up with my work compared to when we would have all four of our classes every day.**” —Grade 11 Student

“My school is doing [the quadmesters] fully in-person. **The [quadmesters] are not terrible, I enjoy being able to only focus on two classes. [However], so far none of my teachers have been able to finish the curriculum, making me feel unprepared for university. I am currently taking grade 12 classes, and am missing full units.**” —Grade 11 Student

“This year has been intense with uncertainty, feeling [isolated,] and strangeness in schools with distance and barriers from others, [with] constantly changing information and risk levels. During first semester I had English and math. Especially with math **I was working constantly, most of the time from when I got home to when I went to bed, with little help from teachers due to the model. The new model is a lot better as teachers can accurately assign workloads each day and see how it is affecting students as well as dealing with student comprehension issues as they arise.**” —Grade 11 Student

“The school I attend has [the quadmester system] in place. Personally I don’t like [it], **the curriculum moves way too fast and a lot of what was supposed to be taught is cut out. This leaves me feeling unprepared for the next year and stressed out as sometimes multiple assignments are assigned and due within an unrealistic amount of time.** Even with extensions it’s [a lot] of work. I also enrolled in pre advanced placement courses and [a lot] of the enrichment material I signed up for was never taught. This is done because the teachers need to teach the curriculum but their time to do that has been cut in half. **The double long periods are also hard to sit through.** There’s no breaks within the class time and this causes mental fatigue after sitting for so long. Bathroom breaks cut time from when we get a few minutes to complete independent worksheets. It’s also very easy to get overwhelmed in notes or procrastinate then not write them. This only adds to academic related stress.” —Grade 10 Student



While quadmesters and octomesters allow certain students to focus and balance one or two classes at a time rather than four classes (as is the case within a regular semester system), the submissions also reflect the constraints of the quadmesters and octomesters that student trustees of OSTA-AECO’s general assembly have also broadly observed students experiencing at their respective school boards: significantly faster pacing of instruction, heavier academic workloads, and sections of the curriculum not being taught.

With the pandemic projected to continue into the fall, various school districts have planned for the continuation of a quadmester or octomester model for at least part of the 2021-2022 school year. The 2020-2021 school year compelled staff and students to experience the quadmesters and octomesters for the first time, thus the upcoming school year provides the opportunity to assess these new models, improve upon them, and mitigate their flaws. OSTA-AECO recommends:



4.1: School boards create a contingent pivot and transition plan to the regular semester or non-semestered model during the 2021-2022 academic year, if or when the local public health circumstances permit such a return;



4.2: School teaching staff actively solicit students for feedback on the class workload and adjust the amount accordingly to a level that is manageable for students;



4.3: School teaching staff and departments collectively assess what curriculum (e.g. units) was not taught this year and adjust 2021-22 teaching plans accordingly to accommodate or support these gaps in learning as students enter the next year having covered different content in class per staff decisions;



4.4: School boards and schools bolster or create learning support systems (e.g. subject-specific interactive office hours, peer tutoring, study groups) that are easily accessible for students to receive academic support outside class time; and



4.5: School boards or schools standardize break lengths within and between classes to ensure that all students receive adequate time to rest.

CLOSING

The student stories of *Volume One* centered around mental health, anti-Asian racism, remote learning, and the quadmester and octomester experience during the pandemic. Within these topics, students discussed a wide range of experiences that express how their schooling has been and what they want their schooling to look like.

There is a myriad of ways to respond to this collection of feedback, as outlined by the policy recommendations in this volume, and stakeholders in public education should seek to implement them for the current and upcoming school years in a timely manner. Student voices and feedback outside of this project should be regularly accessed to guide these decisions and be actively included in shaping the future of a public education system designed to serve them.

We hope these stories inspire and compel you to reflect further on schooling and public education in Ontario and to contribute to shaping the ever-growing and evolving school systems around you.

CALLS TO ACTION

FOR THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION:

1.1: The Ministry of Education specifically outline the role of guidance counsellors to ensure that they can perform their job to the best of their abilities, and students can have a solid understanding of who to turn to for assistance in mental wellbeing and academic success;

1.2: The funding provided for guidance counsellors in Ontario be increased in order to properly support the needs of Ontario students, and the funding provided at the elementary level should match the secondary level;

1.3: The Ministry work to develop the infrastructure to allow and work with school boards to digitize the booking of guidance counsellors and other mental health worker appointments through online systems that fits their local needs;

2.1: The Ministry of Education and school boards provide training and resources (e.g. the Toronto District School Board's *Addressing Anti-Asian Racism: A Resource for Educators*) to teachers on anti-Asian racism and addressing racist incidents;

2.2: The Ministry, school boards, and schools support the creation of communal spaces such as sharing circles, discussion groups, and affinity networks for students to learn and share about anti-Asian racism;

2.3: The Ministry fund the creation of an Office of Human Rights and Equity in each school board to provide oversight to internal human rights complaints procedure, provide leadership and advice to school boards to identify and address systemically-based human rights and equity issues, and to increase capacity to ensure compliance with the Ontario Human Rights Code;

3.1: The Ministry and school boards create and/or maintain structures and social environments (e.g. affinity networks) with sufficient funding that are accessible to students;

3.2: The Ministry and school boards engage community organizations and institutions in providing virtual extracurricular opportunities and events to students;

3.3: The Ministry refrain from implementing a permanent remote learning pathway at school boards due to the intrinsic shortfall of opportunities for social engagement and emotional development in a virtual learning environment; and

3.10: Reliable broadband internet services be accessible to all schools in Ontario;

FOR SCHOOL BOARDS, SCHOOLS, AND/OR TEACHING STAFF:

- 1.4: School boards proactively inform students of school mental health resources (e.g. school psychologist) via proactive outreach;

1.5: School boards proactively inform students of community mental health resources using proactive outreach, including resources responsive to identities and lived experiences such as cultural background, gender identity, or sexual orientation;

1.6: School boards seek opportunities to collaborate with mental health organizations to increase support for student mental health;

2.2: The Ministry, school boards, and schools support the creation of communal spaces such as sharing circles, discussion groups, and affinity networks for students to learn and share about anti-Asian racism;

3.1: The Ministry and school boards create and/or maintain structures and social environments (e.g. affinity networks) with sufficient funding that are accessible to students;

3.2: The Ministry and school boards engage community organizations and institutions in providing virtual extracurricular opportunities and events to students;

3.4: School boards provide students and staff flexibility in operating on virtual platforms that best facilitate social interaction, understanding that stringency in approval processes often restricts students from engaging on platforms that allow them to effectively interact with eachother;

3.5: School boards, schools, and teachers frequently collect and implement feedback from students on their virtual learning experience and structurally incorporate student voice in decision-making processes;

3.6: School boards advise schools and teachers to create equitable learning environments that accommodate the diverse personal circumstances that impact an individual students's ability to learn at home rather than a traditional classroom environment;
- 3.7: School boards provide adequate instructional support to students with special education needs during remote learning, soliciting student and parent feedback to do so;

3.8: School boards advise schools and teachers to proactively review, update, and implement students' IEPs and empower students' self-advocacy (e.g. creating processes that mitigate the teacher-student power imbalance);

3.9: School boards build a process to proactively assess students' technology needs and distribute devices (e.g. hotspots, Chromebooks) accordingly to ensure every student can participate in remote learning;

3.11: A considerable effort is made to retain critical learning skills such as time management and face-to-face interaction with remote learning teachers and students;

3.12: The delivery of remote learning should accommodate the learning styles of all students within the platform's limitations;

4.1: School boards create a contingent pivot and transition plan to the regular semester or non-semestered model during the 2021-2022 academic year, if or when the local public health circumstances permit such a return;

4.2: School teaching staff actively solicit students for feedback on the class workload and adjust the amount accordingly to a level that is manageable for students;

4.3: School teaching staff and departments collectively assess what curriculum (e.g. units) was not taught this year and adjust 2021-22 teaching plans accordingly to accommodate or support these gaps in learning as students enter the next year having covered different content in class per staff decisions;

4.4: School boards and schools bolster or create learning support systems (e.g. subject-specific interactive office hours, peer tutoring, study groups) that are easily accessible for students to receive academic support outside class time; and

4.5: School boards or schools standardize break lengths within and between classes to ensure that all students receive adequate time to rest.

REFERENCES

¹ OSTA-AECO Executive Council, *The Students' Vision For Education: OSTA-AECO Vision Document*. (Toronto: Ontario Student Trustees' Association, 2019).

² OSTA-AECO Executive Council, 25.

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⁴ "OCDSB Office of the Human Rights and Equity Advisor," Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, accessed May 10, 2021, https://ocdsb.ca/about_us/human_rights_and_equity_advisor.

⁵ OSTA-AECO Executive Council, *eLearning: the Students' Perspective*. (Sarnia/Toronto: Ontario Student Trustees' Association, 2019).

⁶ OSTA-AECO Executive Council, 21.

⁷ OSTA-AECO Executive Council, 22.

Photos by Katerina Holmes, Charlotte May, Vlada Karpovich, August de Richelieu, and Fauxels from Pexels

APPENDIX

The following are the full submissions students provided, in the order that they appear in this volume. They have been lightly edited for clarity.

"COVID-19 has been disruptive to my education, however my family and teachers have been helpful in making this year a bit more bearable. My mental health has been through ups and downs since the beginning of the school year, however I really struggled before the summer during emergency learning as I tried to keep up and do my best in everything. This year has been intense with uncertainty, feeling [isolated,] and strangeness in schools with distance and barriers from others, [with] constantly changing information and risk levels. During first semester I had English and math. Especially with math I was working constantly, most of the time from when I got home to when I went to bed, with little help from teachers due to the model. The new model is a lot better as teachers can accurately assign workloads each day and see how it is affecting students as well as dealing with student comprehension issues as they arise. I didn't really have friends before the pandemic, but now even small talk is pretty much gone as it is unnecessary risk. However, I have had some amazing teachers this year that have tried their best to let me know I am cared for. I have tried very hard to join as many extracurricular [activities] as I can to look good in the future and to help my community currently, however this has also made me very busy, which is good and bad because I have less time to think about things I'm worried about. My family is very worried about me going to school as some of them are immunocompromised and have been at home for a year, while they let me go because they are all in elementary school yet

understand it's important for me to attend high school in-person. This has put a lot of stress on me as I am responsible for my family's wellbeing, and has led me to avoid any friendships this year for fear of them wanting to hang out at some point. Getting volunteer hours has been difficult, however I already had 27 before the pandemic so hopefully my community involvement can contribute to this. I think student health and safety is the most important thing this year and everyone should be pushing mental health resources. I am working with my school to make sure this happens as much as possible. Thank you for listening to my story." —Grade 11 Student

"The COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive toll on my mental health. Staying inside for most of the day has made me feel very bad. I think a feeling that I have that is shared with many other people my age is that I feel like these should be some of the best years/time of my life when it is [not] shaping up to be that way. I have been at school in-person since September and the protocols are hard to follow but I manage. Sometimes I felt unsafe at my school as there were cases of here, but we did not close [the school]. There has not been a lot of mental health support though. I am in the IB program so this has made it even harder on top of all this. I hope everyone out there is doing ok, and I hope we can get through this and be stronger for it at the end." —Grade 11 Student

"I am feeling great today. My mental health has been affected by

being in lockdown and not being able to go anywhere which has made me feel lonely at times but when we are not in lockdown or a stay-at-home order, I get to see people socially distanced. I have gotten depressed a little bit because of COVID. I am worried about being around people and then eventually getting the virus. I am relieved that we were out of lockdown at one point. My mental health is being accommodated by my teachers and school because they give us breaks so we don't overwork ourselves and they give us mental health resources to be get help for our health. The mental health resources are very accessible as they are posted on our school website. The changes to COVID and school have affected my education because we now only have one class per week instead of four classes per day and some students are online for their school and some are in-person. The extracurriculars I participated in were canceled because of COVID and there would be close contact such as curling, hockey, track and field, baseball and badminton. I am very athletic so the impact that it has on me, is that I am unable to be more active in the community. I am graduating this year and it feels like I have more access to post-secondary as I have applied to about three bursaries and scholarships than I anticipated. I have been able to earn my volunteer hours through household chores, yardwork, and online through overnight camps and youth groups. This experience helped me realize the importance of community involvement by helping other people around me and being able to socialize virtually.” —Anonymous Student

“In regards to school, I'll admit that a lot is very different compared to what we were doing before lockdown. It's not necessarily a bad thing either, in some ways, it's become easier. We have two classes a day, both of them being just under 3 hours long. We switch to different classes every week. I've been finding it much easier to keep up with my work compared to when we would have all four of our classes every day. Although, my mental health has been rather odd since the pandemic hit. I've been very happy as of late since I've started taking testosterone to help me transition, but I'm also incredibly paranoid because of the virus. COVID-19 has been absolutely terrifying to me, and I simply can't get used to every single change going on. I don't mind cleaning things all the time, or sanitizing my hands, or wearing a mask. I'm just constantly in fear that my school could get another case, maybe they won't be able to control it again if it were to happen. I have been provided sessions with our school counselor, and it helps to talk to her about it, but whether or not I stop panicking is up to me. I believe I'm at a point where I don't want to stop being paranoid. I think if I stop being paranoid, I won't worry about how COVID-19, could affect other's or myself. With that, it has taken a bit of a toll on my assignments. I'm not doing as good as I used to in regards to my grades. They're not bad or anything like that, but I know I could do so much better.” —Grade 11 Student

“Remote learning is very challenging. I feel so distracted during my classes and I lack the proper environment to get through

my schoolwork. When my Wi-Fi goes out I'm disconnected from my class. Other members in my household are also normally on the Wi-Fi and it is quite frustrating for everyone when it disconnects. I was supplied with a free, unlimited data iPad but typing out documents, creating slides and changing tabs on it is very frustrating compared to a laptop or Chromebook, especially as all my courses require [a lot] of typing. Conflict among household members is also a challenge as some people don't understand that all of my schooling is now online. Sometimes my Internet is taken from me purposely because my time management has become difficult. Not being able to leave the house has had a devastating toll on my already not great mental health. Before this pandemic I was already stressed out but at least I was able to see people who are important to me and I had sports, clubs and a regular routine to help me manage. Now that is all gone. I sit on my bed all day, normally rolling out of bed and logging onto class in my PJs then sitting there for three hours, I take a 30 min break then return to my bed or the floor in my room for my next class. I then do my chores or other household tasks then finish my homework. Before remote learning I didn't really procrastinate. Now I find myself procrastinating until the very last second. Even doing simple household tasks seems impossible. This has often [led] to me having sleepless nights, poor eating routines and lack of physical exercise as I feel so drained. I get such bad anxiety and the cut off from in-person socializing has [led] to me feeling quite depressed. The school I attend has [the quadmester system] in place. Personally I don't like [it], the curriculum moves way too fast and a lot of what was supposed to be taught is cut out. This leaves me feeling unprepared for the next year and stressed out as sometimes multiple assignments are assigned and due within an unrealistic amount of time. Even with extensions it's [a lot] of work. I also enrolled in pre advanced placement courses and [a lot] of the enrichment material I signed up for was never taught. This is done because the teachers need to teach the curriculum but their time to do that has been cut in half. The double long periods are also hard to sit through. There's no breaks within the class time and this causes mental fatigue after sitting for so long. Bathroom breaks cut time from when we get a few minutes to complete independent worksheets. It's also very easy to get overwhelmed in notes or procrastinate then not write them. This only adds to academic related stress. I'm a very high achieving student with top marks but that was when I was able to get out and actually get on the bus early in the morning, go sit in a classroom, and see other people in-person. I strongly think online learning is hurting students' mental health and academic success. I don't even know what some of the teachers look like from classes I've been in. The whole possible situation with online/remote learning becoming a permanent part of some education is definitely stressing me out as it's only made things much more difficult for me. I never saw leaving the house as a luxury but after this whole situation is over, I'll definitely never take any in-person learning for granted.” —Grade 10 Student

“Overall, the combination of COVID-19 and school has been

very detrimental to my mental health. I have been struggling a lot with motivation, self-esteem and my grades have dropped significantly. I have also found myself extremely overwhelmed with school and unable to cope with it at times. I have not really felt accommodated by my school, and I have not seen any support from them when it comes to mental health. I do not have any issues with my school's COVID-19 protocols. I think they have done a really good job making everything accessible to students (like scholarships, tutoring, masks for COVID-19, etc.) As for online classes, I do have a comfortable environment at home to work in and I have had little issues connecting to classes (it isn't the same for other students - some of my peers have issues with their Internet, their computers, printing notes, or their home environment). My teachers have been trying their hardest to maintain the attention of their classes. Although I can't say I have been engaged all throughout the classes, I can say the teachers have been putting in the most effort they can and it is the most they can do given the situation we are in. I really appreciate the school's and the teacher's efforts to get resources to us and keep our classes going. I think that our schools should begin offering more mental health services to the students and making it public. I know they have guidance counselors already, but if I am being honest, none of the students feel that they can trust the guidance counselors with mental health or details about their home life. Many students I know who have gone to the guidance counselors for help came back with a negative experience. Maybe having a therapist(s) at our schools would help some? Even if some kids do not necessarily take that opportunity to see the therapist, just having that service there would help make the kids more comfortable in [and of] itself. It would let them know that the school actually cares about their mental health. If having a therapist isn't possible, then maybe the schools should make mental health services more visible to students (e.g. actively posting therapy services, people to contact if they need help, etc. on platforms like Edsby).” —Grade 12 Student

“Ever since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I've dealt with racism at my school simply because I am Asian, and this has caused me to feel less comfortable at school. People have told me that it 'it makes sense to stay away from as many Asians as possible' during this pandemic without thinking that those words are extremely harmful.” —Grade 9 Student

“COVID-19 has amplified the racist micro-aggressive behaviors in my school. While personal attacks have been uncommon, some students have taken to social media to share attacks on the Asian population or blame towards Chinese people. I've noticed subtle comments towards Asian students like myself, notably one instance where two students coughed and joked [that] they had coronavirus after I walked into a bathroom. I've become more frustrated with the education system as a result of the pandemic, but not because the changes have caused these problems, rather because they pulled back the curtain hiding these issues.” —Grade 11 Student

“I am new to the country of Canada as I have only resided here for a few years now and I would say that my experience prior to this pandemic was mostly positive besides a few missed assignments or disagreements between me and my fellow classmates. My experience with the education system here is generally very poor as back in Finland we only had to go to school for five hours each day and with this Canadian system myself and I would presume all students are tired and have little time to do things with our friends. When I was living in Finland, we would get little to no [homework] to do and would learn at school through cooperation as well as problem solving skills we had developed in an educational environment that cultivated it. Here it is very different with [homework] that requires hours and hours to complete, and the majority of group work is just a large piece of homework that is divided between group members who communicate rarely or more commonly not at all. All of this in my eyes is reflected in the attitudes of my peers as many of them are very hesitant or outright refuse to work with other people as they do not [have] the social skills to do so. This is very sad to see as back in my country students often communicated and would prefer to work with others and had the correct skills for it to be a very pleasant learning environment. It's clear to me that the pandemic for many individuals that are enrolled in this education system is something that they resent but what I do not understand is with all of the work, long school hours, and hesitancy to cooperate with other students, what is the difference between the two? From personal research within the community and overarching factors that cannot be dismissed, I have observed that the average student doesn't have much free time to do what they would desire to do. As previously stated with the time that education takes up in the average student's life, they have little time to educate themselves emotionally. I do realize that some students may still find the time for the occasional time to meet with friends the vast majority of their time is spent working away in a system that denies them free time which is a fundamental piece of a youth's social development and growth. As formerly mentioned, the vast majority if not the whole of the student body is resentful towards this lockdown as the very little time they had for communicating with friends and extended family is now gone. If students were already facing an increase of mental illness, it has now surely become an epidemic. The monotony of online school is overwhelming and downright depressing as you can hear the voices of your professors and classmates but are separated by kilometers in distance making the whole experience very alienating. I have the feeling that I am just one in a group of endless blank Gmail accounts sitting in a meeting with a professor that only views their students as a picture and a voice removing all the emotion in learning as well as teaching. The lack of being capable to emotionally connect with a teacher and a teacher with their students creates a very bland and unappealing way of education. Without schools being open students still are required to wake up early everyday and still do not obtain enough sleep to continually retain attention to a screen that's telling them to do more housework that they despise doing

very much. Through this poor alternative to actual school, many students are actually wishing to go back to a real school. The deprivation of emotional connection and a system that only perpetuates the former will lead to a student body of emotionally undeveloped, reclusive, uncooperative, and mentally ill individuals. All I can hope for is that the future and that my generation can change and correct the fundamentally flawed system that educates us today.” —Grade 12 Student

“The pandemic has immensely changed the dynamic of my learning experience. I started the 2020-2021 school year online and it was [very difficult] to adjust to [the] learning platforms and the lack of social interactions at first. Lots of my friends were learning in school and it was strenuous on my mental health to consistently remind myself that I’m not missing out and that my value has not decreased as a result of less interactions with my peers. I’m extremely lucky because I did not experience any housing or significant technological issues, so I was able to connect when/if I wanted to. Also, I had some pretty great teachers that checked in on us and valued our feedback. Eventually, I made special virtual connections with classmates and I am currently involved in multiple extracurricular activities. The virtual aspects have allowed me to take opportunities regardless of geography.” —Grade 10 Student

Being in virtual high school (VHS) I wish there was more of a way for students to still feel connected with their home school. I felt as though students who took VHS were pushed out of their home schools and were expected to be in a new school. For being in grade 12, I felt like I spent most of my years with people from my home school making friendships and getting to know everyone, just to be divided in my last year. I do like the way virtual high school runs, however, I found it easy enough to get the hang of.” —Grade 12 Student

“COVID-19 has changed my experience in my life completely. My quality of education has decreased, my mental health has gotten worse, and I am not feeling very prepared for post-secondary. My school is doing [the quad semester learning style] fully in-person. The [quad semesters] are not terrible, I enjoy being able to only focus on 2 classes. [However], so far none of my teachers have been able to finish the curriculum, making me feel unprepared for university. I am currently taking grade 12 classes, and am missing full units. We also have cancelled exams, which forces me to miss the experience of preparing for exams. As well, during lockdowns I lose the motivation to put effort into my schoolwork. In remote learning, I enjoyed having breakout groups to give a sense of social interaction. My school board has just returned to in-person [learning] and I am very pleased, since I know my quality of education and life will increase.” —Grade 11 Student

“This past year has been excruciating. It’s [an] absolute pain to have to sit through 4-5 hours of hearing my screen talk to me. I often found myself not paying attention as it was difficult to do so. I also feel like the approach feels redundant as it appeals to a very specific group of students, those who listen. I myself and many others would consider myself a visual learner. And without textbooks being present, I have to go through a plethora of information on the internet just to find a specific thing. On top of that it’s extremely fast. I find myself online doing a unit every day, whereas at school it would take upwards [of] a month. Since exams are closed this leads to an even heavier amount of tests/quizzes/CATs etc. It feels like I’m running a marathon. Overall, it’s pretty bad [experience] 4/10 >:(” —Grade 11 Student

“COVID-19 has affected [schools] in so many ways, more negatively than positively in my opinion. I’m someone who needs to be inside a classroom and interacting with my peers[,] or else I fall into a state of mind where I can’t get anything done[,] because there is so much distracting me at home, my mental health has plummeted, and I no longer have the patience to do most of the things I used to love. The plan they have [implemented] for my school is so horrible, learning [a] four month curriculum in 40 days has put so much stress and anxiety on me, I don’t even want to do good anymore[,] I just want to get the school year over with.” —Grade 9 Student

“COVID-19 has massively messed up my school experience, there are things that I wanted to do in school with my friends that now I’ll never get to experience which definitely isn’t the school’s fault. However, in terms of doing online school because of the virus, schools need to understand that we’re all just kids. Most of us don’t have the motivation to do the work given and on top of that a lot of us live in places where it’s hard to get access to school given or there’s too many distractions in our living environment. Frankly I think the way schools (or at least mine) have organized online school is very unorganized, teachers are never using the same website whether that’s Webex, Google Meet, etc, and it can be really confusing. Why not just have all the teachers use the same program so that everyone already understands what they’re supposed to do[?]” —Grade 12 Student

“My school has been using the [quadmester] layout where we have one week of one class then the next week [of another class], [this] layout has been stressful and not an amazing experience. What I’ve found is this layout[’s learning style is] super condensed and doesn’t give you time to process information. As much as [the quadmester system] allows less subjects to be on your plate I’ve found you have to learn all this information in such a short period of time where you have zero time to process any of it.” —Grade 12 Student



From: [Loretta Notten](#)
To: [Alice Figueiredo](#)
Subject: FW: OCSTA: Memo-Education Accessibility Standards Draft Report June 1 2021
Date: Tuesday, June 1, 2021 4:36:50 PM
Attachments: [image003.png](#)

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From: OCSTA - Marie Palombi <MPalombi@ocsta.on.ca>
Sent: Tuesday, June 1, 2021 2:22 PM
To: OCSTA - Marie Palombi <MPalombi@ocsta.on.ca>
Subject: OCSTA: Memo-Education Accessibility Standards Draft Report June 1 2021

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**Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association**

June 1, 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairpersons and Directors of Education
• All Catholic District School Boards

CC: OCSTA Directors and Staff

Board Secretaries and Administrative Assistants

FROM: Patrick J. Daly, President

SUBJECT: Education Accessibility Standards Draft Report

As you are aware, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility established a working group in 2017 to develop recommendations in respect of the development of an accessibility standard regulation for the education sector. On June 1, 2021, the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility posted, for public comment and feedback, the draft report of the working group.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, requires all initial proposed recommendations to be posted online for public feedback for a minimum of 45 days. The reports will be posted for a period of 65 business days, **concluding on September 2, 2021** to facilitate more detailed commentary.

The reports and associated surveys for public feedback can be viewed here:
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/consultation-initial-recommendations-development-proposed-kindergarten-grade-12-k-12-education#section-2>

The Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility is also accepting written submissions on the committee's behalf by email at: EducationSDC@ontario.ca. **As noted above, all comments are due by September 2, 2021.**

As you also know, OCSTA was well represented on this working group by Steve Andrews, Director of Legislative and Political Affairs. Other representatives from Catholic school boards were also involved with the working group, providing valuable input into the report and its recommendations. I would like to thank Steve and those members of the Catholic community that were involved in producing this report to improve accessibility for students with disabilities in our schools.

We would encourage boards to review the report and provide the government any feedback on the recommendations.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at pdaly@ocsta.on.ca or Steve Andrews at sandrews@ocsta.on.ca.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'PDaly', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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From: [Loretta Notten](#)
To: [Alice Figueiredo](#)
Subject: FW: OCSTA News Release - OCSTA Disappointed with Decision to Extend Remote Learning
Date: Wednesday, June 2, 2021 4:15:22 PM
Attachments: [image002.png](#)

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From: OCSTA - Ashlee Cabral <ACabral@ocsta.on.ca>
Sent: Wednesday, June 2, 2021 4:09 PM
To: OCSTA - Ashlee Cabral <ACabral@ocsta.on.ca>
Subject: OCSTA News Release - OCSTA Disappointed with Decision to Extend Remote Learning

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Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

OCSTA Disappointed with Decision to Extend Remote Learning

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TORONTO-June 2, 2021—"For a number of weeks, the OCSTA on behalf of Ontario's 29 Catholic District School Boards has strongly advocated for a regional re-opening of schools. This past Friday in response to Premier Ford's invitation, we restated our conviction that subject to consultation between local public health units and school boards, students should be permitted to and would benefit from in-school learning," said Patrick Daly, President of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA).

“While understanding the need for caution, we support the many medical health experts and public health units who have as well advocated for a return to in-school learning.

Despite our deep concern with the decision, we know that system and school leaders, teachers and support staff who serve in Catholic schools and the trustees who govern them will continue to work heroically in the best interest of the students entrusted to their care,” added Mr. Daly.

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association is the provincial voice for publicly funded Catholic education. Founded in 1930, OCSTA represents the interests of Catholic school boards that collectively educates approximately 600,000 students in Ontario, from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12.

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

Sharon McMillan, Director of Communications, smcmillan@ocsta.on.ca/416-460-7937

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From: [Loretta Notten](#)
To: [Alice Figueiredo](#)
Subject: FW: OCSTA: Memo-ON News Release - Remote Learning to Continue Across Ontario for the Remainder of School Year
Date: Wednesday, June 2, 2021 4:20:10 PM
Attachments: [Letter to Premier Ford re Safe Reopening of Schools May 28 21 final.pdf](#)
[image001.png](#)

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From: OCSTA - Marie Palombi <MPalombi@ocsta.on.ca>
Sent: Wednesday, June 2, 2021 3:27 PM
To: OCSTA - Marie Palombi <MPalombi@ocsta.on.ca>
Subject: OCSTA: Memo-ON News Release - Remote Learning to Continue Across Ontario for the Remainder of School Year

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**Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association**

June 2, 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairpersons and Directors of Education
• All Catholic District School Boards

CC: OCSTA Directors and Staff
Board Secretaries and Administrative Assistants

FROM: Patrick J. Daly, President

SUBJECT: ON News Release – Remote Learning to Continue Across Ontario for the Remainder of School Year

Please see Ontario news release below regarding remote learning to continue for the remainder of the school year. Attached for your reference is our letter to the Premier, originally sent last Friday. Consistent with our letter, we have for a number of weeks been strongly advocating for the regional re-opening of schools, subject to local public health and school board discussions.



Ontario Logo



NEWS RELEASE

Remote Learning to Continue across Ontario for the Remainder of School Year

Ontario Accelerating Vaccinations to Support a Safer Summer and Return to In-Person Learning in September

June 02, 2021
[Premier's Office](#)

TORONTO — To best protect Ontario families from the fast growing B.1.617.2 variant, and to allow for higher rates of vaccination of students, staff, and families, the Ontario government has made the difficult decision to continue with remote learning for all elementary and secondary students across the province for the remainder of this school year. This will allow the province to continue its focus on accelerating COVID-19 vaccinations to support a safer summer and return to in-person learning in September for the 2021-22 school year.

Details were provided today by Premier Ford, Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education, and Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

“At a time when our top priority is putting the third wave behind us so that we can safely enter Step One of our Roadmap to Reopen, we can’t risk increased cases and potential downstream impacts on hospitals and ICUs,” said Premier Ford. “Making this tough decision now will allow kids to safely enjoy camps and outdoor activities this summer, and a safe return to school in September.”

Recent modelling presented by the Science Advisory Table revealed that if Ontario reopened schools to in-person learning the province could see an increase of six to 11 per cent in the number of new daily COVID-19 cases. It is unknown how many of these would be the new, more dangerous B.1.617.2 variant first identified in India, which has entered the province through Canada’s borders.

An increase in cases and the spread of variants would also threaten Ontarians’ hard-fought progress in beating the third wave and could delay the safe return to many summer activities for kids, including day and overnight camps, sports leagues and public pools, among other important activities that support children’s physical and mental wellbeing.

“While this decision was not made lightly, it has been done with one aim: protect the summer for families and deliver a stable and safe September for students,” said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. “We are looking forward and taking action by getting all education workers and students vaccinated with both doses ahead of September, while investing an additional \$2 billion to ensure students and staff are safe.”

Ontario’s plan supports the largest investment in mental health and the largest summer learning program in Ontario history, with supports available to students through the summer and when they return to in-person learning in September. The government is working to ensure that students can look forward to a return to normal and enjoy outdoor and extracurricular activities as soon as it is safe to do so.

School boards will continue to have safety plans in place for students who are experiencing or could be expected to experience mental health challenges. This will help them to have continued access to remote or in-person services through the school, community child and youth mental health service providers or local

health care partners. Schools will continue to remain open for in-person learning for special education students who cannot be accommodated through remote learning until the end of June. Students, parents and families also have a number of mental health resources that are available to them through their school board as well as through other providers, including Kids Help Phone, which offers 24/7 counselling and referral services across the province, as well as resources through School Mental Health Ontario and services through child and youth mental health agencies across the province.

Vaccines remain the best defence against COVID-19 and to date, more than 9.36 million doses have been administered in Ontario and a plan to accelerate second doses has just been released. Youth aged 12 and over are currently eligible to schedule a COVID-19 vaccine appointment through the [provincial booking system](#) and call centre, as well as at [select pharmacies](#) administering the Pfizer vaccine.

To book an appointment online, these individuals must already be 12 years old as of the date of their booking. Individuals who are not 12 years old at time of booking can book an appointment for a later date through the provincial call centre or directly through public health units that use their own booking system. The Pfizer vaccine is currently the only COVID-19 vaccine that has been authorized by Health Canada for use in individuals aged 12 and over. In addition, the province is encouraging eligible family members who have not received a vaccine to attend these clinics to get youth and their families vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Offering the protection of the vaccine to youth aged 12 and over is a significant milestone in Ontario's fight against COVID-19. The province expects to reach all youth aged 12 and over who want a vaccine with a first dose before the end of June and with a second dose by the end of August 2021. Following prioritization of education workers with a first dose this spring, the province also expects to reach all education workers with a second dose by the week of August 15, if not already eligible earlier by age cohort or other eligibility. This is subject to vaccine supply.

These measures will ensure that all Ontarians aged 12 and older who want to will be fully vaccinated by the end of summer, including students and educational staff.

Students have worked incredibly hard throughout the pandemic, with important milestones like graduation ceremonies impacted. Ontario students deserve this positive conclusion to their academic journey, safely. The government will allow school boards to invite graduating students in elementary schools (by class) and secondary schools (by homeroom/quadrimestered class) to return to school in June for a short, outdoor celebration, where physical distancing is possible.

With schools in Ontario closed for in-person learning, emergency child care (ECC) will continue until the end of June to align with the end of the elementary school year. Before and after school programs will remain closed and will

continue to not charge parent fees, which is prohibited during the remote learning period. Licensed child care centres may resume serving school-aged children for full-days in programming over the summer months, in accordance with the Ministry of Education's health and safety guidance. Those before and after school programs that operate as a camp over the summer will be permitted to do so, and will follow health and safety guidance from the Ministry of Health.

Quick Facts

- Ontario's school reopening plan was endorsed by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and funded with \$1.6 billion dollars in COVID-19 resources to protect students and staff.
- Get tested if you have symptoms compatible with COVID-19, or if you have been advised of exposure by your local public health unit or through the COVID Alert App. Visit [Ontario.ca/covidtest](https://ontario.ca/covidtest) to find the nearest testing location.
- To find the right supports, visit COVID-19: Support for People, which has information about the many available and free mental health services and supports.
- To stay safe, you can download the COVID Alert App free from the Apple and Google Play app stores.
- The emergency child care (ECC) program has been an important support for parents of school-aged children, who are frontline workers that are unable to support their children's learning at home while they are required to go to work. During the latest round of emergency child care, more than 11,000 school-aged children have been accessing programs across the province each day.
- Child care for non-school aged children (i.e. children aged 0-4) will remain open. This includes child care offered in licensed child care centres, and in home-based settings.
- To date, 65 per cent of Ontarians have received the COVID-19 vaccine.

Additional Resources

- [Ontario Expanding Mental Health Services for Children and Youth](#)
- [Visit Ontario's website to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19](#)
- Learn about [Ontario's vaccination program](#) to help protect us against COVID-19.
- [Support for parents/students](#)
- [COVID-19: enhanced public health and workplace safety measures](#)
- [COVID-19 public health measures and advice](#)

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Patrick J. Daly, *President*
Michael Bellmore, *Vice President*
Nick Milanetti, *Executive Director*

May 28, 2021

Premier Doug Ford
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford,

A copy of your letter dated May 27, 2021 regarding possible safe return to schools has been forwarded to us by Minister Lecce's office. As the Association which represents Ontario's 29 Catholic school boards, we provide the following responses to the important questions raised in your letter.

At the outset I would like to commend the trustees who govern and the dedicated staff who serve publicly funded Catholic education. Throughout these complex and extremely challenging times, they have placed priority on the health and safety of students and staff while continuing to provide excellence in Christ centred learning. The system and school leaders, teachers and other staff have worked heroically out of a shared commitment to the well-being of their students and the communities they live in.

I would as well like to recognize and thank Ministry of Education Officials and the staff in public health units throughout our Province. They have worked very closely with our member boards and have provided valuable advice throughout these unprecedented times.

Below are our responses to the questions posed in your May 27th letter:

1. Is the reopening of schools for in person learning safe for students?

We have consistently stated our conviction that in-school learning is in the best interest of students. In this regard, for a number of weeks we have advocated for a regional re-opening of schools where it has been determined it is safe to do so. Such decisions should be made following discussions by local school boards and public health units.

2. Is the reopening of schools for in person learning safe for teachers and all education staff?

Please see response to question 1.

- 3. There are a growing number of cases in Ontario of the variant first identified in India (B.1.617). Does this mutation pose an increased risk to students and education workers?**

Please see the response to question 1.

- 4. The modelling from the Ontario Science Table has suggested that reopening schools will lead to an increase in cases in the province of Ontario, is this acceptable and safe?**

Please see the response to question 1.

- 5. Other countries are warning mutations including the B.1.617 variant⁴⁵ are putting children at much greater risk and are shutting schools down. Is this concern not shared by medical experts in Ontario?**

Please see the response to question 1.

- 6. Should teachers be fully vaccinated before resuming in class lessons and if not, is one dose sufficient?**

Catholic school boards have and will continue to strongly encourage vaccination for students, staff and families. We urge that all actions be taken to ensure the teachers and other staff who serve in schools and students (age appropriate) receive both doses of the vaccine prior to the start of the next school year. We will defer to medical and public health experts with regard to the adequacy of one dose.

- 7. Under Ontario's reopening plan, indoor gatherings won't commence until July. Should indoor school instruction resume before then?**

Please see the response to question 1.

We would be pleased to engage in more fulsome discussions regarding this extremely important matter. To state the obvious with only a few weeks remaining in the current school year, the communication of a decision is urgently required. If you or your office would like to discuss our response, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours very truly,



Patrick J. Daly
President

cc. Minister of Education, Hon. Stephen Lecce
Deputy Minister of Education, Nancy Naylor