BLACK LIVES MATTER SUDBURY

POLICING FREE SCHOOLS:

A community-based exploration of the impacts of SRO programs within the Greater Sudbury Area

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Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge that this report was completed in N'Swakamok, later colonised as Sudbury. This Land on which we learn, work, and live is in the Robinson-Huron Treaty Territory. We are located on the unceded Lands of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek and the Wahnapitae First Nation. We would also like to recognize the presence and important contributions of Métis peoples in the community and on this Land.

Furthermore, we recognize the legacy of enslavement in our country and the enslaved African peoples whose labour was exploited for generations in establishing the colonial Lands we currently call Canada.

Let us recognize the histories of this country as fundamentally racist and white supremacist and furthermore acknowledge that the end of enslavement alongside ongoing coloniality continues to be followed by a series of ongoing violent, discriminatory and repressive practices and laws.

Content Warning

This report contains testimonials of the lived experience of members of the Greater Sudbury community. Some of the following content includes reference to suicide and issues of mental health, racial profiling, police and state violence, sexual assault, and anti-queer prejudice, and may be emotionally challenging to some readers.

Introduction

Black Lives Matter Sudbury

Black Lives Matter Sudbury (BLMS) is a not-for-profit organization founded in 2020 at the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement across Turtle Island. Spearheaded by an all-Black board of directors, Black Lives Matter Sudbury is an organization that is committed to fighting systemic racism in all of its forms, demanding that society and all levels of government address, and fix the root causes of racism in all social institutions. In addition to the facilitation of alternative forms of knowledge sharing, inclusive community programming, and the support of cultural creation, BLMS is dedicated to combating anti-Blackness through advocacy, education, and outreach work.

About Policing Free Schools

In April of 2021, Black Lives Matter Sudbury was invited to attend a national and provincial campaign meeting coordinated by Andrea Vásquez Jiménez—who since then has expanded and deepened this work and has been convening these meetings under Policing-Free Schools. Designed to connect organizers from across northern Turtle Island (the Lands now colonised as Canada), this event invited participants to share and learn from one another's experiences with mobilizing to remove police from schools. Our members were presented with a series of in-depth resources outlining the negative impacts of police presence in schools, as well as its disproportionate effects on BIPOC, 2SLGBTQ+, MAD students (students with a Major Affective Disorder), and youth of other intersectional identity markers.

In this space, we had the opportunity to hear first-hand accounts from grassroots organizations from across the country who had conducted community-based research on the presence of policing within educational institutions. We were moved by their organizing efforts, and the impressive community-led success stories in cities such as Guelph, Ottawa, and Waterloo, among others.

- In April 2021: The board of the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) voted unanimously in favour of the removal of the School Resource Officer (SRO) program. (1)
- In June 2021: The trustees of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), the city's largest school board, voted to immediately, and completely terminate engagement with the Ottawa Police Service School Resource

Officer (SRO) program. (2)

- In June 2021: The trustees of the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) voted to cancel the SRO program. The SRO review Committee who convened in response to community uproar against policing in Waterloo's educational institutions issued a series of recommendations to the WRDSB trustees namely that "the WRDSB issues a public apology acknowledging the harms of the program to Black, Indigenous, and Racialised (BIR) students." (3)

As an organisation rooted in abolitionist and equitable values, our organisation was highly compelled to further investigate the impact of policing within educational institutions in the Greater Sudbury area – as there is limited reporting and/or data on this phenomenon and its subsequent impacts. In August 2021, we began the Sudbury Policing Free Schools initiative with the intent of:

1. Ensuring all key stakeholders (i.e community members, teachers, staff, students) are aware of the Sudbury School Resource Officer (SRO) program and the involvement of policing within educational institutions;
2. Centering and privileging the experiences of racialised and/or marginalised students as they outline their experiences with school police officer programs;
3. Determining the impacts (i.e emotional, psychological, academic) of SRO programs in Greater Sudbury; and
4. Advocating for equitable schools without police involvement.

The purpose of this research report is to present our research findings in regards to policing within educational institutions in the Greater Sudbury Area, and to highlight the disproportionate targeting of racialised youth by police, and the negative impact of policing on schools and families. This report centres our findings and supporting literature from advocacy groups of parents/guardians/caregivers, students, and teachers, organizing for equitable schools without police involvement, as well as a conclusive series of recommendations to address systemic racism and carceral punishment in schools.

Research Methods

In Fall of 2021, our team collected rich qualitative and quantitative data from elementary and secondary school students, parents, staff, and community members in the Greater Sudbury area (including Espanola, Massey, Manitoulin and Markstay-Warren) through an accessible online survey. The majority of question prompts from the online form were purposely open-ended to provide participants with the freedom to speak to whichever experiences they saw fit as it relates to policing in school environments.

We received a total of 84 submissions. Participants were asked to indicate whether they were a student, parent, school staff member, or community member. Respondents were largely students (45.45%), followed by parents (21.25%), community members (12.14%) and school staff members (6.7%). In addition, participants were asked to specify which school board they were or are currently affiliated with. The majority of survey respondents were members of the Rainbow District School Board (53%), followed by Sudbury Catholic District School Board (22%) and Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de L'Ontario (19%). With regards to gender identity, most survey respondents were cisgender women (52%) followed by cisgender men (15%), non-binary (11%), transgender men (7.8%), two-spirited (1.1%). Lastly, (3.4%) preferred not to answer. The vast majority of students were in grade 11-12 (48%). Of the 84 respondents, 42% identified as 2SLGBTQIA+, 27% as BIPOC, and 15.5% reported living in poverty.

The survey collected data on the broad topics of racism, discrimination, and policing in Greater Sudbury schools. In approaching the collection and handling of such data, we want to acknowledge that the nature of this research is not to generate a representative sample or produce phenomenological findings that can be generalised to larger populations. Our intention in embarking on this project was to share illustrative examples of the real lived experiences of our community and amplify them on their own accord. The results of our findings will not necessarily indicate statistical significance, but the format of this research has its considerable strengths as it exemplifies the direct impact policing has on youth from minoritised perspectives. As such, the results discussed in this report consist of selected submissions that included mentions/stories of SRO programs and direct impact on youth relating to discrimination, criminalization, learning, and overall safety.

In terms of research ethics protocol, our team ensured that all respondents were aware of informed consent, the rationale of the research project, the benefits, potential risks and harms of participation, as well as the measures taken to ensure privacy, confidentiality, and data security. Best practices were employed throughout the data collection process to protect each individual respondent.

Results & Discussions

Lack of Transparency and Accountability

Prior to starting the community consultation process, our Policing Free Schools advocacy team spent two to three months conducting exploratory research to learn more about the existing structure and presence of police within Greater Sudbury Area schools. Despite thorough searches of school board resources, municipal archives, and Greater Sudbury Police Services online databases, we quickly identified that there was a lack of information and/or data outlining the role police have in schools, and the impacts of the SRO program.

We were unable to obtain accessible information describing the day-to-day responsibilities of an SRO, records of SRO visits and on-campus activity (such as interventions, de-escalations, detentions, etc.), budget reports on how much tax-payer money is allotted to these programs, or reports on the SRO program's performance.

For a publicly-funded program so closely-related to the safety of our community's youth, a number of parent/guardian members within the Black Lives Matter Sudbury community were concerned by the program's lack of transparency. We reached out directly, as concerned community members, to the four trustees of the Sudbury Catholic District School Board for this information and received no tangible answers to our queries. We also attempted to gain access to any materials outlining SRO programs without success. We were instructed that someone would get in touch regarding this inquiry, however at the time of this publication, we have yet to receive any of the requested documentation.

This lack of public knowledge regarding SRO programs seemed evident among our respondents' testimonials as well, with many participants expressing that they did not know that police even had a presence in Sudbury schools to begin with:

> *"I honestly had no idea there was [an SRO] within the school."* - A parent of biracial child in an elementary school

> *"I have heard of this happening in larger cities, and outside of Canada, but I truly did not know of any police presence in my child's school or the school board here. If this is*

happening, I don't believe it is public knowledge to parents, or outlined on the RDSB website." - A 2SLGBTQIA+ community member

"I'm not aware of any police presence at my child's school. However, having an assigned SRO (which is news to me) doesn't sit well." - A parent of a secondary school student

Participants seemed to further question the presence of SROs and why police have the role that they do within the school environment:

"i don't think police should have any presence in schools. i don't understand why they're even there? like i don't understand their role at all" - A 2SLGBTQIA+ community member, living in poverty and living with a mental health condition.

"I don't really understand why police have to be in schools." - A 2SLGBTQIA+ secondary student, living with a mental health condition

*"Students should be more educated on police role"* - A student, living in poverty

These participants' testimonials demonstrate a complete lack of publicly accessible information on the scope and depth of these programs. The main concern in this regard is that when the reporting on policing programs is neglected, we run the risk of letting their impacts and consequences go unnoticed and unchecked. However, this is something of particular concern as it affects BIPOC, 2SLGBTQ+, and other marginalised youths, as a lack of attention to reporting on policing programs within schools allows for the further perpetuation of racism, discrimination, and police-related violence.

One participant highlighted how the presence felt by students might vary considerably depending on intersecting aspects of their identity and lived experience:

"I think that police presence is not well known at all. However, if known, the impact would be different between groups. A police presence could make students feel safer, especially after consuming media on school shootings. It is also known that school and campus authorities do not provide adequate support for students who bring forward issues. For example, in cases of sexual assault, rape, harassment, even extreme bullying, they're swept under the rug when they should be escalated to the police level. However, I also understand a police presence would make some students feel uncomfortable and unsafe, specially BIPOC students. It's possible the fact that police presence is unknown is done deliberately." - A BIPOC secondary school student

As we navigate a national and global recovery from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, communities across so-called Canada are realizing more and more the need for holistic information on how Black, Indigenous, and other marginalised peoples interact with public health and other community services - this includes policing programs like the SRO program. We know of instances of disproportionate negative impact, but in many cases the data collection to document the constancy of such instances is deficient. Collecting race-based data helps us identify systemic discrimination and ensure equitable responses. (4)

Impact on Learning Environment
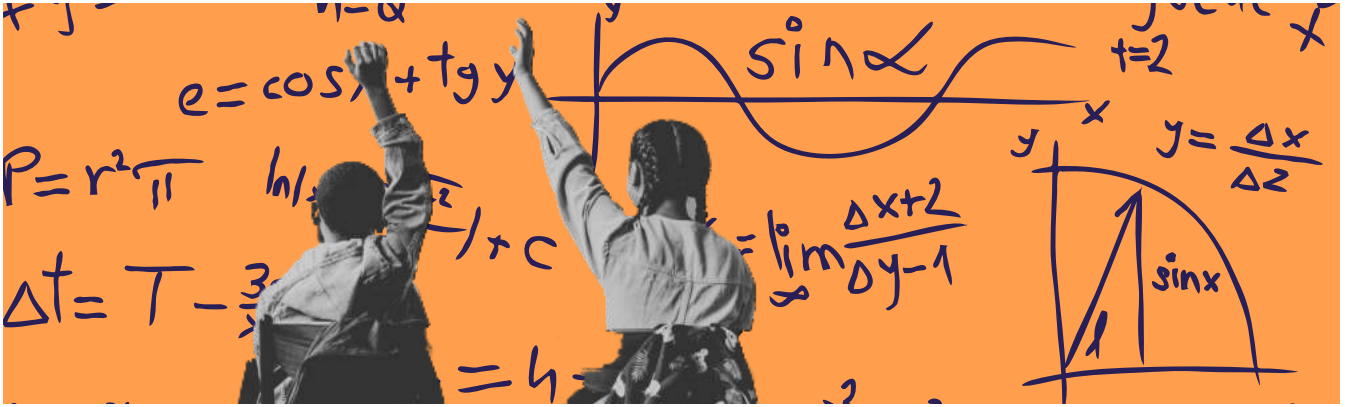
Students feeling comfortable and safe in school is a key aspect to providing an optimal learning environment, where they can feel a sense of belonging and community, and are able to thrive, both academically and socially.

Our survey found that respondents reported a significant impact on their learning environment - mostly relating to their comfort in educational spaces when SROs are present. Our participants indicated a general discomfort, along with mentions of fear and endangerment, some citing that police presence discourages them from attending school. Respondents to our survey describe negative personal experiences as well as witness accounts where SROs inappropriately interacted with students, making them or others feel unsafe. For example, one respondent shares their feelings of intimidation:

> *"I remember back to elementary school being more afraid of the police that came to my school than feeling like they were there to support me. they show up in full gear, flaunt their weapons and then try and talk about bullying or some other topic that could be much better handled by a gentle approach, not a scare tactic. seeing police in a school always had a negative effect on me and other kids, it never actually felt like i could ask them for help or that they were there to help me, it felt like they were there to give their necessary presentation and then leave."* - A 2SLGBTQIA+ secondary school student, living in poverty and living with a mental health condition

Student respondents expressed that these disruptions to their comfort and safety play a significantly distracting role to their education, preventing them from fully immersing themselves in the learning experiences provided by their schools. When faced with fear and intimidation, students see a decline in their focus, and face anxiety concerning their classmates' perception of personal SRO interactions.

> *"I feel uncomfortable having them in my learning environment. They make it an uncomfortable and frightening experience to go into class."* - A 2SLGBTQIA+ student, living with a mental health condition

> *"...If there had been a greater police presence throughout my educational experience, I think it would have created a tense atmosphere and would have cause me to feel unsettled. Police in schools do not contribute to a conducive learning environment."* - A

"May cause discrimination against certain students, may effect their learning" - A 2SLGBTQIA+ parent of a secondary school student, living with a mental health condition

Many studies conducted in the US have suggested that police presence in schools increases suspensions and has a negative impact on graduation rates and students' mental health. "One study in Texas, which assessed over 2.5 million students, found that the hiring of more police in schools lead to an increase in suspensions, lower graduation rates, and lower college enrollment rates. A separate study found that exposure to police violence lead to the persistent decrease in grades, increase in emotional disturbance, and lower rates of high school graduation and lower college enrollment for Black and Latinx students." (5) (6)

The Healthy Schools Campaign, based in Chicago, highlights that the hypervigilance and anxiety that students experience when in police presence at school breeds distrust in their learning environment - spaces that are meant to support them through their development. Students are unable to thrive when the inconsistencies of their safety and comfort are disrupted by SRO presence. *(7)*

The scare tactics enabled by police presence in schools are distracting to students' education, and harmful to their learning experience. Reports suggest officers have interacted inappropriately with students, instilling fear and embarrassment within them. Furthermore, students display anxiety when confronted by SROs, worrying about their safety and social consequences such as peer perception. (8) (9) (10) "When positive structures and supports are lacking or when security measures and distrust increase throughout schools, many students are harmed, including poorer academic outcomes, strained social bonds with teachers and administrators, and increased risk for school failure". (11) This can be especially true for BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, and other marginalised students who know of police violence within their communities. This can result in a barrier to equal access to education as anxieties around police presence can affect school participation and, as a result, performance.

Criminalization of Students and Systemic Discrimination

Alongside mentions of how police presence impacts students' education and learning experience, several participants shared concerns and experiences regarding discrimination and being targeted by officers on school campus. For example:

"...When I showed up the cop singled me out and told me to come over and put my bag on the hood of his car to search, in front of everybody. He made me feel small, intimidated, and uncomfortable for singling me out in front of my peers. As an indigenous women, I felt that cops discrimination against me, singling me out in front of everyone to make a point out of me." - A parent of a secondary school student

"I have been discriminated against for being lgbt by my sro and my friend for being black" - A secondary student, living with a mental health condition

One participant, in particular, highlighted how the presence of police on school campus indicates assumed criminality, raising questions around trust and how its lack thereof might influence students' self- and peer-perception:

"The presence seems like it is assuming some students are criminals or that they aren't trustworthy. the funds going towards paying for the officers to be there would be more valuable going towards having mental health counselors or people trained in de-escalation who are not part of a policing body. being able to support students in order to prevent incidences is more valuable than being prepared if something is to go awry - A 2SLGBTQIA+ secondary school student

"It just makes me feel awkward. Like I'm doing something wrong and that the school feels the need to have us be extra-supervised" - A 2SLGBTQIA+ secondary school student, living with a mental health condition

"I dont think police should have any presence in our schools. It invites discrimination into our schools. With my mental health struggles it scares me that if i reach out to get help in a

time that i feel unsafe that the officer could take me to the hospital without consent. I know that lots of times this has happened... Like what terrible danger do a group of 13-17 threaten to the community." - A 2SLGBTQIA+ secondary school student, living with a mental health condition

The criminalization of students, especially students struggling with mental health, was a concern mentioned numerous times in our survey. Those with experiences and/or had witnessed this criminalization expressed fear of the potential repercussions for displaying symptoms or struggles, including non-consensual removal from the classroom.

"Coming from someone who struggles with severe mental illness, there's definitely an added pressure to hold it all in just to avoid potentially coming in contact with an officer. Our police in Sudbury whether inside or outside the school do not handle mental illness and crisis well, they make it worse. They don't know how to deescalate the situation and instead make it so much worse by criminalizing students and others for simply needing help. I have had some bad experiences with them in my most vulnerable times and I know countless others who have as well." - A 2SLGBTQIA+ secondary school student, living with a mental health condition

"I see them around the school but honestly, the one experience I had was with them putting a suicidal student in [hand]cuffs. He seemed scared and it made the whole situation worse" - A 2SLGBTQIA+ secondary school student, living with a mental health condition

These testimonials illustrate a palpable fear concerning the targeting of marginalised students and how that translates into their lives in and outside of school. They describe the ways by which *systemic* discrimination and racism are felt by BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, and MAD students within schools. The key distinction between systemic discrimination and overt (i.e direct / interpersonal) discrimination being the former occurs when "institutions… create or maintain racial inequity often as a result of hidden institutional biases in policies, practices, and procedures that privilege some groups and disadvantage others". (12) The hidden institutional biases involved with policing programs in schools, their felt impact by our community members, and the maintaining of SRO programs despite reports of negative consequences, is a clear-cut example of this.

With SRO's present in schools, schools end up, most likely, as youth's first site of exposure to the justice system thanks to the surveillance and law enforcement police actively keep and/or symbolize in education spaces. In a recent study investigating how SROs approach their day-to-day role, it was found that they tend to approach their role "through a crime control logic where school spaces are criminogenic hotspots and the student body is ripe with potential offenders". (13) As SROs criminalize school spaces through routine tasks, it comes as no surprise that respondents express distrust in their schools for putting students in this position of surveillance and criminalization. During adolescence, a distinct period of development between childhood and adulthood, young people tend to experiment and take risks, discounting long-term consequences in an effort to develop an integrated sense of self, including individualization, separation from parent, and personal identity (14) - it's important that we foster school environments that are supportive and encouraging of that.

School-to-Prison Nexus

This concept of the criminalization of children in North-American schools is not new - and the impacts of it are becoming evermore palpable. In the last decade, there has been a growing convergence between schools and legal systems, "[a] growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions, primarily via 'zero tolerance' policies, and, directly and/or indirectly, into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems". (15)

Initially coined the School-to-Prison Pipeline, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People defined this phenomenon as one of the most urgent challenges facing education today. "In the last decade, the punitive and overzealous tools and approaches of the modern criminal justice system have seeped into our schools, serving to remove children from mainstream educational environments and funnel them onto a one-way path toward prison". (16) The School-to-Prison Pipeline, and the various ways in which zero-tolerance policies and policing programs in education spaces reinforce the overrepresentation of marginalised youth in juvenile detention centers, increased rates of suspensions and expulsions, and elevated drop-out rates, is well documented across Turtle Island. (17) (18) (19)

There was even mention of the School-to-Prison Pipeline by one of our respondents:

> *"Police presence in schools encourages the continuation of the school-to-prison pipeline. I feel it is unnecessary and detrimental to ALL students and families in the school community. I imagine this also comes at the expense of educational assistants, ESL support, social workers and mental health support, and other key resource workers in schools who are increasingly in demand yet rarely budgeted for."* - A parent of an elementary school student

The literature has since departed from the "School-to-Prison Pipeline" metaphor and landed at "School-to-Prison Nexus", a title that better captures the interconnected system of power that exists through a "network of institutions, policies, practices, and ideologies" (20) which "operate in collusion to exclude, control, disenfranchise, and oppress"(21). Erica Meiners, one of the earliest scholars to propose the use of the nexus metaphor, describes that, "linkages between schools and jails are less a pipeline, more a persistent nexus or a web of intertwined, punitive threads" (22).

Wellbeing in Schools

Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA)

Sudbury is one of many Canadian cities to implement the Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) protocol, a "trauma-informed threat assessment framework that aims to identify and intervene within potential pathways to violence" (23). The training and ensuing protocol brings together school administrators, mental health practitioners, as well as police services to provide a "collaborative response to student threat making behaviours" (24).

In Sudbury, numerous organizations sit around the table, including the city, police services (Ontario, regional and tribal police), child welfare organizations (including Indigenous child services), all four school boards, as well as hospital and community services (including mental health services). The table meets as referrals come in, when a child or youth "demonstrate[s] a plausible intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something" (25). No youth representative sits at this table.

VTRA purports to identify children who show: Interest in violent content, unusual interest in fire/fire-setting, escalation of physical aggression, significant change in behaviour to anti-social, unusual interest in and/or possession of a weapon/replica, bomb threat, threatened violence, internet threat to kill or cause injury to self and/or others (26).

Although on the surface, VTRA seems to imply an increase in "safety" for schools, there are concerns that every day bias (implicit, explicit and confirmation bias) can heavily impact the outcomes for those who finds themselves on the disciplinary end of the protocol. Reeves and Brock (2018) have taken a look at how biases can impact the VTRA process, and that bias (such as racism, homophobia and sexism) "can minimize or overstate student behavioral concerns" (27). It has also been noted that for those who undergo the threat assessment process there is an overrepresentation of Black, Indigenous and Latin-America diasporic students encouraging those who are engaged in the protocol to seriously consider anti-racist and non-discriminatory evaluations of their processes (28).

Safety Narrative

Common narratives around policing often invoke ideas of "safety" and "protection." It is not surprising that when speaking about the presence of police in schools, similar notions arise.

> *"I don't mind when I see police officers around because I think that they are protecting the school."* - A parent of an elementary school student

There is also the idea that their presence helps reduce criminality, and that children will be influenced positively by their presence:

> *"[Police presence]...reduces the amount of bad choices and influences being made at school such as use or drugs and or vaping/smoking."* - A secondary school student

The "safety narrative", where all police represent positive versions of safety is one that is hard to combat, especially in a time of school shootings, bullying and other forms of interpersonal harm that can happen at schools. This dominant narrative on safety is often ill-founded (29), and was not an appreciation held by all respondents. Indeed, the attendance of police were described to evoke fear, worry and even alarm by some students, parents and staff.

> *"I do not believe that children should be closely watched by police or made to feel uncomfortable by police presence. I do not believe that police presence makes anybody safer."* - A 2SLGBTQIA+ community member

> *"...Police presence at schools make us feel more unsafe, not safer. This will be even more the case for BIPOC students and families.* - A parent of both elementary and secondary school students

The presence of weapons within schools was discussed by respondents, highlighting the paradox of having someone carrying dangerous arms into the school setting, while also being coded as "safe."

> *"Having police at school events, especially because they are armed, makes us uncomfortable attending these events. We feel this excludes some people from attending, and do not feel it is appropriate for an armed officer to be present."* - A parent of both elementary and secondary school students

What is not often discussed in the narrative around safety, is that for those who have previous experience with the judicial system or are aware of the institutionalised and systemic bias of policing, police are not a welcome presence. As this respondent shares, communities with histories of displacement, war and conflict, and/or those who are Black, Indigenous, and from other marginalised groups (like 2SLGBTQ+ communities, those who use substances and those experiencing mental illness), police represent the opposite of safety and protection:

> *"Some members of our family have experienced police harassment (including around schools). Some members of our family come from countries with military dictatorships where police were a threat to their lives. Police presence at schools make us feel more unsafe, not safer. This will be even more the case for BIPOC students and families."* - A parent of both elementary and secondary students

Respondents noted that in order for children to be safe at school, and to promote learning, police should "play no role" in the school community. - A 2SLGBTQIA+ secondary student living with a mental health condition

Finally, mental health is one area where the safety narrative was continually challenged by respondents. Concerns around the lack of skills, training and experience by police officers were highlighted, and that encounters with police have invoked fear and trauma for students.

> *"Our police in Sudbury whether inside or outside the school do not handle mental illness and crisis well, they make it worse. They don't know how to deescalate the situation and instead make it so much worse by criminalizing students and others for simply needing help. I have had some bad experiences with them in my most vulnerable times and I know countless others who have as well."* - A 2SLGBTQIA+ secondary student, living with a mental health condition

Others noted that resources would be better spent on professionals who have trained in the area of mental health support for children and youth, cultural safety and anti-racism to better contribute to the feeling of safety for students.

Recommendations for next steps

Here, we list calls to action based on our observations and the lived-experience of our community members. These recommendations are both directly in response to our findings and are also adapted from and in alignment with other advocacy groups across the country and North America. This includes: Policing-Free Schools, Asilu Collective, Advancement Project, Alliance for Educational Justice, and Dignity in Schools.

Restrict Policing in Schools:

We are calling for the removal of any law enforcement personnel assigned to be present on a regular, or occasional, basis in schools.

- Immediately terminate the School Resource Officer program, and prohibit the future use of comparable programs structured under the guise of reform.
- Drastically narrow down the memorandum of understanding or protocol between school boards and Greater Sudbury Police Services to only allow GSPS officers in schools during provincially mandated occurrences.
- On the rare occasions when it is appropriate for law enforcement to enter a school building, there should be agreements with police departments that limit the cases when law enforcement can be called in, with particular safeguards in place to ensure students' right to education and dignity are protected, in addition to their constitutional rights to counsel and due process.
- Completely remove all policing structures from schools (e.g., metal detectors and surveillance systems).
- Acknowledgement that policing and carceral measures exist beyond police presence in educational spaces and align action by developing, establishing, and adopting Board policies that uproot the School Board's issues of policing and carceral infrastructure, practices, policies and culture alongside creation of accountability measures
- Collect intersectional and equity-based data on any police-involved interactions in school even when the police-in-school program is removed.

Transparency and Accountability Measures:

In the circumstance where police are not immediately restricted from schools and meanwhile in process of removing law enforcement personnel including police-in-school programs, if and when police are brought into schools, we require transparency and accountability measures to be put in place.

- Make any and all material outlining the role, responsibilities, funding, and scope of the SRO Program readily available to the public.
- Provide an external evaluator to assess the current Violence Threat Risk Assessment protocol (VTRA) ensuring that key demographic and race-based data is collected on students who are moved through the process.
  - Share the results with the school community, including parents and students, and provide a community-wide update on the findings.
  - Engage in a community-based process to determine recommendations on how to move forward with this program, if at all.
- Collect intersectional and equity-based data on any police-involved interactions in school.

Reallocation of Policing Funds and Student Investment:

- Reallocate any and all school board funds from the School Resource Officer (SRO) program and other school policing structures towards support for students. Look at all school funding and resources and reallocate through an equity lens to ensure all students are supported, centring those most negatively impacted.
- Begin investing in long-term plans for student support, academic excellence and well-being.

Create Healthy Schools Through Transformative Measures:

Deprioritize the use of police as an instrument of last resort, and instead focus on transformative practices that are grounded in healing-centered engagement/practices and are relationship-centered that do not criminalize students.

Instead, school administrators should be equipped to ensure safe and positive school climates. Community intervention workers, peacebuilders, behaviour interventionists, transformative and restorative justice coordinators, school aides, counselors and other support staff, can and do prevent and address safety concerns and conflicts. These staff ensure a welcoming environment, respond to the root causes of conflict and disruptive behaviors, prevent and intervene to stop intergroup tension, and address students' needs. This aims to heal the community, encourage communication, promote accountability, and reintegrate all students into the classroom. Lastly, there is a critical need for opportunities for staff to be trained in restorative and transformative justice practices. Through embracing these values and supporting capacity building – best practices can be developed to enable collective social change.

Watch our virtual panel:

In February of 2023, Black Lives Matter Sudbury hosted a panel discussion titled "Free Our Minds: Policing Free Schools" In this conversation, Isak Vaillancourt, Andrea Vásquez Jiménez, MayaSpoken, Hailey Yasmeen Dash (as pictured above, left to right), do a deep dive into what the idea of "safety" really means in our school communities.

Watch the recording [here.](#)

"Students have unmet needs that are being met with these punitive measures […] they're pushed from the place where they should be receiving support the most' – MayaSpoken

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