

# The state of school liaison programs in Canada

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## Introduction

Over the past decade, the use of dedicated police officers within schools—often referred to as school liaison officers (SLOs)—has become a particularly controversial topic in both Canada and the United States.<sup>2</sup> Advocates for such law enforcement initiatives, including the police, school officials and some parents, argue that SLOs keep students safe and improve police-community relations.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Critics, however, argue that SLO programs are expensive, biased towards Black, Indigenous and other marginalized youth, and ultimately contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.<sup>6,7,8,9</sup> To illustrate, Merkwae argues that SLOs give law enforcement officials additional surveillance power and access to students and thus increase opportunities for legally punitive measures involving school violations.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, an increasing number of U.S. studies, indicate that police-involved disciplinary measures have a disproportionate impact on Black and other students of colour.<sup>11,12</sup>

While there is a dearth of research that explicitly examines experiences with SLOs among racialized youth in Canada,<sup>13</sup> community advocates within many Canadian jurisdictions have long argued that as a result of racially biased policing in schools, Indigenous, Black and other students of colour experience oversurveillance and subsequent criminalization.<sup>14,15</sup> These allegations have led to the dissolution of SLO programs within several Canadian school boards, including the Toronto District

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<sup>2</sup> In some jurisdictions, school-based officers are referred to as School Resource Officers (SROs) rather than School Liaison Officers (SLOs). In this report, the term School Liaison Officer (SLO) is used to refer to both types of school-based policing programs.

<sup>3</sup> G. Abela and J. K. Donlevy, "Violence in Alberta's Urban Schools: The Perspectives of School Resource Officers." *Education & Law Journal* 29, no. 1 (2020): 1-26.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Duxbury and Craig Bennell. *Police in schools: An evidence-based look at the use of school resource officers*. Routledge, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Wesley G. Jennings, David N. Khey, Jon Maskaly, and Christopher M. Donner. "Evaluating the relationship between law enforcement and school security measures and violent crime in schools." *Journal of police crisis negotiations* 11, no. 2 (2011): 109-124.

<sup>6</sup> Denise C. Gottfredson, Scott Crosse, Zhiqun Tang, Erin L. Bauer, Michele A. Harmon, Carol A. Hagen, and Angela D. Greene. "Effects of school resource officers on school crime and responses to school crime." *Criminology & Public Policy* 19, no. 3 (2020): 905-940.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher A. Mallet. "The School-To-Prison Pipeline: A Comprehensive Assessment. Springer Publishing Company, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Amanda Merkwae. "Schooling the police: Race, disability, and the conduct of school resource officers." *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, 21 (2015): 147.

<sup>9</sup> Tammy Rinehart Kochel, David B. Wilson, and Stephen D. Mastrofski. "Effect of Suspect Race on Officers' Arrest Decisions." *Criminology* 49, no. 2 (2011): 473-512.

<sup>10</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling"

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>13</sup> See Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, "Statement: School Resource Officer Programs."

<sup>14</sup> Robyn Maynard. *Policing Black lives: State violence in Canada from slavery to the present*. (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Police-Free Schools Winnipeg. "Police-Free Schools WPG." <https://policefreeschoolswpg.ca/>

School Board (TDSB),<sup>16</sup> the Peel District School Board (PDSB),<sup>17</sup> the Winnipeg School Division,<sup>18</sup> the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board<sup>19</sup> and, more recently, the Vancouver and New Westminster school boards.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, other Canadian school boards including the Edmonton Catholic School Board are presently conducting in-depth, independent evaluations of their SLO programs to help inform decisions regarding program continuation.<sup>21</sup> As the debate continues, many police services and school boards in Canada are now re-evaluating and reforming long standing relationships and collaborations.

The initial objective of the current review was to explore the state of Canadian research into the potential benefits and harms of SLO programs—with a special focus on the impacts of SLOs on marginalized students (i.e., Black, Indigenous and other racialized students as well as students who identify as having a disability). However, while a few peer-reviewed studies have examined Canadian SLO programs in general, an extensive review of the literature reveals no peer-reviewed studies that explore the impacts of Canadian SLO programs on marginalized students. The Canadian-based research that does exist tends to focus on either SLOs as a form of community policing<sup>22</sup> or the role of SLOs in addressing bullying and other forms of school violence.<sup>23,24</sup> These studies also tend to focus on the perspectives or opinions of police personnel rather than students. One Canadian study of a particular SLO program has produced a book manuscript.<sup>25</sup> The authors maintain that in the Canadian context their study is “the largest and most comprehensive assessment of [SLO] programs to date.”<sup>26</sup> However, despite conducting their research in Peel Region, a municipality with one of the highest Black, Indigenous and South Asian populations in Canada, the authors failed to document the perceptions and

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<sup>16</sup> Shanifa Nasser. “Canada’s largest school board votes to end armed police presence in schools,” *CBC News*, November 22, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/school-resource-officers-toronto-board-police-1.4415064>.

<sup>17</sup> Kevin Jiang. “Peel Police end controversial program that put officers in schools,” *Toronto Star*, November 18, 2020. <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/11/18/peel-police-announce-permanent-end-to-controversial-program-that-put-officers-in-schools.html>.

<sup>18</sup> CBC News. “Winnipeg School Division budget cuts police from schools ‘solely for financial reasons,’” *CBC News*, March 9, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-school-division-cuts-police-budget-2021-2022-1.5942650>.

<sup>19</sup> CBC News. “Ottawa’s largest school board officially cuts ties with police,” *CBC News*, June 25, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/ocdsb-school-resource-officer-program-decision-end-1.6079001>.

<sup>20</sup> Jon Aspiri. “New Westminster school board ends police liaison program,” *Global News*, April 28, 2021. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7816191/new-westminster-school-board-ends-police-liaison-program/>.

<sup>21</sup> Lauren Boothby. “Edmonton Public Schools suspends school resource officer program for 2020-2021 school year,” *Edmonton Journal*, September 4, 2020. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/edmonton-public-schools-suspends-school-resource-officer-program-for-2020-2021-school-year>.

<sup>22</sup> Ryan Broll and Stephanie Howells. “Community policing in schools: Relationship-building and the responsibilities of school resource officers.” *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* (2019).

<sup>23</sup> Ryan Broll. “Collaborative responses to cyberbullying: preventing and responding to cyberbullying through nodes and clusters.” *Policing and society* 26, no. 7 (2016): 735-752.

<sup>24</sup> Ryan Broll, and Laura Huey. “‘Just being mean to somebody isn’t a police matter’: Police perspectives on policing cyberbullying.” *Journal of school violence* 14, no. 2 (2015): 155-176.

<sup>25</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

experiences of racialized students.<sup>27</sup> Thus, as noted by the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, Canadian SLO literature maintains a “race-absent” approach that ultimately fails to explore the systemic challenges faced by Black, Indigenous and other racialized students.<sup>28</sup>

The few reviews that do explore the perspectives of racial minority youth are found in independent reports commissioned by school boards or community members themselves.<sup>29,30,31</sup> In sum, despite the current trend toward the dissolution of SLO programs across Canada, research on school-based officers is extremely limited. Nonetheless, this review will provide an overview of the small but growing body of literature on SLO programs in the United States as well as a review of the much more limited Canadian research.

The first section describes SLO research across North America, including a discussion of the various methodologies that have been used to evaluate these programs. The second section will pay particular attention to Canadian based research, documenting the identified benefits and potential consequences of SLO programs. In this section I pay particular attention to criticisms and concerns over racial discrimination towards Indigenous, Black and other youth of colour. The third and final section will summarize the research findings and conclude with a review of research and policy recommendations.

## The historical development of SLO programs in North America

The concept of placing police officers in schools for the primary purpose of maintaining school safety is not novel. Formal collaborative programs between school boards and police services emerged in the U.S. as early as the 1950s. Some Canadian school boards, including the Vancouver School Board, developed similar relationships starting in the 1970s.<sup>32,33,34</sup> However, as a consequence of highly

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<sup>27</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>28</sup> Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. “Statement: School Resource Officer Programs.” Posted July 20, 2020. <https://www.oacp.ca/en/news/statement-school-resource-officer-programs.aspx>.

<sup>29</sup> Elana Gray, Rose-Ann Bailey, Janelle Brady, and Sam Teclé. *Perspectives of Black male students in secondary school: Understanding the successes and challenges—student focus group results*. Mississauga, ON: Peel District School Board, 2016.

<https://www.peelschools.org/Documents/We%20Rise%20Together%20Action%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Toronto District School Board. *School Resource Officer Program Review*. Toronto, ON: Toronto District School Board, 2017. <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Leadership/Boardroom/Agenda-Minutes/Type/A?Folder=Agenda%2F20171115&Filename=171115+School+Resource+Off+3269+FINAL.pdf>. (Please note: the report was recently removed from the TDSB website)

<sup>31</sup> Vancouver District Board. School Liaison Officer: Student and Stakeholder Engagement Program. March 2021 <https://www.vsb.bc.ca/News/Documents/SLOProgramReport-March2021.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Argyle. *School Liaison Officer: Student and Stakeholder Engagement Program*. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver School Board, 2021. <https://www.vsb.bc.ca/News/Documents/VSB-SLO-EngagementReport-Mar2021.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew T. Theriot and Matthew J. Cuellar. "School resource officers and students' rights." *Contemporary justice review* 19, no. 3 (2016): 363-379.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew T. Theriot, and John G. Orme. "School resource officers and students' feelings of safety at school." *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 14, no. 2 (2016): 130-146.

publicized school shootings—including the Columbine<sup>35</sup> and Sandy Hook<sup>36</sup> tragedies in the United States and the shooting death of Jordan Manners in Canada<sup>37</sup>—the perceived need for police in schools was reinvigorated beginning in the late 1990s. The argument for police in schools was supported by emerging research demonstrating a positive relationship between perceived safe school environments and effective teaching and learning.<sup>38,39</sup> As a result, since the turn of the century, the number of formal SLO programs in North American schools has steadily increased.<sup>40,41,42,43</sup> To illustrate, in 1976 a study conducted by the National Institute of Education (NIE) found that only one per cent of U.S. schools had a SLO program. By 2016 a similar study found that 48 per cent of U.S. schools had an SLO, with 65 per cent stationed in secondary schools.<sup>44,45</sup>

Unfortunately, similar data cannot be found in Canada. However, an iteration of collaborative agreements between the police and school boards can be found in most provinces.<sup>46,47</sup> SLO programs have been documented in both elementary and high

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<sup>35</sup> Columbine High School Shooting: Victims and Killers – HISTORY.

<https://www.history.com/topics/1990s/columbine-high-school-shootings>.

<sup>36</sup> Sandy Hook School Shooting – HISTORY. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/gunman-kills-students-and-adults-at-newtown-connecticut-elementary-school>.

<sup>37</sup> Global News. The Legacy of Jordan Manners. <https://globalnews.ca/news/6826381/legacy-of-jordan-manners/>.

<sup>38</sup> Hilary Horn Ratner, Lisa Chiodo, Chandice Covington, Robert J. Sokol, Joel Ager, and Virginia Delaney-Black. "Violence exposure, IQ, academic performance, and children's perception of safety: Evidence of protective effects." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* (1982-) (2006): 264-287.

<sup>39</sup> Michael B. Ripski, and Anne Gregory. "Unfair, unsafe, and unwelcome: Do high school students' perceptions of unfairness, hostility, and victimization in school predict engagement and achievement?." *Journal of School Violence* 8, no. 4 (2009): 355-375.

<sup>40</sup> Abela and Donlevy, "Violence."

<sup>41</sup> Theriot and Cuellar, "School resource officers and students' rights."

<sup>42</sup> Theriot and Orme. "School resource officers and students' feelings of safety at school."

<sup>43</sup> Toronto Police Service, Toronto District School Board, and Toronto Catholic District School Board. *School Resources Officer Program: 2008/2009 Evaluation*. (Toronto, ON: Toronto Police Service, Toronto District School Board, and Toronto Catholic District School Board, 2009).

[http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/publications/files/reports/2008,2009-sro\\_evaluation\\_program.pdf](http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/publications/files/reports/2008,2009-sro_evaluation_program.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>45</sup> Lauren Musu-Gillette, Anlan Zhang, Ke Wang, Jizhi Zhang, Jana Kemp, Melissa Diliberti, and Barbara A. Oudekerk. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2017*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, 2018. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED581798.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Argyle. School Liaison Officer.

<sup>47</sup> Meighan De Pass, Robert Cleveland, Brad Kelley, and Stephanie Duggan. "Panel discussion: How can police presence in schools help with prevention?," *Gazette* 80, no. 2 (2018): 12-14.

[https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2018/grc-rcmp/JS62-126-80-2-eng.pdf](https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/grc-rcmp/JS62-126-80-2-eng.pdf)

schools. In some cases, police officers are assigned to one school. In other cases, several schools share the same SLO officers.<sup>48,49,50,51,52</sup>

In general, SLO programs are guided by community-based principles that encourage proactive policing. This orientation aims to discourage criminal activity by increasing police visibility within schools and promoting routine engagement between students, school staff and police personnel.<sup>53,54,55</sup> While SLO programs vary with respect to implementation strategies, common goals include ensuring school safety and promoting positive youth perceptions of the police.<sup>56</sup> An emphasis of most SLO programs is the establishment and maintenance of positive relationships between the police and both students and school officials.<sup>57</sup>

### **SLO program objectives**

The specific roles and responsibilities of SLOs can vary according to the individual needs of designated schools. However, in North America, standard SLO activities are heavily influenced by The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). NASRO promotes a “triad model” which describes the SLO as law enforcers, counsellors/mentors and educators.<sup>58,59,60</sup>

As law enforcers, SLOs patrol school property, respond to calls for service and conduct criminal inquiries. Law enforcement activities include the general surveillance of the student body as well specific criminal investigations. Investigations often involve interviewing student victims and witnesses as well as the interrogation of offenders. SLOs can arrest and/or ticket students suspected of law violations or divert offenders into alternative measure programs. SLO patrols are conducted to reduce students from engaging in minor offending, truancy, and loitering in and around school property. It is also argued that regular SLO patrols can

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<sup>48</sup> Abela and Donlevy, “Violence.”

<sup>49</sup> Argyle. School Liaison Officer.

<sup>50</sup> Carl E. James. Students “at risk”: Stereotypes and the schooling of Black Boys. *Urban Education* 47 no. 2, 464-494. 2012

<sup>51</sup> Carl E. James and Tana Turner. *Towards race equity in education: The schooling of Black students in the Greater Toronto Area*. Toronto, ON: York University, 2017. <https://edu.yorku.ca/files/2017/04/Towards-Race-Equity-in-Education-April-2017.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Gita Rao Madan. “Policing in Toronto schools: Race-ing the conversation.” Master’s Thesis, University of Toronto, 2016. [https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/71685/1/Madan\\_Gita\\_R\\_201603\\_MA\\_thesis.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/71685/1/Madan_Gita_R_201603_MA_thesis.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>54</sup> Broll and Howells, “Community policing in schools.”

<sup>55</sup> Merkwae, “Schooling the police.”

<sup>56</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>57</sup> Broll and Howells, “Community policing in schools.”

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Merkwae, “Schooling the police.”

<sup>60</sup> Terrance J. Taylor, Kelly B. Turner, Finn-Aage Esbensen, and L. Thomas Winfree Jr. “Coppin’an attitude: Attitudinal differences among juveniles toward police.” *Journal of criminal justice* 29, no. 4 (2001): 295-305.

reduce more serious school-based offending including assaults, bullying and drug activity.<sup>61,62</sup>

As counsellors, SLOs are tasked with engaging with students, teachers and school administrators to provide advice on personal and/or legal matters.<sup>63</sup> In this capacity, SLOs may engage in discussions about general student behaviour or advise school officials on how to deal with student disciplinary issues, including student criminality.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, SLOs often have the power to refer or divert students to social, legal and/or community services if deemed necessary.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, as educators, SLOs often provide in-class lectures on various public safety issues including bullying, cyberbullying, sexting, sexual assault and substance use. SLOs, it is argued, can also help students learn more about policing and the broader criminal justice system.<sup>66,67,68</sup>

Despite the identification of these designated tasks, as a result of individual officer discretion there is a high level of variation in how SLOs operate in their schools.<sup>69</sup> Therefore some SLOs may engage more in enforcement as opposed to counselling or student education. Others may focus more on counselling and education and subsequently de-emphasize their role as law enforcement agents. It is this extreme variation in SLO roles and activities that contributes to scholarly debate and policy discussion.<sup>70</sup>

## American studies

While many school administrators, police officials, parents and students maintain that SLOs keep members of their school community safe,<sup>71</sup> research on the benefits of SLO programs remains limited and contradictory.<sup>72,73,74</sup> This is particularly evident in relation to studies that examine the impact of SLO programs on criminal activity

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<sup>61</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>62</sup> Merkwa, "Schooling the police."

<sup>63</sup> Broll and Howells, "Community policing in schools."

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Maurice Canady, Bernard James, and Janet Nease. *To protect and educate: The school resource officer and the prevention of violence in schools*. Hoover, AL: National Association of School Resource Officers, 2012. <https://www.nasro.org/clientuploads/resources/NASRO-Protect-and-Educate.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> Broll and Howells, "Community policing in schools."

<sup>67</sup> Madan, "Policing in Toronto schools."

<sup>68</sup> Barbara Raymond. *Assigning police officers to schools*. Washington, DC: Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2010. <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-p182-pub.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Kathleen Nolan. "Policing student behavior: Roles and responsibilities." In *The Palgrave International Handbook of School Discipline, Surveillance, and Social Control*, pp. 309-326. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>71</sup> Broll and Howells, "Community policing in schools."

<sup>72</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>73</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>74</sup> Chongmin Na and Denise C. Gottfredson. "Police officers in schools: Effects on school crime and the processing of offending behaviors." *Justice Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2013): 619-650.

within schools.<sup>75,76</sup> To illustrate, using national cross-sectional data from the 2006 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), Jennings and et al. (2011) observed a negative relationship between the number of SLOs and serious crime in high schools in the United States.<sup>77</sup> This led the researchers to conclude that SLOs may function as a possible deterrent to serious crime. Similarly, the Maskaly and et al. (2011) study of school safety measures also identified a possible relationship between the presence of SLOs and a reduction in gang-related activity within schools.<sup>78</sup> However, the authors acknowledge that school and neighbourhood characteristics, including school size and the prevalence of neighbourhood violence, better explain levels of school crime. They also acknowledge the impact of SLO programs is diminished once these factors have been taken into statistical account.<sup>79</sup>

Gottfredson et al. (2020) and Petrosino et al. (2012) both argue that our knowledge about the relationship between SLOs and school crime is greatly limited by a lack of methodologically rigorous research.<sup>80,81</sup> To illustrate, Gottfredson and colleagues note that as a result of the growing use of SLOs in schools, many studies prior to 2010 used variables privy to “temporal fluctuations in outcomes” and thus could not be used to determine program success.<sup>82</sup> In response, the authors completed a systematic review of research—conducted between 2010 and 2019—that investigated SLO program effectiveness.<sup>83</sup>

To be considered a methodologically sound study, the researchers sought research that: (1) includes pre-test and post-test measures for both schools with (treatment) and without (control) an SLO, (2) controls for pre-existing differences between the treatment and control schools, (3) isolates the effects of SLO programs as opposed to other school security procedures, (4) considers school-level variation as opposed to student variation, (i.e., attributing student perceptions of the program to student attitudes) and (5) includes a quantitative component.<sup>84</sup> The proposed criteria were used to distinguish high from low quality studies. High quality studies, the authors maintain, must employ a pre-test/post-test control group design that better controls for historical effects and thus enables conclusions about program attribution. Anything less can render a study’s results inconclusive.<sup>85,86</sup> Ultimately, the researchers found

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<sup>75</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>76</sup> Na and Gottfredson. "Police officers in schools."

<sup>77</sup> Jennings et al., "Evaluating the relationship."

<sup>78</sup> Jon Maskaly, Christopher M. Donner, Jennifer Lanterman, and Wesley G. Jennings. "On the association between SROs, private security guards, use-of-force capabilities, and violent crime in schools." *Journal of police crisis negotiations* 11, no. 2 (2011): 159-176.

<sup>79</sup> Maskaly et al., "On the association between SROs."

<sup>80</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers."

<sup>81</sup> Anthony Petrosino, Sarah Guckenburg, and Trevor Fronius. "Policing schools' strategies: A review of the evaluation evidence." *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation* 8, no. 17 (2012): 80-101.

<sup>82</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime," 909

<sup>83</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Na and Gottfredson. "Police officers in schools."

<sup>86</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."



that only 13 American studies conducted during this period satisfied the “high quality study” criteria.

Using longitudinal data spanning three years from the SSOCS, a number of researchers explore a comparative sample of schools both with and without an SLO, to examine whether the presence of an SLO leads to a reduction in various criminal activities including bullying<sup>87</sup> as well as serious and nonserious violent, property, drug and weapon-related crimes.<sup>88,89,90,91</sup> These studies consistently show that schools with SLOs report more crime than schools without an SLO. Thus, there is minimal evidence to suggest that police in schools contribute to school safety. But, as Kupchik (2010) suggests, SLOs may reframe disciplinary incidents, typically dealt with by school administrators, as a criminal offence.<sup>92</sup> Therefore the notion that SLOs serve as a proactive measure and engage with youth with the aim of reducing crime is questioned. Instead, researchers argue school-based officers may be reactive, increasing the likelihood students will be charged with a criminal offence.<sup>93</sup> This finding is consistent with the argument that SLOs can increase incidents of student criminalization.

Data from other American studies further suggest that schools with SLOs have higher arrest rates and out-of-school suspensions than schools without SLOs.<sup>94,95</sup> Studies also demonstrate that SLOs have a disproportionate effect on arrest rates for Black students.<sup>96</sup> Zhang (2019), however, suggests these higher rates were typically found in schools that recently implemented a SLO program.<sup>97</sup> They argue that schools with well-established programs (i.e., an officer in the school three years or longer) did not have significantly higher arrest rates. This finding suggests that, upon implementation, SLO programs may increase school-based arrests. However, this

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<sup>87</sup> Deanna N. Devlin, and Denise C. Gottfredson. "The roles of police officers in schools: Effects on the recording and reporting of crime." *Youth violence and juvenile justice* 16, no. 2 (2018): 208-223

<sup>88</sup> Na and Gottfredson. "Police officers in schools."

<sup>89</sup> Jason P. Nance "Students, police, and the school-to-prison pipeline." *Washington University Law Review*, 93 (2015): 919.

<sup>90</sup> Christina Pigott, Ami E. Stearns, and David N. Khey. "School resource officers and the school to prison pipeline: Discovering trends of expulsions in public schools." *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 43, no. 1 (2018): 120-138.

<sup>91</sup> Kristin Swartz, Dustin L. Osborne, Cherie Dawson-Edwards, and George E. Higgins. "Policing schools: Examining the impact of place management activities on school violence." *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 41, no. 3 (2016): 465-483.

<sup>92</sup> Aaron Kupchik. *Homeroom security: School discipline in an age of fear*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010.

<sup>93</sup> Swartz et al., "Policing schools."

<sup>94</sup> Emily G. Owens. "Testing the school-to-prison pipeline." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 36, no. 1 (2017): 11-37.

<sup>95</sup> E. K. Weisburst (2019). Patrolling public schools: The impact of funding for school police on student discipline and long-term education outcomes. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 38(2), 338-365

<sup>96</sup> See Emily M. Homer and Benjamin W. Fisher. "Police in schools and student arrest rates across the United States: Examining differences by race, ethnicity, and gender." *Journal of school violence* 19, no. 2 (2020): 192-204

<sup>97</sup> Gary Zhang. "The effects of a school policing program on crime, discipline, and disorder: A quasi-experimental evaluation." *American journal of criminal justice* 44, no. 1 (2019): 45-62

initial increase may diminish after the program is established and the SLO becomes part of the school community.

As such, to date, the most methodologically rigorous studies exploring the effects of SLOs in school consistently demonstrate that the presence of an SLO is “related to increased recording of drug crimes, crimes involving weapons and serious violent crimes.”<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, in their own analysis of the data, Gottfredson et al. found that increasing the number of police officers in schools did not lead to a reduction in school violence.<sup>99</sup> In fact, SLOs contributed to an increase in the number of students arrested and later referred to a criminal justice intervention. The authors conclude that there is no evidence to support the notion that SLO programs make schools safer.<sup>100,101</sup>

### Perceptions of safety

The argument that perceived safety is an important characteristic of the school environment stems from studies that reveal a positive relationship between perceptions of school safety and academic achievement.<sup>102,103</sup> Students who feel safe at school may experience less anxiety and thus have an increased capacity to concentrate on schoolwork and extracurricular activities. Research also suggests that students who feel that their school environment is unsafe are significantly more likely to skip school as a violence-avoidance strategy.<sup>104</sup> As such, proponents of SLO programs suggest that a police presence in school can help staff, students and parents feel safe.<sup>105</sup>

However, American studies have found little or no connection between the presence of SLOs and student perceptions of school safety.<sup>106</sup> Some of these studies note that teachers and school administrators often feel safer after the establishment of an SLO program but that there is no effect for students.<sup>107,108,109,110</sup> Most studies find that students feel very safe in school both before and after the establishment of SLO

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<sup>98</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime," 910.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Na and Gottfredson. "Police officers in schools."

<sup>101</sup> Nance, "Students, police, and the school-to-prison pipeline."

<sup>102</sup> Ratner et al., "Violence exposure."

<sup>103</sup> Ripski, and Gregory, "Unfair, unsafe, and unwelcome"

<sup>104</sup> Suzanne E. Perumean-Chaney and Lindsay M. Sutton. "Students and perceived school safety: The impact of school security measures." *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 38, no. 4 (2013): 570-588

<sup>105</sup> National Association of School Resource Officers. "Frequently Asked Questions." <https://www.nasro.org/faq/>.

<sup>106</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>107</sup> Ida M. Johnson. "School violence: The effectiveness of a school resource officer program in a southern city." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 27, no. 2 (1999): 173-192

<sup>108</sup> David C. May, Stephen D. Fessel, and Shannon Means. "Predictors of principals' perceptions of school resource officer effectiveness in Kentucky." *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 29, no. 1 (2004): 75-93.

<sup>109</sup> Theriot and Orme. "School resource officers and students' feelings of safety at school."

<sup>110</sup> Madan, "Policing in Toronto schools"

programs.<sup>111,112</sup> In other words, SLOs do not enhance or diminish feelings of safety. Research suggests that other factors—including neighbourhood crime and victimization history—have a much stronger impact on student perceptions of safety than SLOs.<sup>113,114</sup>

### **Criminalization of student behaviour: The school-to-prison pipeline**

A major area of concern around SLOs continues to be the potential criminalization of student misconduct.<sup>115,116,117</sup> As noted above, research suggests that schools with SLOs have a higher rate of student charges and arrests than schools without SLOs. In other words, research demonstrates that police in schools can, in fact, turn common student indiscretions on school property into criminal offences.<sup>118,119,120,121,122</sup> Thus, critics of SLO programs argue that an increase in punitive disciplinary responses and measures that involve law enforcement can push students out of the education system and into the criminal justice system.<sup>123,124,125,126</sup> This process, which is often referred to as the “school-to-prison-pipeline,” suggests that students who are charged or disciplined by SLOs also face school suspensions or expulsions. Suspensions and expulsions, in turn, damage academic performance and ultimately lead to barriers with respect to access to higher education and employment opportunities.<sup>127,128</sup> Furthermore, there are concerns that an increase in unsupervised free time (as a result of school removal) can increase students’ risk of engaging in criminal activity, creating a cycle of involvement in the criminal justice system.<sup>129</sup> To illustrate, Pigott, Stearns and Khey (2018) argue “experiencing only one suspension [...] increases an individual’s risk of dropping out of school by over 77 per cent.”<sup>130</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>111</sup> Nicole L. Bracy. "Student perceptions of high-security school environments." *Youth & Society* 43, no. 1 (2011): 365-395

<sup>112</sup> Nathan James and Gail McCallion. *School resource officers: Law enforcement officers in schools*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43126.pdf>.

<sup>113</sup> Jack McDevitt and Jenn Panniello. *National Assessment of School Resource Officer Programs: Survey of Students in Three Large New SRO Programs*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, 2005. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED486271.pdf>

<sup>114</sup> Theriot and Orme. "School resource officers and students’ feelings of safety at school."

<sup>115</sup> Theriot and Cuellar, "School resource officers and students’ rights."

<sup>116</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police."

<sup>117</sup> Nance, "Students, police, and the school-to-prison pipeline."

<sup>118</sup> Theriot and Cuellar, "School resource officers and students’ rights."

<sup>119</sup> Nance, "Students, police, and the school-to-prison pipeline."

<sup>120</sup> Amanda Petteruti. *Education Under Arrest: The Case Against Police in Schools*. Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute, 2011.

[http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest\\_fullreport.pdf](http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest_fullreport.pdf).

<sup>121</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police."

<sup>122</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>123</sup> Petteruti, *Education Under Arrest*.

<sup>124</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police."

<sup>125</sup> Amanda Gebhard. "Schools, prisons and Aboriginal youth: Making connections." *Journal of Educational Controversy* 7, no. 1 (2013): 4.

<sup>126</sup> Theriot and Cuellar, "School resource officers and students’ rights."

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police."

<sup>129</sup> Nance, "Students, police, and the school-to-prison pipeline."

<sup>130</sup> Pigott, Stearns, and Khey, "School resource officers and the school to prison pipeline," 123.

those who drop out of school have a higher risk of criminality as “nearly 40 percent of people in state prisons left school before earning a high school diploma, compared to 18.4 percent of the general population.”<sup>131</sup>

There are also allegations that the consequences associated with SLO charge practices have a disproportionate impact on racialized youth and youth who identify as having a disability. While very few SLO studies centre race and racism,<sup>132,133</sup> it is well established that in the U.S., Black and Hispanic youth are both overrepresented in school suspensions/expulsions as well as arrests and convictions within the criminal justice system.<sup>134,135,136</sup> Thus, there are concerns that the intersection of school and police discipline will have a greater impact on marginalized youth. To illustrate, in the United States, Black youth make up only 16 per cent of those aged 10 to 17, but represent “twenty-nine percent of juvenile court referrals, thirty-six percent of youth detained outside of their homes, and thirty-five percent of youth waived into the adult criminal court system.”<sup>137</sup>

To highlight concerns over the treatment of racialized students by SLOs, recent studies suggest that Black students receive harsher treatment from SLOs than their White counterparts. For example, when faced with the same behavioural infractions, SLOs are more likely to arrest or charge Black students while White students are more likely to be cautioned or diverted into an informal conflict resolution or treatment program.<sup>138,139</sup> Merkwae (2015) raises concerns over the level of race-based discretion SLOs have in “seizing a student on the grounds for the purpose of maintaining school order or security.”<sup>140</sup>

Furthermore, youth with disabilities (those who identify as having a learning, emotional or behavioural disorder) constitute “a disproportionate number of the school-based arrests and referrals to law enforcement that result from an increased

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<sup>131</sup> Petteruti, *Education Under Arrest*, 18.

<sup>132</sup> Shabnam Javdani. "Policing education: An empirical review of the challenges and impact of the work of school police officers." *American journal of community psychology* 63, no. 3-4 (2019): 253-269

<sup>133</sup> E. O. Turner and Abigail J. Beneke. "'Softening' school resource officers: the extension of police presence in schools in an era of Black Lives Matter, school shootings, and rising inequality." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 23, no. 2 (2020): 221-240

<sup>134</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police."

<sup>135</sup> Kochel, Wilson, and Mastrofski. "Effect of Suspect Race"

<sup>136</sup> Eric A. Stewart, Eric P. Baumer, Rod K. Brunson, and Ronald L. Simons. "Neighborhood racial context and perceptions of police-based racial discrimination among black youth." *Criminology* 47, no. 3 (2009): 847-887.

<sup>137</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police," 152.

<sup>138</sup> See Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>139</sup> See Homer and Fisher, "Police in schools and student arrest rates."

<sup>140</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police," 164.

police presence in schools.”<sup>141,142,143,144,145,146</sup> Thus, many academics, activists and policy officials are raising concerns over the negative consequences of SLO programs on youth with disabilities.<sup>147</sup> Consistent with these concerns, May, Rice and Minor (2012) conducted a study to explore whether SLOs hold discriminatory beliefs about students with disabilities.<sup>148</sup> Data collected from a sample of 130 American SLOs suggest the majority believe students with disabilities negatively impact the school environment: 55 per cent of SLOs believe students with disabilities are among the most problematic in the school, 79 per cent believe that youth with disabilities should not be treated differently than students with no reported disabilities and 85 per cent of the SLOs believe students with a disability use their diagnoses as an excuse for disorderly conduct to avoid accountability.<sup>149</sup>

Disability advocates argue the police are neither equipped nor trained to tend to students who suffer from emotional, physical or psychological disorders.<sup>150,151</sup> Police are undertrained compared to teachers and other specialized school staff: they are less likely to have an advanced degree or diploma in teaching, child development or psychology, and as such they are less informed about the various disciplinary measures that can be used to informally deal with youth who have behavioural problems.<sup>152,153,154</sup>

Studies have found that SLO training does not include instruction on “detecting symptoms and behaviours of youths who have been exposed to violence, trauma or abuse” or offer techniques for defusing student conflict and engaging in mediation.<sup>155</sup> Studies have also found that SLO training varies across states and school board jurisdictions, with some SLO training being conducted by schools and other training conducted by police services or independent SLO training organizations.<sup>156,157</sup> Such

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>142</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>143</sup> Paul J. Hirschi. "Preparing for prison? The criminalization of school discipline in the USA." *Theoretical Criminology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 79-101.

<sup>144</sup> Russell J. Skiba, Mariella I. Arredondo, Chrystal Gray, and M. Karega Rausch. "Discipline disparities: New and emerging research in the United States." In *The Palgrave international handbook of school discipline, surveillance, and social control*, pp. 235-252. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018

<sup>145</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. *Civil Rights Data Collection – Data snapshot: School discipline.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-discipline-snapshot.pdf>.

<sup>146</sup> Kelly Welch and Allison Ann Payne. "Zero tolerance school policies." In *The Palgrave international handbook of school discipline, surveillance, and social control*, pp. 215-234. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018

<sup>147</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>148</sup> David C. May, Corrie Rice, and Kevin I. Minor. "An examination of school resource officers' attitudes regarding behavioral Issues among students receiving special education services." *Current Issues in Education* 15, no. 3 (2012).

<sup>149</sup> May, Rice, and Minor. "An examination of school resource officers' attitudes

<sup>150</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police."

<sup>151</sup> Theriot and Cuellar, "School resource officers and students' rights."

<sup>152</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police."

<sup>153</sup> Nance, "Students, police, and the school-to-prison pipeline."

<sup>154</sup> Theriot and Cuellar, "School resource officers and students' rights."

<sup>155</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police," 162-163.

<sup>156</sup> Merkwae, "Schooling the police."

<sup>157</sup> Abela and Donlevy, "Violence."

training disparities contribute to inconsistencies in how SLOs address behavioural issues within their schools. Such inconsistencies may place youth who are both racialized and identify as having a disability at greater risk of arrest and of the physical harms often associated with arrest incidents. Indeed, recent reviews of lawsuits and news stories involving SLOs find that a high proportion of allegations of excessive use of force by SLOs involve Black students and students with disabilities.<sup>158,159,160,161</sup> Proponents of SLO programs argue that excessive use of force is rare and often justified. However, Shaver and Decker (2017) suggest that the growing number of lawsuits and civil rights cases filed against SLO programs by racial minority and students with disabilities demonstrates a growing problem.<sup>162</sup> Thus, contrary to the intended objective of making schools safer, the regular presence of SLOs in schools may be creating an unsafe and hostile environment for these students.

## Canadian research

The vast majority of studies that explore SLO programs have been conducted in the United States. Unfortunately, very little research has been conducted in the Canadian context. To help identify research from a Canadian perspective, a systematic search was conducted on various academic databases using the following search terms: “school liaison officer,” “school resource officer,” “neighbourhood police officer,” “police in schools” and “school-to-prison pipeline.” As of May 7, 2021, only five peer-reviewed research studies and two theoretical examinations were identified. The peer-reviewed publications include: an analysis of the roles and duties of SLOs,<sup>163</sup> an evaluation on the value of Peel Region’s SLO program,<sup>164</sup> SLO perceptions of violence in Alberta schools,<sup>165</sup> SLO perceptions of cyber-bullying<sup>166,167</sup> and two theoretical explorations of the school-to-prison pipeline hypothesis as it pertains to Black and Indigenous students in Canada.<sup>168,169</sup> An additional search was conducted using the same search terms through a Master’s and Doctoral theses database. An additional two sources were found, including a theoretical exploration of police in Toronto schools<sup>170</sup> and a thesis that explored the role of SLOs in fostering resilience

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<sup>158</sup> Perry A. Zirkel. "School resource officers and students with disabilities: A disproportional connection?." *Exceptionality* 27, no. 4 (2019): 299-314

<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth A. Shaver and Janet R. Decker. "Handcuffing a third grader: Interactions between school resource officers and students with disabilities." *Utah L. Rev.* (2017): 229.

<sup>160</sup> Madan, "Policing in Toronto schools"

<sup>161</sup> Joseph B. Ryan, Antonis Katsiyannis, Jennifer M. Counts, and Jill C. Shelnut. "The growing concerns regarding school resource officers." *Intervention in School and Clinic* 53, no. 3 (2018): 188-192.

<sup>162</sup> Shaver and Decker, "Handcuffing a third grader."

<sup>163</sup> Broll and Howells, "Community policing in schools."

<sup>164</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>165</sup> Abela and Donlevy, "Violence."

<sup>166</sup> Broll, "Collaborative responses to cyberbullying"

<sup>167</sup> Broll, and Huey, "'Just being mean to somebody isn't a police matter.'"

<sup>168</sup> Gebhard, "Schools, prisons and Aboriginal youth."

<sup>169</sup> Abigail Tsonne Salole and Zakaria Abdulle. "Quick to punish: An examination of the school to prison pipeline for marginalized youth." *Canadian Review of Social Policy* 72/73 (2015): 124.

<sup>170</sup> Madan, "Policing in Toronto schools"

among LGBTQ+ youth in Alberta.<sup>171</sup> A Google search uncovered additional government sources including a survey conducted by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) that explores student, parent and school administrator perceptions of SLOs.<sup>172</sup> Finally, a search uncovered a few consultant reports conducted on behalf various school boards, including the Vancouver School Board and the Winnipeg School Board. These reports also explore student and parent perceptions of their local SLO programs.

The results of the above-described literature search highlights a shocking lack of Canadian research designed to evaluate the effectiveness of SLO programs and explore their impact on marginalized students.<sup>173</sup> This is especially problematic since scholars suggest policing in Canada differs greatly from policing in the U.S.<sup>174</sup> If true, American evaluations of SLO programs cannot be easily generalized to the Canadian context.

Although there are SLO programs in most Canadian provinces, the available research is limited to jurisdictions in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Furthermore, the only study that explicitly explores the perceptions and experiences of Black, Indigenous and other racialized students is not a peer-reviewed study; rather, it is a 2021 consultant report developed for the Vancouver School Board. Thus, with respect to SLO programs, there is a glaring absence of empirical insight into the experiences of racialized students and parents in Canada. As the Ontario Association Chiefs of Police (2020) notes, much of the Canadian literature on SLOs is descriptive and takes a “colour-blind” approach that not only avoids any discussion of race or racism, but also provides very little insight into the perspectives of students who experience SLOs in their schools. A review of the limited Canadian research is explored further in the next section.

### **Examining the SLO role in Canada**

Studies conducted by Broll (2016) and Broll and Huey (2015) use interviews with 34 police officers to gain insight into how SLOs perceive and address cyberbullying in schools.<sup>175,176</sup> The authors conclude that Canadian SLOs like to take a preventative approach to cyberbullying by educating students on internet safety.

These findings closely relate to Broll and Howells’ (2019) exploration of the non-enforcement side of SLOs and the role of community engagement.<sup>177</sup> This study is based on eight semi-structured interviews with SLO officers, from both high school

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<sup>171</sup> Emily Pynoo. "How Do School Resource Officers Foster Resilience in Sexual and Gender Minority Youth?," Master's Thesis, University of Alberta, 2020. [https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/97675540-9b02-4e88-9ae9-a0fe46332296/view/7aa511f8-ca67-4a3c-8fc9-8f155abd9bbd/Pynoo\\_Emily\\_202007\\_MEd.pdf](https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/97675540-9b02-4e88-9ae9-a0fe46332296/view/7aa511f8-ca67-4a3c-8fc9-8f155abd9bbd/Pynoo_Emily_202007_MEd.pdf)

<sup>172</sup> Toronto District School Board. School Resource Officer Program Review.

<sup>173</sup> Madan, “Policing in Toronto schools”

<sup>174</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>175</sup> Broll, “Collaborative responses to cyberbullying.”

<sup>176</sup> Broll, and Laura Huey. “Just being mean to somebody isn’t a police matter”

<sup>177</sup> Broll and Howells, “Community policing in schools.”

and elementary schools, from a mid-size Ontario city. Broll and Howells suggest that SLOs in high schools mainly take on the role of law enforcer while SLOs in elementary schools, which report lower levels of criminal activity, largely work as educators and mentors. The authors suggest that a collaborative relationship between school administrators, school staff, students and parents can foster positive relationships with the police and increase perceptions of school safety. They suggest that SLOs can build positive relationships with students in particular through active involvement in student life. They argue that police should further engage with youth by participating in school dances, class outings, coaching sports teams and in-class presentations.<sup>178</sup> The authors suggest SLOs can be effective if they closely follow the “triad model” (as outlined on page 6), but with an emphasis on counselling and education. However, Broll and Howells do not provide any data from students to support this claim.<sup>179</sup>

A study exploring how SLOs promote resilience among five youth from two Edmonton high schools who identify as LGBTQ2S+ suggests SLOs can build relationships with vulnerable students through mentorship.<sup>180</sup> Youth participants in Pynoo’s (2020) study favour SLOs who promote “positive and inclusive school environments.”<sup>181</sup> Pynoo argues that in comparison to heterosexual and cisgender youth, sexual and gender minority youth are at a higher risk of experiencing bullying in school. Thus, by intentionally making space for LGBTQ2S+ students that are at a high risk of bullying victimization, the study’s participants suggest SLOs can indeed increase positive perceptions of the police among youth who traditionally report higher levels of distrust.<sup>182,183,184</sup>

Broll and Howells argue initiatives that focus on building relationships can both increase trust in the law enforcement and help with police investigations.<sup>185</sup> The authors argue that the relationships that SLOs foster with students can be useful for other police units as it may encourage students to report crimes or serious incidents that take place on or around school grounds. For example, Broll and Howells found that the SLOs in their study believed students would report personal victimization to them and not traditional police.<sup>186</sup> However, the authors once again do not provide an analysis of actual student perspectives to support this claim.

Furthermore, Broll and Howells argue that a regular police presence in schools can enable SLOs’ access to information about students who may be engaging in gang or other criminal activities outside of school.<sup>187</sup> They suggest this inside information can

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Pynoo, "How Do School Resource Officers Foster Resilience."

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>182</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>183</sup> Pynoo, "How Do School Resource Officers Foster Resilience."

<sup>184</sup> Theriot and Orme. "School resource officers and students’ feelings of safety at school."

<sup>185</sup> Broll and Howells, "Community policing in schools."

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.



help law enforcement officials solve crimes faster and more efficiently. Ultimately the authors conclude that SLO programs that encourage positive student engagement can not only help increase positive perceptions of the police but also aid in community safety.

The research conducted by Broll and Howells, however, ignores all concerns that suggest SLOs target and thus over-surveil Black and Indigenous students. Thus, Broll and Howells' research provides little insight into the unintended consequences associated with SLOs in schools. The following section reviews these concerns in more detail.

### **Toronto police evaluation**

After the shooting death of Jordan Manners, at a Toronto High School in 2008, both the Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic School Board agreed to place SLOs in a number of their "high priority" schools.<sup>188</sup> The initial implementation saw dedicated police officers placed in 29 schools. By 2011, this number had increased to 47 schools. The Toronto Police Service (TPS) conducted an internal review of the SLO program in 2009, one year after implementation of the program, and again in 2011.<sup>189,190</sup> The review sought to explore whether the SLO program improved school safety, improved perceptions of school safety and improved the relationship between Toronto high school students and the police. Data was drawn from over 11,000 survey respondents interviewed during 2009 and 2011 and captures the perceptions of students, school officials, parents and SLOs. Furthermore, the TPS reviewed crime data to explore whether there was a reduction in school-reported crime and victimization following implementation of the program.

To gather student perceptions in 2009, the TPS administered surveys to all 29 schools involved in the SLO program. Surveys were completed in October 2008 and again in May 2009 to explore any differences in perceptions before and after program implementation. The TPS randomly selected two classes from each grade (grades 9–12) for a total of 6,960 surveys. To gather information on teacher perceptions, teachers from each randomly selected class were provided with a survey (sample size=319 teachers). To gather information on parental perceptions, a parent survey was sent to the addresses of the randomly selected students, for a total of 4,350

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<sup>188</sup> Louise Brown and Karen Rushowy. "Jordan Manners shooting death led to school safety changes," *Toronto Star*, May 20, 2011.

[https://www.thestar.com/life/parent/2011/05/20/jordan\\_manners\\_shooting\\_death\\_led\\_to\\_school\\_safety\\_changes.html](https://www.thestar.com/life/parent/2011/05/20/jordan_manners_shooting_death_led_to_school_safety_changes.html)

<sup>189</sup> Toronto Police Service, Toronto District School Board, and Toronto Catholic District School Board. *School Resources Officer Program: 2008/2009 Evaluation*.

<sup>190</sup> Toronto Police Service, Toronto District School Board, and Toronto Catholic District School Board. *School Resources Officer Program: 2011 Follow-Up Evaluation*. Toronto, ON: Toronto Police Service, Toronto District School Board, and Toronto Catholic District School Board, 2011.

[http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/publications/files/reports/2008,2009-sro\\_program\\_follow-up\\_evaluation.pdf](http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/publications/files/reports/2008,2009-sro_program_follow-up_evaluation.pdf).

surveys. Finally, each SLO was required to complete a one-time survey at the end of the school year.

To capture the SLO program's impact on local crime, the TPS examined crime incidents that took place either at SLO schools or within 200 metres of school property. The crime analysis compared crime rates one year prior to program implementation with crime rates one year after implementation. A similar methodology was used in 2011. However, only one class was randomly selected from each school for the 2011 review, and that review did not identify how many surveys were administered or returned (from students, parents, administrators or SLOs).

Key findings from the 2009 review suggest the SLO program produced no significant changes in perceptions of safety among students. Most students (over 90 per cent) already felt safe at school prior to the implementation of the SLO program. This finding is consistent with previous American research, which also suggests that most youth feel safe at school regardless of the presence or absence of an SLO.<sup>191,192</sup> The TPS review also found that students who frequently interacted with their SLO did not feel safer than students who had no interaction. Unfortunately, the study did not examine whether attitudes towards the SLO program varied by student race or other personal characteristics.

The review's findings also suggest there was no change in perceptions of safety among school officials. The vast majority of school staff felt safe both before and after the implementation of the SLO program. Parents, however, reported an increase in perceptions of school safety after the implementation of the SLO program. As for reported crime and victimization, the data suggest there was a slight reduction in reported offences on school grounds one year following implementation of the SLO program. However, the findings also reveal a slight increase in victimization and offending within 200 meters of school property. This finding suggests that the SLO program may not have eliminated crime but rather displaced crime and victimization from school property to the immediate vicinity of the school.

Similar findings were reported in the 2011 review, however the TPS also reported a reduction in weapons-related crimes and an increase in the number of youth who expressed a willingness to report criminal incidents to the police. Based on these findings, the TPS concluded the SLO program had a positive impact on both students and school safety. They conclude that an increase in the number of students who are willing to report crime and a reduction in reported weapons-related crime suggest

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<sup>191</sup> James and McCallion, School resource officers.

<sup>192</sup> Na and Gottfredson. "Police officers in schools."

SLOs can build positive relationships with youth and that this stronger relationship can contribute to an overall reduction in crime.<sup>193,194</sup>

While seemingly positive, findings from the TPS review did not demonstrate a causal relationship between SLOs and reductions in school crime or increased perceptions of safety. The TPS only included data from schools with an SLO; data from comparative TDSB schools without SLOs would have allowed for a higher quality evaluation. For example, as Gottfredson et al. note, perceived differences in crime and safety may be a result of external factors unrelated to an SLO program. Program attribution is thus impossible to determine.<sup>195</sup>

Furthermore, the TPS failed to provide any insight into the characteristics of their youth sample. Only gender and school district were considered in their analysis. Important demographic characteristics—including race, age, socio-economic status and disability—and as contextual factors—like previous experiences with victimization or previous contact with police—were excluded.<sup>196,197</sup> Furthermore, the TPS report fails to explore the potential negative impacts of the SLO program and whether the program is perceived and experienced differently by racial minority students and parents.<sup>198</sup> The exclusion of race, class and experiences with disability is important as there is evidence to suggest these factors can influence police interactions and perceptions of police legitimacy. As Madan (2016) notes, “there is reason to believe that some students feel unsafe, not in spite of [SLO] presence, but because of it.”<sup>199</sup>

### ***Concerns over racial bias***

In Toronto, concerns about the selective deployment of the police to working class, predominantly racialized schools has been widespread since the implementation of the SLO program.<sup>200,201</sup> Some suggest that these communities were already highly policed through targeted intervention strategies leading to disproportionate police contact and the use of violence against members of the Black community.<sup>202</sup> The placement of SLOs in Black students’ schools continued this trend. While there is no Canadian data exploring Indigenous youth perceptions of SLO programs, Gebhard (2015) makes a similar argument about Indigenous communities’ experiences with policing and suggests that police in schools contributes to “Canada’s ongoing colonial

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<sup>193</sup> Toronto Police Service, Toronto District School Board, and Toronto Catholic District School Board. *School Resources Officer Program: 2008/2009 Evaluation*.

<sup>194</sup> Toronto Police Service, Toronto District School Board, and Toronto Catholic District School Board. *School Resources Officer Program: 2011 Follow-Up Evaluation*.

<sup>195</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>196</sup> Toronto Police Service, Toronto District School Board, and Toronto Catholic District School Board. *School Resources Officer Program: 2008/2009 Evaluation*.

<sup>197</sup> Toronto Police Service, Toronto District School Board, and Toronto Catholic District School Board. *School Resources Officer Program: 2011 Follow-Up Evaluation*.

<sup>198</sup> Madan, "Policing in Toronto schools."

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> James and Turner, Towards race equity in education.

<sup>202</sup> Madan, "Policing in Toronto schools."

project.”<sup>203</sup> She notes that encounters between Indigenous peoples and law enforcement are often characterized by routine verbal and physical harassment, assault and racist practices.<sup>204</sup>

For many Black and Indigenous students, police in schools mark the “unwelcomed collision of their life in school with their life outside of school.”<sup>205</sup> Madan further argues that the mere presence of SLOs who are both armed and uniformed serves as a “constant visual reminder” of White colonial power.<sup>206</sup> SLOs can also contribute to the construction of racialized students as criminals within the wider school community. Indeed, the deployment of police officers within predominantly racialized populations can lead to stereotypical perceptions of targeted schools.<sup>207</sup> To illustrate, McCrimmon Middle School in Brampton, Ontario, previously home to an SLO officer, was often referred to as “McCriminal,” even by school board trustees.<sup>208</sup> Scholars suggest the deployment of police officers at racialized schools serves to reinforce the stereotypical association of Black and Indigenous youth with criminality.<sup>209</sup>

Limited data from Ontario suggests that Black and other racial minority students are more likely to experience harsh disciplinary measures—including suspensions, expulsion and police intervention—than their White counterparts. Importantly, research suggests harsher school discipline is related to lower levels of school engagement, higher dropout rates, unexplained school absences and poor academic performance.<sup>210</sup> Thus, consistent with the school-to-prison pipeline argument, there is a valid fear that reliance on law enforcement to address school disciplinary issues may further contribute to the marginalization and criminalization of Black and other racialized youth.<sup>211,212,213</sup>

In response to concerns about racial bias within the Toronto SLO program, the Toronto District School Board decided to conduct their own SLO study. In collaboration with researchers from Ryerson University, the review sought insight from all current TDSB students, some former students, community members and representatives from various community agencies. Between September and October 2017, data were collected through a survey and through small focus groups with students and community members.

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<sup>203</sup> Gebhard, “Schools, prisons and Aboriginal youth,” 157.

<sup>204</sup> Gebhard, “Schools, prisons and Aboriginal youth.”

<sup>205</sup> Salole and Abdulle. “Quick to punish,” 145.

<sup>206</sup> Madan, “Policing in Toronto schools,” 72.

<sup>207</sup> James and Turner, *Towards race equity in education*.

<sup>208</sup> E. Chadha, Suzanne Herbert, and Shawn Richard. *Review of the Peel district school board*. Toronto, ON:

Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/new/review-peel-district-school-board-report-en.pdf>

<sup>209</sup> James and Turner, *Towards race equity in education*.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> Gebhard, “Schools, prisons and Aboriginal youth.”

<sup>213</sup> Salole and Zakaria Abdulle, “Quick to punish.”

While there were many positive responses about the program, TDSB officials were alarmed by a number of negative findings that demonstrated potential student harm as a result of SLO presence.

Over 15,500 respondents completed the SLO Program Student Survey.<sup>214</sup> Key findings include:

- A majority of students (71 per cent) had no interaction with the SLO at their school.
- 41 per cent of respondents felt the SLO at their school was trustworthy while 53 per cent were unsure of whether or not they could trust their SLO.
- 42 per cent of respondents felt that the SLO at their school was helpful while 53 per cent were unsure about SLO effectiveness.
- 57 per cent of respondents stated having an SLO made them feel safer at school while 10 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed and 33 per cent were not sure.
- When asked whether they would like the SLO Program to continue at their school, 47 per cent of respondents said yes, seven per cent said no and 46 per cent said they were unsure.

An alarming number of students also expressed that they felt uncomfortable or intimidated in the presence of their SLO. The student focus groups provided additional insight. They expressed feeling “intimidated, and frequently mentioned feeling that they were under continual surveillance and suspicion, leading many of them to stay away from school.”<sup>215</sup> Many other students “spoke of the stigma associated with having an [SLO] assigned to their school, and the impact of this perception on both the school and their community as a whole. They were keenly aware of the fact that [SLOs] were mostly deployed to schools with a high proportion of racialized students and within communities which were already overly policed.”<sup>216</sup> This made many students feel they “were targets for discrimination.”<sup>217</sup> Many also shared that they felt the police were using the opportunity to “gather personal information and data which could later be used against them or their friends.”<sup>218</sup> Finally, many felt the “presence of the [SLO] in the school was not welcoming.”<sup>219</sup>

Once again methodological flaws persist as the survey data did not allow for an examination of racial, gender, socio-economic or disability differences among the student sample. However, the survey is the first Canadian study to clearly identify and highlight negative perceptions of an SLO program. Thus, contrary to previous

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<sup>214</sup> Toronto District School Board. *School Resource Officer Program Review*, 2.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>216</sup> Toronto District School Board. *School Resource Officer Program Review*.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*.

TPS reviews, the results from the TDSB's study demonstrated a sense of unease or discomfort with Toronto's SLO program. This finding is consistent with a growing body of Canadian research that suggests Black and Indigenous communities have less trust in the police and are more likely to experience negative police encounters.<sup>220</sup> Shortly after the release of the report, TDSB's SLO program was dismantled.<sup>221</sup> However, a study that followed the Board's decision suggested SLO programs were valuable for Canadian schools, thus questioning the TDSB evaluation's results.<sup>222</sup>

### **The Peel Regional Police Resource Officer study**

A major review of Peel Regional Police's SLO program, conducted by Duxbury and Bennell (2019), is described as a longitudinal study that explores the value SLO programs through the perceptions of students, school administrators, police executives and SLOs using quantitative, qualitative and ethnographic methods.<sup>223</sup> Furthermore, the study employs a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis—an "outcomes-based measurement tool that helps organizations understand and quantify the social, environmental, and economic value they are creating"—in an effort to help determine the value that the assignment of police officers to Peel Regional high schools provides to stakeholders.<sup>224</sup>

For context, the Peel Region, located in Ontario, has a population of approximately 1.5 million, which the authors state includes "people from many different cultures."<sup>225</sup> The SLO program was implemented by the Peel Regional Police Service, the second largest police service in Ontario, in 2003. The program saw a dedicated police officer stationed in all 60 secondary schools within the region. The police funded the program, which cost the service approximately nine million dollars per year.

Results from the study were overwhelmingly positive. The authors suggest that students, school administrators and SLOs who participated in the study had positive perceptions of the program. For example, there was a general belief that the SLO program deterred crime, provided a quick response to school-safety issues, helped de-escalate potentially violent situations and contributed to overall school safety.<sup>226</sup>

The evaluation consisted of interviews with eight Grade 9 students from five schools in the region. In addition, over 600 surveys were administered to Grade 9 students

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<sup>220</sup> Kanika Samuels-Wortley. "To serve and protect whom? Using composite counter-storytelling to explore Black and Indigenous youth experiences and perceptions of the police in Canada." *Crime & delinquency* 67, no. 8 (2021): 1137-1164.

<sup>221</sup> Nasser, "Canada's largest school board votes."

<sup>222</sup> Rosie Dimanno. "Carleton University study proves TDSB was wrong to remove cops from schools," *Toronto Star*, January 18, 2008. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2018/01/18/carleton-study-proves-tdsb-was-wrong-to-remove-cops-from-schools.html>.

<sup>223</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>226</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

within these five schools during the first week of school (Time One: September) and five months after first exposure to the SLO program (Time Two: March). The authors however provided minimal insight into their youth sample.

For the one-on-one interviews, the authors note the group consisted of seven young men and one young woman where “none of the students [...] were Caucasian.”<sup>227</sup> Few other demographic details were provided. Five of the students acknowledged they knew of their SLO; however, the other three reported that they had no contact with their SLO and did not know them in any way. Based on these eight student interviews, the authors conclude that “*all*” students feel safer as a result of their SLO and would trust their SLO enough to report a crime.<sup>228</sup> The authors highlight that all students believe the SLO program should stay in schools and cannot report any issues with the program. However, they do state that one participant “felt the presence of the SLO stopped students from acting freely because they felt they were being watched by the officers.” This student also “worried about possible overreaction by the officer to small things.”<sup>229</sup> The authors did not provide any additional insight into this student’s concerns.

Furthermore, the survey data used to explore overall student perceptions of the program did not identify race, age, or socio-economic background of the respondents. At Time One 610 students completed the survey and at Time Two 655 students responded. The authors acknowledge that due to “confidentiality requirements”<sup>230</sup> they were unable to determine whether the same students responded to the survey during both time periods. They were also unable to match Time One with Time Two responses and thus observe evidence of individual change. As such, the longitudinal quality of the study is, at best, questionable.

Based on the survey data, the authors conclude the majority of students support the SLO program and believe the police in school are effective at reducing crime. The authors base this claim largely on the fact that fewer students reported fear of bullying at Time Two than Time One. It is interesting that the authors attribute this reduction in fear entirely to the SLO program and not the fact that Grade Nine students may naturally become more comfortable in their high school environment after the initial first year jitters.

Nonetheless, the authors report that 75 per cent of students feel safer with police at their school and later claim that “*all*” students feel safer at school and less stressed as a result of officer presence.<sup>231</sup> The survey data did, however, capture that at Time 1, 18 per cent of youth felt that school-based police officers “pick on young people and visible minorities.” This figure increased to 20 per cent by Time 2. However, the authors do not discuss this finding or provide any insight into why this perception

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 76.

exists among one fifth of their respondents. Furthermore, the study does not explore whether perceptions of SLO bias are more prevalent among racialized students than White students.

The National Association of School Resource Officers continue to endorse the Peel study as evidence that school liaison programs are valuable additions to protect local communities. Canadian evaluation of an SLO program<sup>232</sup>. However, the study is deeply flawed and limited in its analysis. The researchers relied upon interviews and surveys of SLOs, police sergeants, school officials and 655 Grade 9 students to conclude that all Peel Region high school students benefit from the SLO program.<sup>233</sup> This claim is, however, grandiose. As noted by Na and Gottfredson (2013), it is problematic to conclude the impact of an intervention based on survey data and minimal interviews.<sup>234</sup> Without a control group (a comparative school without an SLO) researchers cannot make strong claims about program effectiveness. Furthermore, the authors do not explicitly identify the specific objective measures they aimed to study, which is necessary for a high quality study.<sup>235,236</sup> The authors simply state they aim to “examine the value of SLO programs.”<sup>237</sup> As a result, concrete data, such as a recording of changes in criminal activity in and around the high schools, were not obtained.

An additional issue relates to the sample of youth in the study. The authors only focus on Grade 9 students, thus excluding all other students in the region. The authors justify their focus on Grade 9 students due to an inability to conduct a comparative sample of schools without an SLO as every secondary school had a designated SLO. Therefore, a focus on Grade 9 students who had never had an SLO in their elementary school provided an alternative comparison group. However, a reliance on Grade 9 students renders the results as an attribute of a cohort (i.e., Grade 9 students) rather than all Peel Region students as implied by the researchers. Duxbury and Bennell do not account for alternative reasons that may lead Grade 9 students to view an SLO presence positively,<sup>238</sup> which as noted earlier may include anxieties around entering a new school and thus a feeling of reassurance when seeing an authority figure.

What is most problematic about this study, and what drew a great deal of critique, was the absence of a race-based analysis.<sup>239</sup> Despite the researchers’ claims that the study accurately represented the religious, cultural and socioeconomic composition of the Peel Region, only a quarter (24 per cent) of the students in the study identified themselves as a “visible minority.” This is significantly lower than the 62 per cent of

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<sup>232</sup> National Association of School Resource Officers. Frequently asked questions: What evidence exists that school resource officers are valuable? <https://www.nasro.org/faq/>.

<sup>233</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>234</sup> Na and Gottfredson. "Police officers in schools."

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of school resource officers on school crime."

<sup>237</sup> Na and Gottfredson. "Police officers in schools," 2.

<sup>238</sup> Duxbury and Bennell, *Police in schools*.

<sup>239</sup> Danielle Foppiano. "SRO Programs in Ontario's Public Schools," *Public Policy and Governance Review*, December 16, 2019. <https://ppgreview.ca/2019/12/16/sro-programs-in-ontarios-public-schools/>.



the Peel Region's population that identifies as a visible minority according to the Canadian Census.<sup>240</sup> Furthermore, the analysis in the study does not directly compare the perceptions of visible minority youth with the perceptions of white youth, nor does it provide a disaggregated racial analysis that would compare Black and Indigenous youth with youth from other racialized groups.

In light of the conclusion that all Peel high school students benefit from SLOs, the failure to include disaggregated race-based data is especially concerning considering the findings of a consultation meeting conducted by the Region prior to the release of the SLO study, which revealed many Black youth perceive police in schools to be racially biased. A report stemming from this meeting holds that, “[al]though police presence in school is supposed to make students feel safe, for some Black students, police presence has the opposite effect due to the racial profiling they have experienced.”<sup>241</sup> Black students often describe incidents where they were accused of vandalism, being stopped around school property for wearing headphones or stopped when driving their parent's car.<sup>242</sup> Therefore, the failure of Duxbury and Bennell to include and publicize any negative perceptions or experiences of racialized students undermines their broad claims to the success of the program.

### ***The Peel SLO study aftermath***

Following the release of Duxbury and Bennell's study, Chadha et al. (2020) released a report into concerns over racism within the Peel District School Board.<sup>243</sup> After more than 110 consultations with community members and students conducted between December 2019 and February 2020, Chadha and colleagues found sufficient evidence to suggest that anti-Black, anti-Indigenous and anti-South Asian racism was in fact ingrained within the culture of the PDSB. To illustrate, despite South Asian, East Asian and Black people representing 72 per cent of the secondary student population, 67 per cent of Peel School Board staff are white. The authors were also able to identify a number of concerns raised by students, including ethno-cultural violence, high suicide rates among South Asian LGBTQ+ youth and concerns over Islamophobia, which were often treated indifferently by school staff.

The authors also report many incidents of anti-Black racism including issues with school curriculum, academic placement (i.e., being placed in remedial classes as opposed to advanced classes) and an overall strained relationship between Black students, parents and teachers and staff. However, the authors also noted a number of disturbing incidents involving police in schools. During community consultations, Black students often shared experiences involving arrest and in-school suspensions where parents were neither called nor provided any information about the suspension or the return-to-school process. Data shows that Black students as young as four years

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<sup>240</sup> Region of Peel. “2016 Census Bulletin: Immigration and Ethnic Diversity.” Peel, ON: Region of Peel, 2017. <https://www.peelregion.ca/planning-maps/CensusBulletins/2016-immigration-ethnic-diversity.pdf>.

<sup>241</sup> Gray, Brady, and Teclé. Perspectives of Black male students in secondary school, 9.

<sup>242</sup> Gray, Brady, and Teclé. Perspectives of Black male students in secondary school.

<sup>243</sup> Chadha, Herbert, and Richard, Review of the Peel district school board.

old were being suspended. Troubling statistics suggest that while Black students make up 10 per cent of the secondary school population, they represent 23 per cent of all suspensions. Many of the suspensions were arbitrary; as the authors note, “some principals use any excuse to suspend Black students from schools including hoodie—suspension, hoop earrings—suspension, doo rag—suspensions.”<sup>244</sup> Often police were involved during these suspensions.

The authors conclude that for Black and South Asian students, the PDSB maintains a culture of fear and has failed to create a safe and inclusive environment for its students. Shortly after the review into PDSB culture, Peel Regional Police permanently ended their SLO program in the district citing the negative impact of police in schools on racialized students.<sup>245</sup> Police Chief Nishan Duraiappah expressed concern over issues of systemic racism and “the disproportionately punitive effects [police in schools] programming can produce” and thus felt it was best to gain community trust by ending the long-standing program.<sup>246</sup>

### **Provincial context: Vancouver School Board School Liaison Officer student and stakeholder engagement program**

In response to concerns over anti-Black and Indigenous racism within Canadian policing and growing calls to remove police from schools, the Vancouver School Board (VSB) initiated a third-party public review into their SLO program. Established in 1972, the Vancouver School Board’s SLO program led to a police officer stationed in each of the board’s secondary schools. According to the Vancouver Police Department (VPD), the program was an integral resource for both students and the wider community. VPD argue their program helped increase school safety, provided programming for “at-risk youth” and also helped divert youth, who were in conflict with the law, away from the formal court system.<sup>247</sup>

A review of the program conducted by Argyle (2021) included one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with students, parents, school administrators and staff, community members and members of the Vancouver Police Service.<sup>248</sup> Argyle also administered a survey, during a two-week period in 2021 which was open to students, parents, school staff and community members. In addition, the authors collected written submissions from members of the public. The goal of the report was to “gather feedback on the experiences and impacts of the SLO program.”<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Chadha, Herbert, and Richard, Review of the Peel district school board, 8.

<sup>245</sup> Jiang, “Peel Police end controversial program”

<sup>246</sup> Nick Westoll. “Peel Regional Police end school resource officer program after community consultation,” *Global News*, November 18, 2020. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7471721/peel-regional-police-school-resource-officer-program-dissolved/>.

<sup>247</sup> Vancouver Police Department. *VPD statement on school board vote*. April 27, 2021. <https://vpd.ca/news/2021/04/27/vpd-statement-on-school-board-vote/>.

<sup>248</sup> Argyle. School Liaison Officer.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

The authors intentionally centred responses from Black, Indigenous and other persons of colour in an attempt to gain a better understanding of their concerns and experiences. Overall, the findings suggest mixed reviews of the program. While there are positive perceptions of SLOs, the authors note that Black and Indigenous participants are more likely to express negative experiences and concerns about bias. To illustrate, a few students of the 60 students consulted through six focus groups expressed discomfort with police in their school and feelings that “race, gender, identity, sexuality, immigration status and geographic area” could exacerbate negative interactions.<sup>250</sup> As one student stated, “I thought the main reason for the SLO program was to make students feel safe (and to help with any legal matters at the school of course) but so many of my peers and myself don't feel safe when the SLO is around.”<sup>251</sup> There are however some positive expressions as well. As one student stated, “The SLO program changed my high school life forever and I'll never forget that. If there's a kid like me in Grade 8 who doesn't know what to do who can't talk to an SLO because the program was dismantled, that kid would be lost. That would've been me, if not for the SLO program.”<sup>252</sup>

The authors note that, overall, students were indifferent to the program, however a few either expressed a strong desire to retain the program or a strong desire to have the program removed from Vancouver area schools.

One-on-one consultations with 31 school staff, community members and Vancouver police also produced mixed results. While most police and school officials expressed strong interest in seeing the program continue, a number of officials expressed concerns over potential racial bias and how policing impacts feelings of safety among racialized students.

Members of the community, however, felt very strongly about ending the program. Many felt the program was a reflection of institutional racism and maintained historical systems of oppression. To illustrate, a community member expressed that the “RCMP were used in the past to enforce residential schools; this is a longstanding history that has led to distrust and fear.”<sup>253</sup> Thus, for some, police in schools are unwanted and “not a response that was asked for by the community in our jurisdiction. It's been around for decades, was started by a cop, was never about responding to parents coming forward asking for [support] in identifying issues to be addressed in schools.”<sup>254</sup>

The review also included a survey that was open to VSB students, parents, school staff and community members. The survey produced a racially diverse sample where four per cent self-identified as Indigenous, four per cent as Black, 47 per cent as a person of colour (Asian, East Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Hispanic) and

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 19.

33 per cent as white. An additional 26 per cent did not answer the race question or identified themselves as “other.”

Interestingly, 41 per cent of student respondents reported not being familiar with the SLO program, which calls into question how involved some SLOs are with their student population. The lack of connection between the SLOs and the students they work with could undermine the program’s goal to develop a positive relationship between students and the police. Of those who were familiar with the program, many students reported positive perceptions of the program, including feelings of safety, building community relationships and access to supports for students. To illustrate, a student stated they “personally feel more safe. I love knowing that there’s a liaison officer that I can talk to and share anything. It was always a positive experience. I just felt more safe.”<sup>255</sup> Another expressed the importance of the program as “vital to the building of trust and a positive relationship between communities and the police. SLOs have a positive impact and provide volunteer hours through coaching or various programs that have a great impact on schools.”<sup>256</sup>

However, there were also students who expressed concerns over safety and systemic biases. For instance, one student expressed the SLO “makes me feel more scared than protected. It makes me feel like the school is saying the kids are dangerous, when I know they aren't. It feels like I am being criminalized for something I didn't do. I would say these experiences are negative.”<sup>257</sup> For some racialized students, seeing police creates a feeling of unease. As noted by one participant, “As a black student, when the first thing I see when I walk into school in the morning is an armed police officer, it automatically gives me the message that "you aren't really welcome.”<sup>258</sup> The survey results suggest Black students are more likely than Indigenous students to express perceptions of discomfort and feeling “unsafe” in the presence of their SLO.

The authors note that not all Indigenous or racialized participants express negative perceptions of the program. Some Indigenous students expressed feeling safer in the presence of their SLO and most other students of colour expressed general positive feelings about the program. They stressed that the presence of the SLO increases perceptions of safety, encourages friendly encounters with the police and a contributes to the general belief that SLOs have a positive impact on their school community.

Overall, most expressed interest in keeping the program. However, Black students were more likely to suggest an end to the program. By contrast, most Indigenous and students of colour suggested keeping the program with minor changes. These changes include a removal of the police officer’s firearm and uniform, increased respectful engagement and more sports programs.

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 26.

The authors did not provide a final recommendation but highlight the diversity in responses which include both positive and negative perceptions of the SLO program. They highlight that there continues to be a lack of familiarity with the program and equate this to expressions of indifference and uncertainty when it came to exploring participants feelings about next steps. The authors do highlight that both Black and Indigenous students are more likely to report negative perceptions of the program and equate their experiences to a historic cycle of systemic oppression. Other students of colour, however, expressed positive perceptions of the program, and expressed a “personal connection to SLOs with whom they related—i.e., being from the same ethnocultural background.”<sup>259</sup>

As with other SLO program evaluations, Argyle’s evaluation suffers from some methodological flaws. As the evaluation set to “gather feedback on the experiences and impacts of the SLO program,” the short study period (two weeks to complete the online survey) likely impeded a collection of insights from more members of the racialized community (as was expressed in a number of written submissions from community members). Furthermore, as the survey was only available on the internet, it could have excluded students, parents and community members with little or no access to a computer. Understandably, during the COVID-19 pandemic, online interaction would have been the preferred, and perhaps safest, method for survey administration. However, the authors must acknowledge, that some of the most marginalized voices will continue to be excluded from the evaluation. However, the report took an important step in explicitly highlighting the voices of Black, Indigenous and other persons of colour, which had not been done in previous Canadian SLO evaluations.

### ***The Vancouver evaluation aftermath***

After a release of the report in March, the VSB as well as the New Westminster School Board voted to end their SLO program over concerns about the potential negative impacts on the racialized and LGBTQ2S+ student population.<sup>260</sup> However, iterations of “police in school” programs remains in other British Columbia school boards, including the Burnaby School District<sup>261</sup> and Delta School District.<sup>262</sup>

## **Summary**

American research suggests that SLO programs may lead to more school-based arrests and thus the criminalization of youth.<sup>263</sup> Some research suggests that Black and other racialized youth and youth who identify as having a disability are more

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>260</sup> Aspiri, “New Westminster school board ends police liaison program.”

<sup>261</sup> Cornelia Naylor. “Burnaby school board making no sudden moves on police in schools,” *Burnaby Now*, April 28, 2021. <https://www.burnabynow.com/local-news/burnaby-school-board-making-no-sudden-moves-on-police-in-schools-3674263>.

<sup>262</sup> Sandor Gyarmati. “Delta School District, Police comment on liaison program,” *Delta Optimist*, May 11, 2021. <https://www.delta-optimist.com/local-news/delta-school-district-police-comment-on-liaison-program-3766533>

<sup>263</sup> Gottfredson et al., “Effects of school resource officers on school crime.”

negatively impacted by SLO arrest activity than their White counterparts and those who do not identify as having a disability. Unfortunately, there is no Canadian research that examines the impact of SLOs on the number of school-based arrests or charges for these vulnerable populations. Furthermore, there is no substantive data to suggest that SLO programs increase students' perceptions of school safety. Most students feel safe at school with or without the presence of an SLO officer. However, there is some evidence that school staff feel safer when there is an SLO at their school. Similarly, many parents feel that their children are safer when an SLO program has been implemented.

Canadian studies have been few and far between. The studies that have been conducted have been limited to small, non-random samples or have other methodological limitations. Nonetheless, some Canadian studies suggest that SLO programs are popular among many students, parents and school staff. However, limited research suggests that Black, Indigenous and other racialized students and parents are far less enthusiastic about SLO programs than their white counterparts. Many fear that biased police practices will extend from the street to the school but unfortunately most Canadian studies, especially those led by the police themselves, have avoided the "race question" and silenced the concerns of minority communities, allowing for little insight into their experiences.

Future research must employ high quality evaluation strategies to determine the effectiveness—and possible negative impacts—of SLO programs. Studies should employ a pre-test/post-test control group design to isolate the impact of SLOs from other school, police and community factors. This is the only way we will be able to draw strong conclusions with respect to program attribution.

Based on concerns raised by racialized community members, it is clear that some students, parents and community members are highly uncomfortable with police in schools. These stakeholders often fear that SLOs will contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline and further impede the life chances of marginalized students. Although some may favour SLO programs, schools are supposed to support and nourish all students. Thus, even if a small minority of the population demands the removal of police from schools, this is sufficient to support the disbanding of SLO programs in Canadian schools.

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