

An Invitation to a Community Conversation

September 27, 2022

Somerville High School

Today's Presenters

SHS Administration
in collaboration with
Somerville School Committee

- **Ellenor Barish, School Committee Member**
- **Sarah Phillips, School Committee Member**
- **Ms. Kersten, SHS Co-Principal**

***School Safety and a Police
Presence in Somerville High
School: *What is an SRO (School
Resource Officer)?***

Purpose of this Presentation

To provide a safe, inclusive place

- To learn
- To invite further conversation

We are not here...

- ☒ To debate
- ☒ To persuade

Norms

1. Be aware of your own identity, the perspective you bring, and the space/role you occupy in society. Be aware of the identity you bring to the issue.
2. Take care of yourself.
3. Be open-minded to other ideas and perspectives.
4. Remember: everyone is still learning. Seek to understand.
5. If you choose to discuss this later, speak from your experience, awareness, and perspective. Use “I feel” statements.
6. Be aware that even good intentions might have a negative impact; consider the impact of your statements before speaking. Be open to feedback.
7. What is said here, stays here. What is learned here, leaves here.

What is the School Committee?

- **The School Committee consists of nine members. There are seven “wards” in Somerville and each elects its own representative. The president of the Somerville City Council and the Mayor of Somerville are also on the School Committee.**
- **The School Committee approves the budget for the schools, is responsible for district/school policies, maintains contracts with unions, and hires and evaluates the Superintendent.**

What is the School Committee considering?

- 1. What should be the relationship between the Somerville Public Schools and the Somerville Police Department?**
 - a. How can this relationship be crafted to help make the students and staff feel safer and be safer at school?**
 - b. Should this relationship include a School Resource Officer at Somerville High School?**

Their decision will take into consideration the opinions and experiences of Somerville Public Schools students and families.

What is a School Resource Officer or SRO?

- According to Somerville Public Schools, the purpose of the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program, is to help provide a safe, secure, violence-free, and nurturing school environment that allows all students to learn and flourish
- To develop positive relationships with students & parents thereby enhancing the relationship of law enforcement with youth and the community
- To provide preventative help and services to at-risk students and families
- To prevent violence and the use and distribution of illegal substances in schools
- In the 2015-2016 school year 43% of public schools and 71% of high schools reported the presence of armed law enforcement officers

What special training does an SRO receive?

- **Instruction on common youth behaviors, actions and reactions as well as the impact of trauma, mental illness, behavioral addictions, and developmental disabilities**
- **Differences in arrest procedures for juveniles and adults**
- **Strategies for resolving conflict and de-escalation tactics that are specifically effective with youth, instead of making an arrest**
- **Anti-bias, anti-racism and anti-harassment strategies and how to prevent, identify, respond to, and investigate hate crimes and hate incidents**
- **Bullying and cyberbullying, and how to identify youth at risk of or who are being commercially sexually exploited**
- **How to interact effectively with school staff and victim communities and build public confidence with cooperation with law enforcement agencies**

The SRO at Somerville High School

- Somerville High School had an SRO for more than 25 years
- There was an SRO at Somerville High School until the start of the pandemic, March 2020
- [In 2014 the state of Massachusetts required an SRO for each district after the Sandy Hook shooting](#)
- In 2020 Massachusetts Law no longer required schools to have an SRO.
- Spring of 2021 the Somerville School Committee voted to suspend the SRO program pending further conversations with the community
- **Currently, SHS does not have an SRO**

What are reasons some people do not want an SRO?

- The movement to stop having SROs is part of a larger movement to “Defund the Police”, which highlights racial bias and discrimination and the use of excessive force in police forces
- Nationwide, there are examples of SROs using excessive force on students while in the school, and of conflicts that should have been handled by the school becoming criminal investigations - exacerbates “School to Prison Pipeline”
- For some community members, their experiences with police officers are negative and having a police officer in school is stressful and upsetting
- Other people or roles can provide some of the same supports/resources as the SRO
- There isn’t enough clear, transparent information about the impact of SROs in schools

What are reasons that some people want an SRO?

- **SROs protect staff and students from threats - internal and external**
- **SROs can help schools respond quickly and appropriately in a crisis, particularly if they know the school, staff and students**
- **SROs develop relationships with students and their families; they can help answer questions and provide resources**
- **Having regular, positive interactions with a police officer might help students and their families avoid future conflict with the police**
- **Help educate students and families about their rights and the role of the police**
- **Help students and families navigate potential conflicts with the police**

Additional Resources for Education - We encourage you to do your own research

- [The Debate Over School Resource Officers and the #CounselorsNotCops Campaign - Close Up Foundation](#)
- [New Massachusetts Law Paves the Way for Police-Free Schools - The Appeal](#)
- [School resource officers: What are they and are they necessary?](#)
- [Percent with sworn law enforcement officers routinely carrying a firearm](#)

Closing Out the Meeting - Please take this survey!

Take a mindful moment.

Sit with all you heard.

Please take [this survey](#) (scan QR code) to let us know what you are thinking.

Let us know if you want to talk more about school safety and School Resource Officers.

