

Special Policing Subcommittee: District Recommendations

November 30, 2022

Overview

- In Spring 2021, the School Committee voted to pause the School Resource Officer and STEPS programs in our schools.
- The School Committee formed the Special Policing Subcommittee to review these programs more fully and determine next steps.
- The Subcommittee and SPS have conducted outreach of students and staff, and held a public forum for community members.
- The School Committee, SPS, and the Somerville Police Department are committed to the safety and well-being of all students and staff. Based on all efforts and feedback to date, SPS is recommending a new option for our school community.

Recap: Steps Taken to Date

Previous Actions	
May 2021	Somerville School Committee voted to pause school police programs (i.e., STEPS Program and SRO at the high school)
January 2022	Somerville School Committee formed the Special Policing Subcommittee
April 2022	Reviewed SPS Social Emotional and Mental Health Supports
October 2022	Reviewed feedback from student focus groups and staff survey
Nov 14, 2022	Special Policing Subcommittee hosted a Public Forum
Nov 30, 2022	Presenting a recommendation & Special Policing Subcommittee deliberation

Meeting notes and presentations available at somerville.k12.ma.us/district-leadership/somerville-school-committee

Recap: Stakeholder Engagement Outcomes

Students and staff provided feedback on what makes them feel safe, and different school safety models.

Student Logistics: Focus Groups

- 12 focus groups ~ about 90 students; 2-15 students per focus group
- Moderated by Dr. Gretchen Brion-Meisels, doctoral students, representative adults from CPAR

Staff Logistics: Survey

- **Total # of respondents:** 96 (SHS & FC)
- **Average years of service:** 9.5 years
- **Type of roles:** Educators, Counselors, Administrators, Secretarial Staff, Nurses, Custodians, and more!

Summary of Themes from Students & Staff

Overall consensus:

- **Model 1 (Reinstate a building-based SRO):** important to have someone who has necessary trainings & can build strong relationships in the high school community, although a full-time SRO can make students uncomfortable, especially if the SRO is armed with a gun.
- **Model 2 (No building-based SRO; any on-duty SPD dispatched as needed):** least preferred because it would not allow for relationship building with students and staff. Response time might be slower in emergencies.
- **Model 3 (No SRO, but have a dedicated, trained officer available):** could be a good compromise between models 1 and 2 because the individual is trained, accessible, but not stationed in the school. This could hinder relationship building and response time in emergencies.

Previous School Safety Model: School Resource Officers

- A law enforcement officer or officers; armed and often in plain clothes
- Selected by the Chief of Police in consultation with the Superintendent
- Full-time; stationed at the high school
- Received specialized training in child and adolescent training, conflict resolution, behavioral health, and other training required by the Municipal Police Training Committee
- Ability to make arrests related to 16 reportable incidents

School Perspective

- Assemblies, student focus groups, and staff surveys convey the complexity of feelings about police presence at the high school
- We want to respect the range of valid perspectives on this issue
- As administrators, there will always be some instances where we (student, staff, and families) need effective police response
- What is most valuable to us as administrators is clarity of process, especially in emergencies, and established relationships between students and staff with a responding officer when possible

District Recommendation: School Liaison Officer(s)

Based on all stakeholder feedback, the district recommends establishing a new model:

School Liaison Officer (SLO)

SLO model will include **2 part-time SPD officers** who:

- Will be assigned to support the high school on a part-time basis.
- Are specially trained in juvenile matters & work specifically with youth and families in Somerville.
- Officers are detectives who receive additional, specialized **training in child and adolescent development, conflict resolution and diversion strategies, de-escalation tactics, anti-bias and trauma informed practices, behavioral health and other training.**
- Will build relationships with students, staff, and families in a number of structured ways.
- When not supporting the high school, these officers may be assigned to cover youth and family service related investigations in SPD's Family Services Unit.

District Recommendation: School Liaison Officer(s)

Details & SLO Roles at High School

- Assigned to support the high school on a **part-time** basis.
- **Will not play a role in enforcing disciplinary or code of conduct violations**, but will focus on de-escalation, fostering positive relationships, and promoting public safety.
- In case of emergencies, admin will call 911. If available, **SLOs will respond first**.
- Will usually appear in business attire, but occasionally be in a police uniform. Will be armed.
- Will build relationships with students, staff, and families in **predetermined, structured ways**.
- Support high school admin in public safety protocols and best practices
- SLO model will be **guided by MOU** signed by Superintendent & Police Chief.

SLO Model: Key Changes

SRO Model / Past Practice

- Full-time officer(s), stationed at high school
- Receives specialized training
- Present whenever SHS is in session
- Builds relationships with students/staff in unstructured/informal ways
- Arrests made outside of school “whenever possible”

SLO Model / District Improvements

- Part-time liaison officers
- Expanded + increased training, including de-escalation and anti-bias
- Builds relationships through structured process, scheduled events and meetings
- Limits what matters warrant police response
- Establishes clear report/complaint process, data sharing limitations
- School admin respond first to incidents except in emergencies

School Climate Support & Success

Ensuring a safe and affirming school environment requires multiple forms of support and resources:

Current social-emotional learning (SEL) & Mental Health Investments

- **Mediation** - Expanded to include 4 mediators; includes peer to peer training
 - SY 21-22: 200+ cases involving 2 or more students
 - SY 22-23: 125 cases in first quarter
- **Embedded Counseling** - increased contracts for out of district therapy, including one specific to LGBTQIA+ youth
 - SY 21-22: 400+ students served
 - SY22-23: 180 students served in first quarter
- **School-based Social Workers in every school** - provide Tier 2 and 3 interventions
 - SY 22-23: 130+ students and families served with one-on-one support and access to wraparound services. 24 clinical groups with approximately 110 students supported.
- **Mental-Health First Aid Training** for educators

School Climate Support & Success

Ensuring a safe and affirming school environment requires multiple forms of support and resources:

Additional Investments

- **Restorative Justice** - SPS committed to district-wide implementation over the next 3 years; Suffolk University training began this year.
- **Community Engagement Specialists (CES)** - Shifted away from security guard model. Five CES staff establish relationships with students by engaging in positive conversations, and build connections with SHS staff and families.
- **Mental-Health First Aid Training** - Partnering with the City to train youth-led ambassadors
- **De-escalation Training** - More than 22 staff trained this school year. 100 staff trained last January. Three additional facilitators being trained in January. Will continue to implement two trainings per year for all appropriate staff.

Summary: SLO Model

- Recognizes + incorporates needs of both students and staff
- Model 2 (no SPS-SPD relationship) was least desirable across all stakeholders
- Includes 2 part-time, trained community officers who are dedicated liaisons
- SLOs work with stakeholders in a structured way, with reporting + data sharing
- Officers will not enforce disciplinary violations; will respond first in case of emergency (via 911) + primarily work to de-escalate incidents

Next Steps

- Special Policing Subcommittee deliberates and votes in December 2022
- Special Policing Subcommittee makes a recommendation to the School Committee for final approval in January 2023.
- Finalize job description for new position; Chief and Superintendent will select potential candidates together. Selected candidates will meet high school student leaders; they will offer the Chief and Superintendent feedback.
- New liaison officers begin role February 2023; they will conduct student and staff meet & greets & listening sessions alongside school administration.