



SPS School Liaison Officers

District Proposal Nov 30, 2022

The SPS [Special Policing Subcommittee](#) has been tasked with voting on a recommendation to the School Committee about whether School Resource Officers (SROs) should be reinstated, permanently removed, or re-envisioned. The Special Policing Subcommittee aims to bring the School Committee a recommendation by January 2023.

Community Process

Since January 2022, the district, City administration, Somerville Police Department, and Special Policing Subcommittee have worked to gather input from all stakeholders, including through regular subcommittee meetings, focus groups, surveys, and public forums. This Fall, the district has held numerous student focus groups moderated by Dr. Gretchen Brion-Miesels and trained doctoral students, as well as surveyed high school staff about different school safety models. Across all student and staff groups, the current model of school safety was least preferred. The general consensus from high school students is to not restore the SRO program, though some Latinx students and recent immigrant students felt more positively about reinstating the SRO. The majority of students favor a re-envisioned school safety model with a trained officer not based at the high school. The majority of high school staff prefer a School Resource Officer, although they recognize some students will likely feel negatively impacted by the presence of an armed officer at school.

District Recommendation

Feedback from high school students and staff was clear that the status quo for school safety in situations requiring police assistance is not acceptable. Our schools need a clear partnership and communication protocol between school and police personnel, along with delineated roles and responsibilities. An effective partnership helps maintain a positive school climate for students, families, and staff and can promote school safety by ensuring a trained, known officer is first to respond. School administrators – not police – must always be responsible for school code of conduct and routine disciplinary violations. There are some students for whom the presence of any armed officer makes them feel less safe. But there are limited instances in which school administrators and educators must call on law enforcement. In those instances, it is critical to have a trained, culturally competent officer who has an established positive relationship with SPS students.



Recognizing and incorporating the needs of [both students and staff](#), the district recommends establishing a School Liaison Officer (SLO) model in partnership with two part-time juvenile officers in the Somerville Police Department. These officers are part-time detectives specially trained to work with youth and families in Somerville. When they are not supporting the high school, the juvenile officers will have an assigned caseload involving youth and family service matters in the SPD Family Services Unit.

The SLOs will receive specialized training, including in child and adolescent development, conflict resolution and diversion strategies, de-escalation tactics, anti-bias and trauma informed practices, behavioral health and any other training required by the Municipal Police Training Committee. The Officers will serve as a community resource for high school students, families, and staff. The SLOs will attend youth events throughout Somerville and spend limited, structured time at the high school to facilitate relationship building with SPS students, staff, and families, in the following proposed format:

- Intentionally introduced to school community by the school principals
- Be available for coffee hours or workshops for staff, teachers, and students who wish to interact. Come to the high school campus based on request and scheduled interactions with school administrators, staff, teachers, and student body
- Offer regular meetings with school administrators to understand ongoing safety concerns
- Attend high school athletics, extracurriculars, and/or other youth community events
- Focus on developing positive relationships with students, staff, parents, and guardians

The SLOs will also enhance public safety at the high school in the following ways:

- Support Community Engagement Specialists, Deans & Assistant Principals in strategic building safety management protocols and best practices
- Assist high school leadership team, student services, and SPS central administration with safety evaluations, safety drills, and fire drills at the high school

In case of an emergency, SPS administrators will still call 911 and an SLO will respond to the emergency if available. If the Officer is already on campus and/or if they are available, they may be the first on the scene. If the SLOs are not available, other SPD officers will respond.



SLOs will be armed and will generally appear in business casual attire rather than uniform. SLOs do not play a role in school discipline. Their role is focused on promoting public safety, fostering relationships, and preventing situations from escalating that might require additional police response.

The proposed model not only recognizes the needs of students and staff, it also offers an opportunity to build relationships grounded in collaboration and trust that will lead to mutual understanding and respect.

Memorandum of Understanding Elements

The School Liaison Officers will be guided by a memorandum of understanding (MOU), signed by the Superintendent of Schools and the Chief of Police, that formalizes and clarifies implementation of the partnership between the district and police. The new MOU will establish key guidelines such as when and how police and schools share information and what school matters warrant a call to police. SPS has used the Middlesex District Attorney model in the past, but will shift to the [State Model MOU](#) as a minimum requirement. There are some areas where the district will make additional recommendations that go beyond the minimum requirements in the State MOU.

While the Special Policing Subcommittee is not tasked with voting on the MOU, which is signed by the Superintendent of Schools and the Chief of Police, we believe that it is helpful to outline some of the key shifts.

Police Involvement

<i>Current Model</i>	<i>New Model</i>
16 mandatory reportable incidents	Three instances of criminal and delinquent conduct: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poses substantial harm to physical wellbeing ● Willful, malicious, and substantial harm to school property ● Taking property of substantial value

Arrest

<i>Current Model</i>	<i>New Model</i>
Arrests should be made outside of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong preference for issuing a summons over an arrest ● Arrest at school limited, must try off-campus arrest first



school “whenever possible”	
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Accountability

<i>Current Model</i>	<i>New Model</i>
No accountability or complaint process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establishes a clear and simple complaint process ● Requires report of timely resolution ● Inform public of right to go to court to mandate compliance with MOU

Information Sharing

<i>Current Model</i>	<i>New Model</i>
Does not address this issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allow sharing information with police when it is “germane to a specific unlawful incident or a specific prospect of unlawful activity the school is otherwise required to report.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ E.g. sexual assault, sexting, weapons possession ● CANNOT be shared: immigration status, citizenship, neighborhood, religion, national origin, ethnicity, suspected / alleged / confirmed gang affiliation

Abuse & Neglect

<i>Current Model</i>	<i>New Model</i>
Share with SPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Abuse and neglect reported to DCF and NOT to police, unless there is an immediate threat to the student

Model Review

<i>Current Model</i>	<i>New Model</i>
Requires Chief of Police, Superintendent, and SRO to evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Superintendent, Chief of Police, and SLOs will meet at least bi-annually to assess performance and model ● School policing and discipline data will be shared publicly ● Information on officer performance will be shared within constraints of collective bargaining agreements and personnel rights as dictated by state and federal law