

# MEMO

**To: Somerville School Committee**  
**From: Special Policing Subcommittee Chair, Ellenor Barish**  
**Date: February 15, 2023**  
**Re: Recommendations of the Subcommittee**

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The Special Policing Subcommittee met eleven times over the course of the past thirteen months. For the first half of the year, the work of the subcommittee was primarily learning about the role of the School Resource Officer (SRO) in the past, about the purpose and content of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Somerville Public Schools and the Somerville Police Department (SPD) that was in place for recent years and the 2022 Commonwealth's Model MOU, and learning about Somerville Public Schools' (SPS) infrastructure of student support. After the start of the current school year, the Subcommittee heard feedback on school safety and policing in schools from community stakeholders including SPS students, staff, parents, and other concerned community members. This feedback was gathered through surveys, focus groups, public comment, and a web based comment form. At the end of November, Interim Superintendent Curley shared the district's proposal for police involvement in schools. In December and January, the Subcommittee considered that proposal and deliberated on recommendations. Presentations, meeting notes, and other related documents from all of the Subcommittee's meetings can be found on the Subcommittee's webpage.

**<https://somerville.k12.ma.us/district-leadership/somerville-school-committee/special-policing-subcommittee>**

At the Special Policing Subcommittee's January 31 meeting, members voted to make the following recommendations to the Somerville School Committee:

- 1. That the full school committee adopt the district's proposal to call the two police officers designated by SPD in emergency situations and direct the superintendent and/or his designee to develop guidance for SPS staff and administrators on their roles and responsibilities when calling and interacting with police that are based on the draft MOU SPS has been developing. Until such time that this guidance is developed and in place, the school department will work with legal counsel to ensure compliance with all applicable laws and our stated values to interrupt the school to prison pipeline.**

The "two police officers" referenced in the above recommendation were described in a proposal presented at the November 30 meeting of the Special Policing Subcommittee as follows: *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.*

In that same proposal, Dr. Curley presented some specific items he would like to see included in a future Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Somerville Public Schools and the Somerville Police Department, though the subcommittee has not seen a preliminary draft of a new MOU.

- 2. That the superintendent work to establish an MOU with the SPD focused on calling an off-site SLO for the three incidents of criminal and delinquent conduct named in the State's 2022 model MOU. Upon a tentative agreement with the SPD, the superintendent will bring back a draft for approval by the full School Committee.**

SLO stands for School Liaison Officer, distinguishing these officers from the legally defined School Resource Officer. The three incidents referenced in this recommendation include conduct that:

- Poses substantial harm to physical wellbeing
- Willful, malicious, and substantial harm to school property
- Taking property of substantial value

- 3. That the superintendent focus the MOU on the three incidents laid out in the district's original proposal, revising the purpose, mission, goals, and objectives sections of the model MOU and cutting the second full paragraph on page three that is about intervening in incidents that do not meet the thresholds of criminal and delinquent conduct.**

The paragraph referenced in this recommendation:

*For student conduct that requires immediate intervention to maintain safety (whether or not the conduct involves criminal conduct), the SRO may act to de-escalate the immediate situation (where feasible) and to protect the physical safety of members of the school community. To this end, school personnel may request the presence of the SRO when they have a reasonable and articulable fear of an imminent threat to their safety or the safety of students or other personnel.*

- 4. That the SPS budget not fund police involvement in schools.**

The SPS budget has not funded police involvement in schools in recent memory. At the January 19, 2022 meeting of the Special Policing Subcommittee, then Superintendent Mary Skipper raised this as a question that the subcommittee might address.