JUNE 2021

OTTAWA STUDENTS SPEAK OUT:

Cops Out of Our Schools!

ASILU

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge that this report was completed on the unceded and stolen lands of the Algonquin Anishinaabe. As we move forward with our work, we continue to honour the original stewards of these lands.

ASILU

WHO WE ARE

Our No Cops In School campaign and research report

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Asilu Collective is a Black and brown women-led abolitionist group committed to police-free schools on the unceded and stolen lands of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people. As settlers, we are committed to uplifting the voices and demands of the people whose land we reside on and we see our abolitionist organizing as a means to do so.

Our No Cops In School campaign aims to terminate the School Resource Officer program from all Ottawa public schools and to end any existing relationships between public school boards and Ottawa Police Services. Police and policing-free schools across the city is the first and foremost step towards healthy and barrier-free education for marginalized youth in so-called Ottawa.

The purpose of this research report is to call attention to the ways in which policing in schools impacts marginalized youth across all facets of their lives-- both in the short-term and long-term. This report also puts forward actionable recommendations for Ottawa public school boards that we strongly encourage them to engage with.

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SECTION 1.1
Literature Review

Policing has historically been a project of Canadian state violence that disproportionately targets Black and Indigenous peoples. No different is the practice of policing in schools, which, despite claims of security, relationship, and trust-building, is, too, a mode of racial control and discipline for children and youth of colour. Collusion between school administrations and police forces in Canada has a historical basis in Indian Residential Schools, which were established in the 19th century. The RCMP kidnapped Indigenous children from their families to facilitate Canada's genocidal project, and from this stems the continuation of policing culture and practice to regulate the behaviour and life trajectory of Black, I

Indigenous, and racialized students today. A wealth of published knowledge indicates that school policing, not limited to police-in-school programs but also school policing infrastructure (e.g., hall monitors, security cameras), policies (e.g., zero-tolerance codes of conduct), and practice (e.g., punitive measures), produce disastrous long-term effects for exposed students (Madan, 2016).

Moreover, school policing generates negligible results as a strategy for improving school safety or student well-being according to this same literature (Madan, 2016). In fact, as Madan (2016) notes, research shows that schools with School Resource Officers (SROs) are responsible for higher rates of suspensions, expulsions, and transfers than schools without SROs. In addition, rates of arrests for so-called disorderly conduct are more than five times greater in schools with an SRO than without one (Madan, 2016).

Through disciplinary measures disproportionately applied to students of colour, the Canadian school system has been racialized to lead youth of colour and immigrant youth to intensified police contact both in and out of school (Madan, 2016). This disproportionate contact is often referred to as the "school-to-prison pipeline." This system targets marginalized youth within school settings through disciplinary policies and patterns of socialization in order to push them out of the education system and into incarceration (Bernard and

Smith, 2018). High rates of incarceration for Black and Indigenous youth in Ontario detention centres, up to 10x more than their white peers, demonstrates the effectiveness of this pipeline in Canadian schools (Salole and Abdulle, 2015). Education, just like the criminal justice system, becomes a site of racialized control which is only strengthened by the presence of police in schools (Bernard and Smith, 2018).

Madan (2016) argues that racial power is constitutive of the Ontario SRO program itself, "that it is not simply an effect or consequence of the program's existence but the very instrument through which it operates." In their research on Toronto's SRO program, Abigail Tsionne Salole and Zakaria Abdulle conclude that the program undermines a healthy educational environment for youth because police presence implicitly labels students as untrustworthy (Salole and Abdulle, 2015). Canadian studies by Ruck and Wortley (2002) and Kovalenko (2012) exhibit the knowledge that students have about this labelling along with other forms of discrimination. Racialized and immigrant youth are more likely to not only perceive the discrimination that they are subject to in school but also locate it as racially motivated; from teacher mistreatment and school suspensions to the discretionary use of police by school administration and treatment by SROs (Kovalenko, 2012). Another Canadian study shows that Black students (justly) feel the school's use of police is primarily to control and supervise their behaviours (Ruck and Wortley 2002). Socialization through discipline has dire impacts on student

mental health as they begin to understand themselves in the way they are perceived by the administration and police officers (Bernard and Smith, 2018).

In their study of policing in Toronto schools, Salole and Abdulle (2015) find that the adultification of the behaviour of students of colour invokes the use of SROs in trivial matters. Their findings are supported by similar scholarly research which asserts that marginalized youth, particularly youth of colour, are not permitted leniences afforded to their white peers (Salole and Abdulle, 2015). "Instead of being treated like a 'misguided youth', for example, Ferguson (2001) explains that when student behaviour is decontextualized the noncompliance of even young children can be 'adultified,'" and that "'transgressions are made to take on a sinister, intentional, fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naiveté' and '[i]n the case of African American kids, what might be interpreted as the careless behavior of children is displaced by images of adult acts of theft that conjure up violence and mayhem'" (Salole and Abdulle, 2015). Criminalized behaviour induces police response both pre-emptively and reactively. Kovalenko (2012) writes that "more privileged youth are governed through gentle strategies and support from school, families and social services. Meanwhile more marginalized youth, like the youth participants in (their) investigation, are governed through more punitive and disciplinary strategies," including the use of police officers.

For over 20 years, Ottawa Police Services (OPS) has provided Ottawa's four publicly-funded school boards with armed and uniformed police officers as part of the SRO program (Ottawa Police Services). Additionally, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), the Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB), the Conseil des Écoles Catholique Centre-Est (CÉCCE), and the Conseil des Écoles Publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario (CEPEO) are all signatories to the Protocol to Accompany Safe Schools Policies in the City of Ottawa; which includes the Protocol for Police Involvement in the Schools of Ottawa (The Regional Safe Schools Committee of Ottawa, 2011). According to the latter agreement, "it will assist in providing greater safety and protection of students, teachers, principals, staff, and volunteers in the school. It will also facilitate appropriate sharing and disclosure of information" (The Regional Safe Schools Committee of Ottawa, 2011). However, at its essence, SROs are a strategy of racial power premised on white supremacist ideas of which bodies require surveillance, discipline, and control and which bodies deserve protection and nurturing (Madan, 2016). ◼

SECTION 1.2
Our Research Methodology

Over the past year, our team has collected qualitative primary data from current and former Ottawa public school students through three online forms. The first was a "Share Your Story" feature on Asilu Collective's petition form, the second was a survey about Ottawa SROs conducted by Asilu Collective, and the third was a survey about racism in Ottawa schools conducted by Ottawa Student Equity Coalition. The majority of question prompts from each online form were purposely open-ended to provide participants with the freedom to speak to whichever experiences they saw fit. When referring to participants' gender identity, we use the terms female and male as adjectives to mean any woman/girl and any man/boy, respectively (trans-inclusive).

The petition form prompted participants to share a personal experience with SROs or Ottawa Police Services (OPS), their perspective on policing in schools and why they think police presence in schools should end, and/or something they have witnessed that supports removing police from schools. Participants indicated if they were a student, educator, parent or guardian, or community member and for the purposes of this student-focused report, we have only included testimonies from those who indicated "student" or who explicitly spoke to their experiences as a student in their response (former students of Ottawa public school boards are included). We also asked participants to indicate which school board they were or are affiliated with. Participants overwhelmingly belonged to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) (79.3%) with Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB) (10.3%), Conseil des Écoles Publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario (CÉPEO) (3.4%), and Conseil des Écoles Catholiques du Centre-Est (CÉCCE) (0%) following. We have a total of 29 testimonies from this form.

Our survey for current and former Ottawa students collected school board, graduating year, racial and/or ethnic identity, and gender identity demographics. A total of 66 individuals participated in the survey. The large majority of respondents, 57 (86.3%), are students and alumni of OCDSB. There are 7 respondents who are students and alumni of OCSB (10.6%) and 2 respondents who are alumni of CECCE (3%). The respondents represent current and former students nearly equally with 32 (48.4%) being current students (graduating classes of 2021 - 2024) and 34 (51.5%) being alumni who graduated between 2004 - 2020. Of the 66 respondents, 11 (10.44%) are Black, 2 (2.98%) are Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, Métis), 15 (16.41%) are non-Black and non-Indigenous people of colour, and 38 (56.71%) are white. In terms of gender identity, 12 (18.2%) respondents are gender diverse (non-binary, genderfluid and/or trans), 39 (59.1%) are women, 13 (19.6%) are men, and 2 (3%) did not respond to this question.

Ottawa Student Equity Coalition's survey collected demographic data on race/ethnicity, age, gender identity, and school board from current and former Ottawa students. This survey collected qualitative data on the broad topic of racism in Ottawa schools, therefore we chose to hand-select student submissions that included mentions of SROs, police presence or involvement in schools, and stories of criminalized behaviour at the hands of school administrators. These testimonies came from 42 students aged 14 to 32. 40.5% are Black, 0% are Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, Métis), 52.3% are non-Black and non-Indigenous people of colour, and 7.1% are white. Women made up 78.6% of participants with men at 14.3%, gender non-conforming folks at 2.3%, and 4.7% preferred not to say. For school boards, 59.5% of participants are current students or alumni of OCDSB, 31% for OCSB, and 4.7% for each CÉCCE and CÉPEO. ■

SECTION 2
Impacts on Youth

This section contains the thematic content analysis of our qualitative findings. There are six primary themes developed from our manual coding, where sub-themes are included as we saw fit. Each theme contains direct quotations from (current or former) student participants along with an analysis and published evidence to support our conclusions. The student quotations do not contain identifiable information.

SECTION 2.1
Racialized Youth

The presence of SROs not only polices the lives of racialized youth outside the classroom, but affect racialized youth's mistreatment within the class setting as overpoliced youth labelled as "trouble-makers" become over-disciplined by educators (Kovalenko, 2012). Conversely, students seen as disruptive or misbehaved in the classroom are more likely to have interactions with SROs. A former OCDSB student who had SROs in her school multiple times a week outlines this when writing, "Troubled kids. Kids with substance abuse issues, those who had a

reputation for being "disruptive" [are most spoken to by SROs]." Many other study participants used the term "troubled" or similar language to describe who their SRO interacted with the most. As students are repeatedly singled out and disproportionately disciplined, they become isolated in their learning space and thus have a unique barrier to learning due to internalized perceptions of competency. Meaningful student participation by youth in class settings is undercut by the implicit and explicit outcomes of policing and unequal treatment by officers, educators, and school administrators (Salole & Abdulle, 2015). Racialized youth are especially prone to this treatment as educators are often quicker to penalize them and they are more likely to be targeted by SROs. A former OCDSB student writes, "I witnessed the harm having police in schools did first hand. To myself and other students, the resource officer of our school would repeatedly target the same groups of students. Young, impressionable students were labeled and harassed, some searched without parents or guardians present at the time." Another former OCDSB student, an Inuk woman, writes that they "knew [SROs] targeted a certain demographic at my school". Targetted approaches to discipline and harassment by educators and SROs to attribute markers of a "good student" to other, more privileged, youth who are most often white (Musto, 2019). Racialized youth internalize and carry these fabricated ideals years into their education which subsequently affects their class performance, post-secondary education, and career prospects (Musto, 2019).

A Black female former OCDSB student reported that harsher punishments are often given to racialized youth, while non-racialized youth are often let off with "a warning, multiple warnings" because of how educators and SROs alike perceive white innocence. The disproportionate rate at which racialized youth are disciplined not only negatively affects academic performance but leaves them victim to unjust suspensions and increased contact with police (Kovalenko, 2012). A current OCDSB student who is racialized expresses this experience by saying: "I've almost been suspended various times over incidents that I had nothing to do with when white-skinned students who were a part of the problem were let off with warnings. It doesn't help when the entire admin staff is white so no one can relate." Collusion between school administrators and SROs is directly responsible for the transfer of racialized students out of schools and into the criminal justice system. This is especially concerning for racialized immigrant youth who are vulnerable to criminalization under the mechanisms of the school-to-deportation pipeline (Bergen & Abji, 2019).

"[Teacher name] has admitted to not liking students of colour because they were always the most misbehaved," - A racialized former OCDSB student

"Although I have not encountered them, my brother has. And being perceived as a black boy by society, and who just so happened to not be quiet or shy or one to say nothing when he was being treated unfairly, he's had a bad encounter with them. I do not think putting criminal catchers and brutalizes in schools is going to improve relationships or build trust of any kind. I don't know what Chief Sloly was thinking, man." - A Black current OCDSB student

> **Every time I would see a police officer in schools I would always get anxious (I'm a person of colour and live in a low-income neighbourhood). This feeling has always been with me since I was young and honestly, that's sad. No child should be worried about police officers. I find that a lot of my BIPOC peers always stiffen up and change their personalities somewhat (by that I mean they take down their attitude a bit) in front of cops just so they don't get in trouble (despite not doing anything). - A racialized current OCDSB student**

SECTION 2.1a
Knowledge of Discrimination

"I was homeschooled most of my life, and only attended junior kindergarten and am currently attending high school. In my relatively short in-school experience I have not yet encountered a police presence that I remember. But

if I did or do, I don't feel like they'd be there for MY 'safety'," writes a Black current OCDSB student revealing two important realities that racialized students face with police presence in their schools: (1) internalization and (2) increased self-awareness, also called hypervigilance. A racialized student is already wary that their social identifiers, including race and ethnicity, create opportunity for police discrimination in schools. A previously homeschooled student who has yet to interact with an SRO already has safety concerns given their everyday lived experiences of being racialized. Their testimony shows hyper-vigilance that could transform into an internalization. By saying "I don't feel like they'd be there for MY 'safety'" the youth reveals that their existence as a student of colour does not fall under the criteria of what a student worthy of safety looks like in Ottawa. Madan (2016) explains that society attaches villainy to Blackness; thus, the presence of a Black student is easily used to defend police presence. The author states, "the spaces and bodies associated with blackness always already signify violence and criminality, falling outside the realm of justice and universality. Therefore, any violence enacted towards these bodies is legitimized by the need to maintain order in schools and keep them 'safe'." This statement also reveals that this knowledge of discrimination through hypervigilance means that students will likely not call on the SRO for help if they need it, fearing that they may instead be punished in the process. This finding of fear is supported by Ruck and Wortley's work on policing in Ontario schools (Ruck and Wortley, 2002).

"They walked the halls and only spoke/approached groups of students of colour. Not once had I seen them approach a group of white students while at my school." - A Black former OCSB student

"[SROs primarily interacted with] students of colour" - An Inuk former OCDSB student

A female Inuk former OCDSB student reports "I felt like I was more likely to be arrested or stopped by them than the white students". The mere presence of SROs is a reminder of what their Indigeneity costs them in their hyper-policed schools. Research shows that internalization and hyper-vigilance could greatly affect student confidence and mental health as students begin to believe they actually are less worthy than their white peers. Conclusions from Salole & Abdulle (2015) support these findings through their examination of implicit labelling of students and how administration and police already expect less from racialized youth. In addition, it is well studied that internalization harms the mental health of racialized people (James et al, 2010; Pyke, 2010). This aspect of emotional strain is further explained in section 2.iii. ∎

A racialized current CÉPEO student writes that "Even though I never caused trouble in school I always felt the need to take a detour every time I would [see] our schools police officers so as not to tempt my faith and I should not have felt as thought my life were in danger when I was meant to be studying," further exemplifying Ottawa student knowledge on discriminatory behaviour enacted by SROs. Furthermore, it showcases the ways in which their behaviour is altered as a result. Numerous other student testimonies also speak to taking detours and leaving the school premises completely in order to avoid the possibility of police contact. A negative internalization of discrimination is likely occurring with SRO presence in Ottawa schools.

"Racism, makes school feel uncomfortable. They follow u around and it just freaks us students out their will always be a fear for us students with immigrant parents, or coloured backgrounds. We don't need the extra stress. Their useless anyways and just stand around to intimidate u and show u their the big guys." - A current OCDSB student

SECTION 2.2
Gender-oppressed Youth

Policing in schools regularly causes serious harm to gender-oppressed students (that is, trans and cis women/girls, nonbinary people, trans men/boys, and/or gender non-conforming people) both in its official, school-sanctioned duties and when individual officers act outside of them. Measures purportedly intended to address sexual violence instead reinforce a culture where victims and survivors are not only shamed and intimidated into silence but even threatened with criminalization themselves. "When i had issues with sexual harassment at school," one female former OCSDB student said, "they never took them seriously and made myself and my friends feel like it was our fault and not a serious issue." A female OCDSB alumnus recalls that an SRO threatened her with child pornography charges when her ex-partner shared her nude photos without her consent. "What I needed," she expresses, "was support not to be made to feel even more powerless. The SRO program does not support students." Other accounts make it clear that this was a widespread practice and not a one-off incident. Another person, a non-binary alumnus, describes being subject to school assemblies about revenge porn that placed the blame on young girls for their own victimization.

> "SROs either had no impact or a negative impact depending on the student. The precursor to the kind of impact was not dependent on any character flaws or inherent traits of the student but simply whether they were a girl (slut shaming) or BIPOC (racial profiling and other systemically engrained racist impacts) or both." - A non-binary former OCDSB student

Reasonably fearing a situation like that of the previous respondent, they were unable to safely reach out for help from adults when it happened to them. The same person remarks that "most of [their] friends who were LGBTQI+ did not make it to graduation without being sexually assaulted" and points to SROs as perpetuating rape culture. Much literature and media coverage in recent years has highlighted how reporting sexual violence can itself be painful and retraumatizing for survivors. Testimonials from students illustrate how this process plays out within Ottawa schools. A non-binary transmasc OCDSB alumnus describes how they and their friend, who "was in full tears," were pressured against their

will into filing a report against a sexual abuser. One of the SROs involved, a woman, appeared sympathetic but still "couldnt understand why [they] wouldnt want to do it." That is, even when showing apparent concern for survivors, SROs refused to acknowledge that such action could and was causing further harm to them. In other instances, when students did attempt to come forward about sexual violence, officers actively undermined and dismissed survivors' experiences, or else accused them of lying. Of a friend's experience with reporting, one respondent says that "[i]nstead of listening and responding with empathy, my school's SRO tried to poke holes in her story." Another SRO forcibly confined a current OCDSB student in a locked room and coerced her into giving a witness statement to a sexual assault she had not been around for herself, telling her she could only leave once she had done so. At the same time, he interrogated her about whether she believed the victim had fabricated their claims.

As well, students repeatedly identify SROs as a source of gender-based violence and harassment themselves. Multiple participants bring up instances of sexual and gendered harassment from SROs themselves against gender-oppressed students such as trapping two young girls in a room and screaming at them for twenty minutes. This can and has had a severe negative impact on the well-being of those targeted, as with one person who says that "being in the vicinity of an officer, that alone is enough to induce one of [their] fucking crippling anxiety attacks." Additionally, two people refer to

incidents where SROs stalked youth. This behaviour is sometimes rationalized as an extension of their duties, though it may extend beyond the school day, as with an SRO who "broke into [a student's] home to prove she was doing drugs." This demonstrates again how their more blatant transgressions are still deeply entwined with and enabled by their official duties to surveil and criminalize students.

The focus in schools on surveilling and policing students also overlooks other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by adults in positions of power, as with teachers who groom and prey on young people, cases of which continue come to light in more recently. A former K-12 OCSDB student says that "[s]ome of these incidents [of child sexual assault] have gone on for years and SROs are not equipped, nor were they ever equipped, in assisting in these situations." Another alumnus describes, looking back on their school experiences as an adult, putting together patterns of inappropriate and alarming behaviour from one such teacher who was later exposed in the media. They "even as a student thought some stuff was vaguely sketchy but god knows where the cop was or what he was doing." SRO-led efforts to tackle sexual violence, focussed on victim-blaming rhetoric that instills shame and fear, fail youth by leaving them unprepared to actually identify predatory behaviour and power dynamics present in school settings, while never placing that same scrutiny on adult perpetrators. In the first respondent's words, "SROs are intimidating and harmful presences in

schools. They should be removed immediately with resources devoted to actually creating a school culture that allows cases of child sexual assault not to be the norm."

SROs' position as a part of the school-to-prison pipeline inherently precludes them from effectively supporting impacted students. While they may "emphasize that they were here for us students just like any teacher or guidance counsellor… the way they patrol the halls carrying visible weapons and protective gear definitely contradicts that message." These responses unambiguously demonstrate that the current, policing-focussed approach to addressing sexual violence in OCDSB schools is not only ineffective but itself a preventable cause of further harm and trauma. ∎

"The police officer at my high school… stalked someone I knew at this same school a few years later back to her home and broke into her home to prove she was doing drugs (he'd been harassing her previous to this incident). He was later charged. He only caused more harm in being present in a learning environment. There is no reason for police officers to have an active presence in schools." - A former OCDSB student

"They did assemblies about revenge porn. Yet they focused on shaming and scaring the girls. They said we could be charged for creating and distributing child pornography therefore if it was shared around the school it was our fault for not being smart. It was our fault for taking the nudes in the first place. My friends and I felt annoyed and confused and ashamed. We didn't know if we could take pictures in bikinis. We didn't tell anyone when our pictures were shared without our consent. When my boyfriend shared mine without my consent I was terrified I was going to be arrested so I told no adults and just suffered alone." - A non-binary former OCDSB student

SECTION 2.3
Mental and Emotional Impacts

There are significant adverse mental health effects Ottawa students experience as a direct result of SROs. Students report poor self-esteem and negative self-perceptions created by SRO surveillance. White students are also noticing these stark differences: "As a white woman I feel like [SROs] didn't affect me to the extent it affected others," a current OCDSB student writes. Student testimonies from our study reveal that youth felt (in their own words) anxious, tense, fearful, mistrustful, stressed, victim-blamed, criminalized, patronized, uneasy, scared, and uncomfortable with police presence in schools: "like there's [a] rat in my house," says one Black former OCDSB student. A current OCDSB student writes that SROs "made the [school's] atmosphere tense, my poc friends were especially anxious."Biomedical research shows that prolonged exposure to stressors is known to have short and long-term health effects (Chestnut et al., 2021). For one's mental health, this could lead to developing anxiety, depression, and/or low self-esteem (Chestnut et al, 2021; Kovalenko, 2012). When students are continuously in a state of fear and anxiety, they are not able to focus well in school, which can have long-lasting effects--physically, mentally and for future aspirations.

"Police have no business being in schools if there is no legitimate and immediate threat to the safety of the entire student body and faculty. As a student growing up in the early 2000s in the Ottawa Carleton school board, I never felt supported or worthy, I was made to feel completely worthless and inadequate by my supposed educators. We need more black and brown teachers educating our children . We must do better because god knows I've spent nearly my entire 20s going through therapy for the shit I went through At the hands of systematic racism at schools." - A racialized former OCDSB student

The self-esteem of racialized students is significantly affected by internalizing the disproportionate discipline they are subject to. As a result, they believe they are incapable of progressing to post-secondary education or excelling in future endeavours (Bernard and Smith, 2018). This is consistent with experiences of students in Ottawa schools as, as highlighted above, a former OCDSB graduate revealed that they were "made to feel completely worthless and inadequate by [their] supposed educators." Policing in schools inherently categorizes students and their behaviour as deviant and criminal which can greatly impact their self-perceived notions on identity and actually escalate undesirable behaviour (Kovalenko, 2012). The racist treatment by educators compounded by that of SROs drastically intensifies these experiences. This is highlighted by an Afro-Arab former OCDSB student who writes that SROs "[m]ade school feel like a prison, made students feel inferior and punished" which does not foster an appropriate learning environment for students who felt constricted and unsafe to the point of having to leave "the premises when cops were there." Research has found that youth actively care about their education, however, when SROs are present the constant surveillance and over-regulation affects their ability to learn effectively which correlates to seemingly 'bad' behaviour such as leaving school to prioritize their mental health and safety as quoted above (Salole & Abdulle, 2015). Concurrently, labelling youth, especially racialized youth, as criminals through SRO policing and the school-to-prison pipeline correlates to future deviance (Kovalenko, 2012). SROs

evidently escalate great harms to Ottawa student self-esteem and self-perceptions. This is especially worrying considering that SROs and school policing are not interventions that only affect the lives of youth during the time they are in secondary education, but rather they have the ability to negatively affect the long-term trajectory of the affected students' lives.
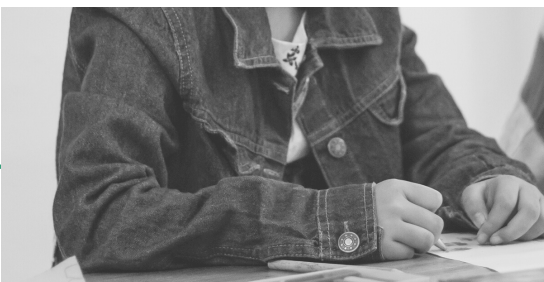
> "(SROs) gave kids a hard time. Folks tended to come from disadvantaged backgrounds at my school. Struggles that would have been better addressed through [support] were often dealt with by officers instead. A lot of kids were criminalized for behaviours that were really just symptoms of mental health/addiction struggles. Overall, though, the SROs didn't do a whole lot. Just kind of walked around and made people feel like they were always being surveilled." - A former OCDSB student

The quoted testimony from a former OCDSB student paints a telling picture of how criminalization in schools exacerbates mental health issues as opposed to fostering a safe environment where schools should support the mental and emotional wellbeing of their students. Surveyed Ottawa students conveyed inadequate support for their mental health, for instance, a recent OCDSB graduate wrote that schools need "mental health access (more social workers + psychologists, ones that work w marginalized groups), art supplies, better guests for assemblies (especially for mental health!!! Bring in a psychologist)." Another student expressed that "schools also need to be investing in mental health intervention that ACTUALLY prioritizes the student & real confidentiality." As the above quote makes evident, the constant fear of surveillance by SROs is partnered with a lack of appropriate mental healthcare for students who lack a safe space to express their mental and emotional anxieties. This is a particular issue when students feel as though SROs affect the very reason they attend school, to learn and gain valuable knowledge, where one student writes "It makes it feel less safe, and less like a learning environment." This directly calls attention to the way resources are being funded in Ottawa schools and the concerning implications of school boards' support toward policing over providing necessary mental and emotional support for youth to facilitate their learning. ■

"School is where every child deserves to feel safe and secure to grow and develop their intellectual and emotional wellness." - A former OCDSB student

"Very uncomfortable especially knowing they were paid more than my actual teachers" - A Black former OCDSB student

"Having SROs in the school pointed out to the rest of us the people who were "in trouble" which alienated students from each other. SROs were always in the position of power and authority - you couldn't say no to a conversation with them. These things don't foster better relationships, they fracture and divide." - A female former OCDSB student

SECTION 2.4
Creating an Unsafe Space: School Atmosphere and Heightened Surveillance

"I don't mess with feds, when they were at my school I felt like there was an intruder in my house. It makes you feel like you need to watch their every move, you never know what they might be plotting." - A Black former OCDSB student

This section explains two themes, school atmosphere and heightened surveillance, both which create an unsafe space for students. Police presence in Ottawa schools create atmospheres of fear and intimidation. Student participants in our study write about feeling unsafe and surveilled in their learning environments, therefore indicating the detrimental effect they have on the creation of a healthy learning environment where all students feel comfortable. Research from other Canadian studies indicates the same negative effect where students in Ontario feel like they cannot perform well if continuously surveilled by police-in-school programs (Salole & Abdulle, 2015). Students exposed to the SRO program also indicate that schools with a majority white demographic would not have the same level of surveillance.

Feelings of unsafety from SROs come in many forms. Some students report hearing about incidents that others have had, while others report being followed, badgered, criminalized, and feeling anxious when approached by an SRO. This makes students feel like they are walking on eggshells at all times while having to maintain their grades and activities. As aforementioned, prolonged exposure to feelings of racism and hypervigilance is incredibly disastrous; therefore, will greatly hinder academic success and abilities to learn. Being unsafe in a place where youth spend the majority of their days adds additional stressors for youth, which again, could become detrimental to their health. Many student participants also report that their immigrant status adds another layer of criminalization for them which SROs use as a means to target them. Consequent of the school-to-deportation pipeline, students who were newcomers or who have immigrant parents felt especially at risk in the presence of SROs. One current OCDSB student writes, "Racism, make school feel uncomfortable. [SROs] follow you around and it just freaks us students out. There will always be a fear for us students with immigrant parents, or coloured backgrounds. We don't need the extra stress. They're useless anyways and just stand around to intimidate you and show you they're the big guys. Go find a useful role in society for once."

Notably, Ottawa students report that their school environment has become hostile due to alienation from other students. Youth can no longer engage normally with others in fear that they are seen as "people who were 'in trouble'". This could create barriers in making and maintaining friendships with peers. This could also increase the chances of the student becoming a target for other students for bullying or harassment. A social environment is a hallmark for a school setting; thus, students should be free to engage with each other in order to develop healthy and diverse social skills. Additionally, because of power dynamics, SROs engage in conversations with students when they (as minors) are incapable of consenting to that dialogue. Students have indicated that they feel helpless and powerless which is compounded by the fact that many feel as if knowing their rights against police authorities is meaningless when police have the upper hand in decision making. Mosher (2008) states that the differences in power dynamics between authority figures and students allow those in power, the SROs and school employees, to be "unconstrained by the law", even when students attempt to stand up for themselves using their legal rights. ■

"It made me feel uncomfortable because my school had a majority of non-white people. I knew if this was a white private school there'd be less surveillance by law enforcement. It was a white police officer who just patrolled the halls. It felt like they were waiting for something to happen all the time." - An Inuk former OCDSB student

-"It doesn't make me feel anymore secure, it brings me a sense of worry, a sense that something is wrong and almost like we're being restricted." - A former OCDSB student

"I remember one time I was coming into school late and a SRO was walking in at the same time and she glanced at me and I got a bit anxious and all I told myself at time was to 'go to class and don't look suspicious' (although there was nothing I had or could've done that would've got me in trouble), until she just said she liked my hair and to have a good day and I got calm again, but I think the anxiousness is just rooted inside from hearing about and seeing past events." - A former OCDSB student

SECTION 2.5
School Performance and Extracurriculars

In the above section, student experiences outlined how SROs negatively impact their learning environment. Ottawa's SRO program was established to provide safety and support to students, yet the nature of Ottawa Police Service's (OPS) historically violent roots and their contemporary function to control, discipline, and criminalize has instead created an uncomfortable and hostile learning environment for racialized, 2SLGBTQ+ and gender-oppressed students. Therefore, maintaining relationships with police forces through police-in-school programs and memorandum of understanding's replicates and intensifies systemic barriers by fostering a culture of punishment and surveillance (a carceral culture). In addition, a white, cishet male as the default culture is reflected in teacher and administration biases, curriculum content, school policy, and ultimately, student experiences during school activities. Salole & Abdulle (2015), found that "students excluded from school not only miss out on educational enrichment...they are simultaneously excluded from crucial meals and recreational programs." A school is a space for growth, play, discovery, and inspiration, but it is not the reality for the students who are targeted by SRO programs. For Black,

Indigenous, and other students of colour, people who use drugs, disabled, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth, school is a space of caution, fear, distrust and neglect where school performance and involvement in extracurriculars becomes significantly impacted.

According to OPS, Ottawa's SRO program allows police to address "incidents that occur when students are on the way to school or home after the school day may also be dealt with by the SRO," thereby leaving youth with no refuge from the abuses of policing outside of school (Ottawa Police Services). Given how racialized and low-income communities across the city are already over-policed, many students live lives where policing is inescapable.

> "I've always avoided them [SROs], because I've never felt safe around heavily padded, armed adults, traipsing around my school for no good reason while I'm trying to get an education."
> - A former OCDSB student

"I used to go to woodroffe high school and I didn't have a positive experience with the school's officer being Afro-Indigenous…I don't think police should be in schools because their targeting us and it's causing kids to drop out develop anxiety and depression fear for when they come to school it's bad enough we're nervous walking outside and seeing cop cars but now we fear when we're walking down the hallway."

A former OCDSB student reports that an SRO was stalking a student from their school. Another former OCDSB student details their experience with policing outside the grounds of the school: "I luckily had a better experience than many of my peers, but there was an SRO that was called during a day when students had permission from their parents to leave school for a protest, and while some of us were leaving, the SRO arrived and harassed us, making claims that it was going to make us look bad for standing up for what we believed in." Evidently, it is not just mental and emotional impacts that cause students to not involve themselves in extracurricular

activities after school, but also the physical presence of SROs who attempt to prevent them from doing so. Student testimonies also reveal that being a teenager is a time of great curiosity, exploration, and learning from mistakes. With police involvement and carceral culture on school grounds, Black students, Indigenous students and students of colour, are expected to adhere to a higher maturity level than white students their same age as a result of adultification. Racialized students, especially, quickly become aware that police officers, teachers, and administration watch them more closely, expecting them to make a mistake. This makes it harder to learn when students want to learn, which is supported by a former OCDSB student reporting that, "Young, impressionable students were labeled and harassed, some searched without parents or guardians present at the time". A harmful learning environment will create barriers to future success. This is explained in the next section's theme: future opportunities. ∎

SECTION 2.6
Future Opportunities Diminished

Relying on criminalization and heavily carceral punitive responses fails to treat students as children who should be nurtured into achieving their best capabilities. Specifically, strict zero-tolerance policies paired with badge and gun interventions or removal from the classroom disproportionately impact racialized youth and are a result of adultification. Unlike their white peers, Black, Indigenous, and other racialized students are expected to fail and face adult repercussions when they do. This process and outcome reduce students' ability to succeed in school and beyond graduation because, as they report, so much of their energy at school is spent in fear, uncertainty and frustration instead of experiencing healthy and safe learning. Kovalenko (2012) states, "One of the most prominent implications of the zero tolerance disciplinary policies is its negative impact on students' academic performance – students are essentially rendered incapacitated when they are suspended from the classroom setting." In addition, when students lose prolonged classroom instruction time, they are also more likely to be exposed to dangerous situations out of school as the school-to-prison pipeline is designed to cause (Kovalenko, 2012).

The school-to-prison pipeline, which targets marginalized students through disciplinary policies and patterns of socialization in order to push them out of school and into the criminal justice system, operates in plain sight throughout the Ottawa education system (Bernard and Smith, 2018). A racialized former OCDSB student recalls a life-altering incident following the criminalization of their behaviour: "I was charged with assault while this student who was racist towards me sat in class nothing was altered in his life. I was expelled I didn't get to graduate with my friends, and I was sent to a school outside of my district in LowerTown Ottawa how they thought that was beneficial I do not know!!! I spent a yr in and out of court over this, I hated/feared cops ever since that day. I hope for the new generation you will make a change with having "resource officers" in our schools they are of no benefit unless you are white. I was suspended for 5 days, and once I came back from my 5 day suspension they proceed to expell me, and arrest/charge me with assault".

"our school was 80% POC. Mostly boys. All the officers, mostly white men, had no relationship with parents or students. They weren't "fighting" anything except maybe the successful futures of those boys" - A current OCDSB student

Traumatizing events like these impact students and their families for life. Criminal records prevent job opportunities from being secured as well as post-secondary education enrolment in some cases, despite the fact that research shows how enrolment in education is actually a preventative measure in keeping young people away from the criminal justice system (Kovalenko, 2012). According to OPS, between 2017 and 2019 there were 324 criminal investigation reports done by SROs, 63 of which resulted in someone being charged (Ottawa Citizen, 2020). 63 Ottawa students subjected to psychological trauma, court expenses, and time out of school.

> **"[On relationship between students and SROs] Poor, they did not deter them from [making mistakes] they just opened the door for them to suspended and punished" - A racialized former OCDSB student**

As already mentioned, racialized youth are critically watched, excessively policed in school and out of school, and removed from school at disproportionate rates. Furthermore, racialized youth coming into contact with police at a higher rate than white youth increases the likelihood of them being processed by the justice system and sentenced to a prison term (Kovalenko, 2012). All of this creates internal and external barriers to their

academic success and equitable opportunities to learn. Kovalenko (2012) states that "education improves students' future opportunities." A Toronto District School Board study reported that more than a third of graduating African-Canadian students left high school with scarce resources to build a stable adult life (Bernard & Smith, 2015). Students come to school to learn and all they want is a learning environment where they excel and feel valued for who they are; which is something most white, cishet, male, abled, and high socioeconomic students are allowed. White students are given the chance to learn without hyper-surveillance, targeted intimidation, or the deep-seated fear that their mistakes will lead to criminalization. This is not the case for Black and Indigenous students or immigrant and refugee learners. Racialized and marginalized students report more police intervention at

> **"When I went to school under the OCDSB I think police would be present on a daily basis and would go around with canines to sniff out if high school students had drugs....They would be there to arrest black students if they got into fights with one another but the same was not applied to white students." - A former OCDSB student**

school, surveillance, emotional impact, and more suspensions for their behaviour as a result. What is unique about police-in-school programs is that it operates under the assumption that criminality exists and an officer must wait for it (Madan, 2016). SROs, the installation of security cameras, and hall monitors exist in the absence of any actual evidence of wrongdoing, therefore criminality (or the possibility of it) is ever-present (Madan, 2016).

The mere presence of SROs creates a sense of fear that their teenage "mistakes will lead to really bad consequences" and disrupts their ability to thrive. Students cannot learn when they feel their "life [was] in danger when [they] were meant to be studying." This upholds a system of white supremacy, power, and comfort at the expense of marginalized students' safety and agency. A power dynamic has been instilled in policing and carceral frameworks since the very beginnings of its operation. ∎
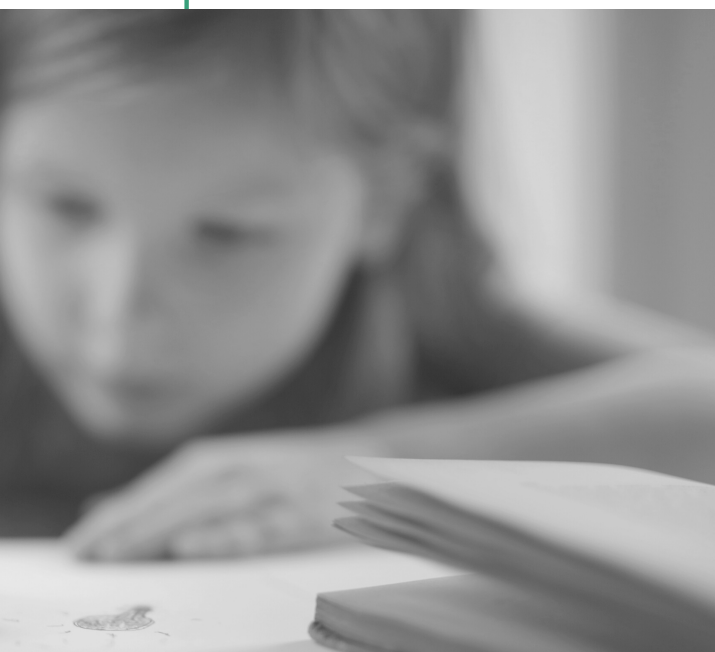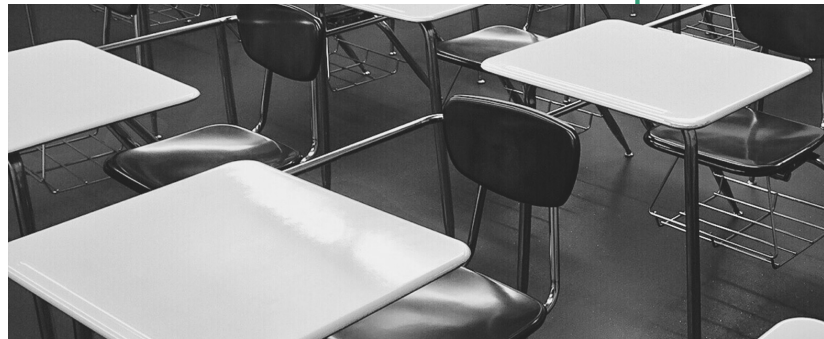

"I grew up in Herongate, an underfunded, racialized area in Ottawa South, and my high school, Ridgemont HS, had an SRO officer we would see on a daily basis. He was not the first, nor was he the last to criminalize Black youth, aggressively stopping them in hallways for nothing, speaking to them in demeaning tones and language, etc. Let us no longer pretend cops have added anything to the fabric of our educational systems. Instead, they only further institutional frameworks of white supremacy and carcerality, and enough is enough. We demand justice. No cops in our neighbourhoods, no cops in our schools." - A racialized former OCDSB student

SECTION 3.1
Conclusion

The disproportionate impacts of policing in schools felt by racialized and gender-oppressed youth (alongside their peers) and the consequent mental and emotional impacts, unsafe educational environments, school performance, and limiting of future opportunities is plainly reported by current and former Ottawa students. Students are well aware of the harms caused by school policing infrastructure, culture, and practice and how the criminalization of school discipline relies on sophisticated regimes of security, surveillance, and preemptive policing (Madan, 2016). The presence of an SRO program in Ottawa schools exemplifies the expansive nature of policing that requires the control, discipline, and surveillance of racialized bodies--which in this case, are students. After the Toronto District School Board ended their SRO program in 2017, there was a significant decrease in their use of disciplinary measures against students (Toronto District School Board, 2020). Suspensions dropped by 24% and expulsions by 53% (Toronto District School Board, 2020). It is clear that without the presence of police officers in schools the previously intensified environment of fear and mistrust that influences student performance has since significantly reduced.

In Canada's 21st and 23rd periodic report for the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination as part of the efforts to implement the International Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the committee spoke to their concern about racial disparities in the Canadian education system (United Nations, 2017). Specifically, "unequal access to quality education, especially for African-Canadian and Indigenous children", and how "African-Canadian students are reportedly disciplined more harshly than other students, which forces them out of learning environments and contributes to the 'school-to-prison pipeline'" (United Nations, 2017). The continuation of policing, formal and informal, in Ottawa schools breaks this international commitment, which Canada is a signatory on, as the presence of police in schools is a direct cause of the school-to-prison pipeline. In tandem with this commitment, literature on policing in Canadian schools, and the findings from participants in our study, we conclude that police-free schools are a necessary facet of a just education system and without them, there cannot be healthy, equitable, and barrier-free public education in Ottawa and in Canada. ∎

SECTION 3.2
Solutions

reimagining of the educational system in Ottawa will, too, require zero-tolerance approaches to end as they leave no space for growth. ■

A radical new approach to education in Ottawa is necessary to obtain truly healthy and equitable schools. Fostering an environment of trust, care, support, and belonging is crucial for moving forward without policing in schools. In addition to calls for police-free schools Ottawa-wide, the implementation of non-punitive and non-disciplinary practices that centre restorative and transformative justice for intervention is highly advised. These approaches to repairing any harms caused in school have been studied extensively and proven to be largely successful, for example with the successes in the Toronto District School Board (Toronto District School Board, 2020). At Almaguin Highlands Secondary School, restorative justice practices have proved to be successful as well with the school using meditation, healing circles, and most frequently, group conferences (McCullough, M.). Since the beginning of this program, there have been zero re-offenses (McCullough, M.). Students can be victims as much as they are perpetrators; thus, with restorative and transformative justice, this means that systems of oppression that caused the harm in the first place will not be replicated as engagement with students is instead in the form of accountability and healing. A complete

SECTION 3.3
Reccomendations

Echoing our police-free schools movement partners, the Latinx, Afro-Latin-America, Abya Yala Education Network (LAEN), we are calling for: 1) the removal of police-in-school programs and any/all policing structures structures, 2) deprioritization of the use of police as an instrument of last resort and institutional shift away from punitive disciplinary practices and ensuring accountability measures, and 3) reallocation of funds through an equity lens to support students (LAEN, 2021). Moreover, we also adopt U.S based Alliance for Educational Justice's definition of police-free schools: "dismantling school policing infrastructure, culture, and practice; ending school militarization and surveillance; and building a new liberatory education system" (LAEN, 2021).

Deprioritization of Policing

1. Immediately terminate the School Resource Officer (SRO) program, and prohibit the future use of comparable programs structured under a reformist framework.
2. Drastically narrow down the memorandum of understanding between school boards and Ottawa Police Services (OPS) to only allow OPS officers in schools during provincially mandated occurrences.

3. Completely remove all policing structures from schools (e.g. metal detectors and surveillance systems).
4. Deprioritize the use of police as an instrument of last resort, and instead focus on transformative practices that are grounded in healing centred engagement/practices and are relationship centred that do not criminalize students.
5. Begin collecting intersectional race and gender-based data on every police interaction in schools.

Reallocation of Policing Funds & Student Investment

1. Reallocate any/all school board funds from the School Resource Officer (SRO) program and school policing structures towards support for students. Also look at all school funding and resources and reallocate through an equity lens to ensure all students are supported and centring those most negatively impacted. (View Table 1.0 below)
2. Begin investing in long-term plans for student support.

Restorative and Transformative Futures

1. Dismantle oppressive systems within the school board, curriculum, and population to fulfill the responsibility to provide equitable access to quality, affirming educational environments and opportunities.
2. Provide opportunities for staff to be trained in restorative and transformative justice practices; Move beyond anti-racist rhetoric and fully fund these opportunities.

Use reference Table 1.0 (Student submitted suggestions for the reallocation of policing funds) as a starting point for investment in restorative and transformative futures that centre student support.■

Table 1.0 Student submitted suggestions for the reallocation of policing funds	
Staff additions	Black/African diasporic, Indigenous, Racialized among all intersectional identity markers who are culturally fit, and trauma-informed staff who are grounded in healing centred engagement and have proven records of their practices being anti-racist, anti-oppressive, equitable. Power dynamics within the school and education system are actionably recognized. • Counsellors • Social workers • Psychologists • Community health workers • Peer support • People trained in nonviolent crisis intervention • More racialized teachers with equity, diversity, and inclusion training who use anti-carceral methods of intervention and support
Mental health	• Peer support safe spaces, circles, and group support • Mentorship programs • Community-led programs for informal reporting • Outreach programs • Transformative justice and healing centred practices for justice resolutions for interpersonal conflict • Mandatory assemblies and class workshops surrounding interpersonal conflict, power, and privilege with active and moderated participation from peers (equity consultants running workshops)

Table 1.0 Cont'd student submitted suggestions for the reallocation of policing funds

Social services	• Financial safety nets • Life skills programs • Immigrant support programs • Free tutoring • After-school programs • Free food programs (breakfast emphasized the most)
Infrastructure	• Fixed lockers • Ridding of lead in pipes • Adequate air circulation and heat • Adequately spaced classrooms (cease the use of portables) • Accessibility for disabled students
Miscellaneous	• Upgraded technology (e.g. computers) • New textbooks with updated content • Funding for student clubs • Upgraded science equipment • Diversifying curriculum content • Expanded and better-invested art and music programs • Expanded and better-invested sports/gym programs and equipment

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