

## **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

**8 June 2021**

### **REPORT NO. 21-049**

## **Presentation of the Policy and Practice Review of Police Involvement in Schools**

**Key Contact: Mary Jane Farrish, Superintendent of Instruction, 613 721 1820 ext. 8821**

### **PURPOSE:**

1. To present the report from the Human Rights and Equity Advisory (HREA), attached as Appendix A (hereinafter referred to as the HREA's Report) examining practices at the OCDSB when involving police and the resultant impacts on stakeholders. Staff will reflect on the observations in the HREA's report to inform our response through revisions to OCDSB policies and practices.

### **STRATEGIC LINKS:**

2. Both the HREA's report and Report 21-049, in response, align with the OCDSB 2019-2023 Strategic Plan (strategic plan) goals within the cultures of Innovation, Caring and Social Responsibility:
  - a. Champion high learning expectations for all students
  - b. Remove barriers to equity of access, opportunity and outcomes;
  - c. Prioritize the dignity and well-being of students in inclusive and caring classrooms; and
  - d. Build authentic engagement with and among our communities.

The District multi-year Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap (IEHRR) calls for centering principles of human rights and equity in policies, practices and decision-making and identifying and removing disparity in outcomes. A human rights and equity lens is reflected in the HREA's review.

A strategic link to the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy 2019-2022 exists in the approach to supporting mental health in a shared model of collaboration with community and home to reduce barriers to accessing culturally responsive services.

## CONTEXT

3. Responding to community concerns about police involvement in schools, the Board of Trustees passed a motion on 22 September 2020 directing a review of Policy P.043.SCO Police Involvement in Schools, including the role or roles of the School Resource Officer (SRO).

4. Board Motion

On 22 September 2020, the Board passed the following motion directing a review of police involvement in schools:

- A. *THAT the Board Review Policy P.043.SCO Police Involvement in Schools, including (i) the role or roles of the School Resource Officer (SRO) in OCDSB schools, and (ii) all OCDSB commitments identified as legally discretionary within the multilateral protocol governing relations between Ottawa Police Services (OPS) and Ottawa-area school districts.*
- B. *THAT staff bring forward a report with a plan for Board approval no later than the end of October 2020, which includes: (i) a plan for the overall review of police involvement in OCDSB schools, with milestones; (ii) internal and external consultation plans, per Policy P.110.GOV; and (iii) options for the involvement of external academic or other experts, the creation of an advisory panel, and/or the creation of an ad hoc or steering committee.*

5. Review Process

The consultation plan for the policy review, approved in October 2020, outlined the scope of the broader review of OCDSB practices and included the generation of a report to share findings from the review. The HREA was tasked with conducting this review and completing a report within her 'arm's length role', with the authority to provide recommendations on practice and policy to the District for consideration.

The HREA is a provincially funded position in Ontario school boards with the mandate to promote and uphold principles of human rights and equity across the district. As such, part of the work of the HREA includes providing guidance and advice to senior staff on policies related to human rights with the goal of fostering a culture free of harassment and discrimination.

In accordance with the consultation plan, the HREA established a steering team of student representatives, parents and community representatives, as well as advisory committee representatives. This team remained involved throughout the review process and provided input for pieces of the consultation process as well as the final HREA's report (Appendix A).

6. Review Structure

The review of OCDSB practices of involving police in schools, began in November of 2020 with the formal consultation activities spanning four months. The modes of consultation, conducted to inform the HREA's report included both public and private discussions as well as written feedback submissions and anonymous surveys. The participant engagement for the HREA's report includes voices from

both secondary school students, parents/guardians/caregivers and staff as well as input from the current and past SROs assigned to both schools. All participants were offered the opportunity to provide individual feedback, and some made written submissions to the HREA directly and/or arranged for individual conversations.

Facilitation of the sessions was completed by internal facilitators and note takers as well as external facilitators and note takers from Dennery Resources for sessions designed for participants who identify as Black or racialized. Dennery Resources also facilitated consultation sessions for stakeholders from Gloucester and Ridgemont High Schools, the two schools that are served by priority SROs.

Other sources of information for the HREA's report include inquiry with other school districts, relevant reports and literature reviews from other districts, studies and research in the field of police involvement in schools.

#### 7. Structure of the HREA's Report

The HREA's report has been organized to provide background information to reflect the intended outcomes of the OCDSB practices when engaging with Ottawa Police Service (OPS) as well as a presentation of the impacts as shared by participants in the multiple consultation activities. Participation data for each consultation activity is included in the appendices found within the HREA's report. The HREA's report includes sections on perceptions, perspectives and impacts as well as a section on connecting these perspectives to OCDSB policy and practice and to the available external research and reports. In addition, the HREA's report includes a scan of other Ontario school districts' reviews and the scholarship and studies available. The HREA's report concludes with recommendations for staff to consider. The HREA's report includes considerations and recommendations pertaining to the summary observations in each section.

#### 8. Legislative Requirements

Both the provincial model for local protocols and the Ottawa protocol directs the legislated partnership between the OPS and the 4 publicly funded school boards in Ottawa. Shaping the on-going partnership with OPS to achieve productive intersections in service for youth and families through our shared legislative obligations is the goal and objective of our response to the review observations as outlined in the HREA's report.

The relationship the District has with OPS reflects a shared focus on, and commitment to, youth safety and healthy development in our schools as subsets of communities. Maintaining a positive relationship with all community partners is the cornerstone of effective community involvement and engagement. The District shares stakeholders with OPS and we are committed to shaping our partnership activities to improve service for students who experience disproportionately negative outcomes through our practices. These practices include the District's involvement of police in progressive discipline and in activities intended to build positive, engaging and safe school cultures and climates.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

### 9. Responding to the HREA's Report

Staff have received the HREA's report, which can be viewed as an audit of OCDSB stakeholder experiences and perspectives pertaining to police involvement in the school community. We will use the observations presented in the HREA's report to consider and examine our practices in the partnership and relationship that we have with OPS. As the employer, OPS governs police programs such as the SRO program and they will similarly consider the HREA's report so that our work forward will be informed through this common source.

The HREA's report issues guidance and recommended considerations for decisions and direction with respect to future OCDSB practices when involving OPS. This guidance will be reflected upon to draft the revised policy document for presentation to the board of trustees in fall 2021.

The findings from the HREA's report are assessed within the context of the OCDSB commitments within the IEHRR and the strategic plan. As the IEHRR states:

Explicit and deliberate actions are urgently required to address inequities in our systems, structures, policies and practices that continue to impact student and staff success and well-being and to build trust with students, families, staff, and communities that we have been under-serving.

Championing high learning expectations for students requires appropriate and relevant supports that serve to prioritize the dignity and well-being of students. Achievement is also inextricably connected to the conditions that we set for learning in our schools; conditions that are free from barriers to equity of experiences and outcomes. As an educational institution, our purpose in service to students is to provide them with the opportunity to realize their potential and develop into highly skilled, knowledgeable, caring citizens.

Our schools must therefore be places where students feel empowered and elevated in reaching their potential, set by high expectations of them matched with conditions that support their achievement. Students are not only welcomed, but expected and supported to excel, in our school climates and cultures, in the bodies and identities that they live as well as the knowledge, skills and talents that they bring.

### 10. Stakeholder impacts

The perspectives that are recorded in the HREA's report reveal outcomes of harm experienced for stakeholder groups whom we have centred as priority voices in this review. Many participants from minoritized groups voiced that the events happening in their communities and schools involving police cannot be separated from the impact of world events involving police violence. Participants pointed to the violence experienced by Indigenous and Black people in the US, in Canada and in Ottawa when discussing OCDSB policy on police involvement in schools.

The observations presented in the HREA's report question the hypothesis that relationship building with police through resource officers in schools achieves positive outcomes for students and the intended objectives of the program as it currently operates. The presence of police officers in schools is also built upon the assumption that having a police officer in school makes school a safer place. Feedback from participants in the consultation did not confirm this assumption. The larger number of Indigenous, Black and racialized voices heard in the consultation process described the creation of an environment that was unsafe, rather than safe when police were involved at school.

Many participants in the consultation discussions expressed concerns about inbuilt systematic racism and bias in the education system combined with systemic racism in the policing system resulting in over-exposure and involvement of Indigenous, Black and racialized students with the police at school.

OCDSB's annual suspension data demonstrate disproportionality and disparity for equity seeking groups including students with special education identifications, students who are Indigenous and students who are racialized. This is also the case for students living in lower socio-economic conditions, keeping in mind the possible intersectionality of all lived identities. The OCDSB policy and practice for police involvement in schools includes engagement with police in supporting progressive discipline

Although individual relationships with SROs were cited as positive in some cases and appreciated by some stakeholder groups there were also examples provided that suggested the benefit and value of the partnership was dependent on the individuals in the roles (administrator and SRO). The integrity of any individual, or their intentions (both District staff and OPS staff) is not in dispute or meant to be judged in the examination of the review observations or in the HREA's report. The examples of the positive relationships, interactions and outcomes, in some instances, do not mitigate or neutralize the harm expressed by many stakeholders from minoritized identities who spoke about a level of distrust and fear felt about the institution of policing. It appears from these stakeholder groups' reports that distrust and fear is not being addressed or repaired in the types of activities that are intended through police involvement in schools, and in fact the presence of police in their schools intensifies their negative feelings and experiences.

#### 11. Priority SRO support

Consultation activities were held specifically for students, parents/guardians/caregivers and staff at both secondary schools that are currently supported by priority SROs.

Input shared through the consultation activities includes reports of harm being experienced by students, staff and families who are minoritized, in response to the presence and involvement of police officers in school settings and processes. Some stakeholders from these schools expressed a feeling of being surveilled and targeted in their neighbourhoods and school communities and having police officers present in their schools was not seen as supportive but rather negatively impacted their sense of safety. Some stakeholders felt that having police presence in school limited their full participation in school life due to a sense of being

watched. Students and families from both schools indicated that the high visibility of police officers and police vehicles at the school reinforced and perpetuated incorrect, negative stereotypes about the students, school and community as dangerous and criminal.

Staff at both schools indicated that the schools were well resourced through the Urban and Priority High School (UPHS) ministry funding and that the involvement of the priority SROs was not critical nor a high yield resource in achieving improved outcomes for their students. Staff at both schools appreciate the framework for resource allocation that is attached to utilization of the UPHS funds and indicated that they could invest the money diverted from the memorandum of understanding (MOU) using their UPHS framework for allocation.

## **CONCLUSION:**

12. At the 26 May 2021 Committee of the Whole Budget meeting, staff informed the Board of Trustees that the 2021/2022 staff recommended budget will not include a continuation of the investment in the MOU with OPS in any amount. Budget preparation continues and decisions about the diversion of those funds will be forthcoming.

In response to the stakeholder perspectives presented in the HREA's report, current practices, and operations within our partnership with OPS will be suspended while we recalibrate our relationship through the policy revision process which will unfold in the fall. Findings and recommended considerations from the HREA's report will inform the policy revisions, and actions to implement changes to OCDSB practices. The voices heard and prioritized in this review indicate that a reshaping of the District's partnership with OPS, in service of student and school safety is necessary.

The policy revisions will consider the range and profundity of the impacts and perspectives from the voices collected through consultation activities and documented in the HREA's report. The draft revised policy will be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval in the fall of 2021.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

13. The current investment of OCDSB funds to support the MOU with OPS combined with the contribution made by OPS is approximately \$200,000. This amount will be available for the investment in the 2021-2022 staff recommended budget to be directed to schools for use with similar parameters to UPHS funding or other student success centered initiatives.

## **COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:**

14. The HREA's report will be shared directly with the steering team who guided this review as well as with the student groups who were consulted, all school-based

staff, community groups who were consulted, board Advisory Committee chairs as well as the Ottawa Assembly of School Councils (OCASC), school council chairs at Gloucester and Ridgemont High Schools' as well as through the OCDSB digital school council newsletters. The HREA's report will be shared through social media communications and on the District website. OPS will also receive a copy of the HREA's report and this resultant Committee of the Whole report, 21-049.

The District consultation webpage will be updated to reflect the timelines and activities to be completed, including the policy revision.

Direct communication with OPS, through the respective staff members, will continue as we facilitate the reshaping of the approach within our partnership, to maintain a productive and a positive relationship in our collaborative actions to support students and families as required.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

15. How is the strategic plan's monitoring progress reflected in response to the HREA's report as per the following questions:
- How is decision-making guided by the strategic priorities?
  - How does this create conditions to promote a change in culture?
  - How does the data/ evidence inform our work?
  - How is the response to the HREA's report consistent with the goals from the IEHRR in the areas of Engagement and Connectedness, Importance of Identity, and Governance and Leadership?
  - How can we build on the consultation process and outcomes that informed the HREA report to inform the policy development and commensurate procedures that the board will undertake as the next steps?

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Secretary of the Board

Appendix A-Policy and Practice Review of Police Involvement in Schools