

## **Police Involvement in Schools Steering Committee**

**SUMMARY for SEAC, June 2, 2021**

**Dr. Maggie Mamen**

### **Leadership:**

This project was led by Carolyn Tanner, Human Rights Lawyer, hired by the Board, but acting at arm's length. The Steering Committee consisted of 23 members, representing Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQ+ and Individuals with Disabilities. The OCDSB was represented by Mary Jane Farrish and Ann McCrimmon. The Committee met seven times from March to May, with varying attendance. The final meeting was held on May 27 with 7 members present. My role was to represent SEAC, and I assumed Individuals with disabilities, but is not clear to me how the remaining members of the Committee were selected/appointed. A number of them were high school students, others were community-involved adults, many clearly have a background in advocacy for a broad range of diverse interests..

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of the project has been to examine the role of police in schools within the OCDSB, in particular of the School Resource Officers (SROs), but also when the police are called in following a mandatory report of a specific incident outlined in Board policy (e.g., involving a weapon, assault, fights, etc.). Carolyn stated from the very beginning that the assumption was that police presence causes harm, especially to marginalized youth, and those traumatized by their history with police in their countries of origin or as refugees, and that the aim was to remove police from schools wherever possible.

### **Process:**

The process consisted of a number of discussion groups formed of individuals of similar or shared lived experiences in order to provide a space that was as comfortable as possible.

Student groups:	Ridgemont and Gloucester High Schools (considered high needs)
	2SLGBTQ+
	African Descent/Black
	Indigenous
	General
Parents/Community	Somali-speaking
	Arabic-speaking
	General (two sessions)
	Gloucester and Ridgemont Parents
	African Descent/Black
	Indigenous

## 2SLGBTQ+ Disability

The groups were reported to be facilitated by Dennery Resources, an outside company, or by Carolyn. Dennery personnel were apparently taking notes, as was Carolyn, to ensure accurate recording of the proceedings, but the Steering Committee was not informed as to which facilitators were at which meetings.

According to Carolyn, there were also discussions with some Administrators and some SROs, but it is unclear what form these took, who attended, and what the outcomes were.

The Steering Committee was not made aware of the numbers of people attending the discussion groups. It is my understanding that the Indigenous community was not well represented in terms of numbers, and that a second group was organized to try to attract more attendees. Indigenous Educators within the Board were present at the Indigenous group discussions in order to provide an appropriately safe context.

In addition, an on-line survey was compiled for general distribution throughout the OCDSB, although it is not clear who received it. There was some discussion regarding the format of the survey, the need for freedom from bias, the scientific rigour of the process, and the need for it to be made available via text-to-voice software to those whose English reading skills were not adequate to cope with the level of language being used. The survey was not available in any language other than English.

### **Results:**

Other than a brief overview of some of the discussions, and despite many requests on my own part, the Steering Committee has not seen the results of the survey, the notes from any of the discussion groups, or any draft of any part of the final report which is slated to go to Trustees for their upcoming meeting on June 8. Information has not been made available to the Steering Committee regarding: the actual job description of the SROs, the number of SROs, the number/type of incidents to which police were called or were involved, whether the situations reported in the survey or at discussion groups involved SROs or general police personnel responding to incidents. It is unclear to me whether a clear distinction was made or asked for between the presence of SROs and the presence of other officers called in for incidents.

The Steering Committee was shown the Table of Contents of Carolyn Tanner's report. There is a section on Students with Disabilities. There was no discussion of this at any of the meetings, I was not invited to join the Discussion Group, my request for information/notes from the Discussion Group was unsuccessful, as was my request to see the draft of this section, and I have therefore no information upon which to comment.

There has been no discussion at the Steering Committee about any of the recommendations that will be forthcoming.

At the COW Budget Meeting last week, a recommendation was apparently made to withdraw the OCDSB funding given to support the SROs at Gloucester and Ridgemont (approximately \$92,000). This was approved, with a decision to reallocate the resources, but I am unaware of how this will be done.

Given that neither the report nor the recommendations will not be made available prior to its presentation to the Trustees, it is not possible for me to report anything concrete back to SEAC. When I asked what I would be able to report, I was told I could discuss some of the “themes” that had emerged, based on some comments from the Discussion Groups as reported by Carolyn Tanner at our most recent meeting, and backed by selected quotes from participants.

Examples:

- A strong theme that police presence in the schools was generally perceived as negative across all groups; significant preference for alternative interventions to be used
- There were some positive comments but no examples were given
- Reports of police bias against black, indigenous, students of colour (e.g., when two students were involved in an altercation, only the black student was spoken to by police)
- The need for accountability on the part of administrators who call on the police for assistance – no records available of incident reports kept within the schools
- Issue of mandatory requirement for administrators to report certain types of incidents to police but not to request police intervention; this would be left up to the discretion of the police
- Administrators using threats of police involvement to intimidate/scare students
- Too ‘cozy’ a relationship developed between Administrators and SROs, resulting in inappropriate sharing of confidential information
- A preference for other types of trained professionals to be used as intervenors, rather than the police

## **Recommendations**

Other than the recommendation to remove OCDSB funding supporting the Ridgemont/Gloucester SROs, no other recommendations have been presented to the Steering Committee, so I am afraid I cannot comment on what will be put forward.