



Memorandum

Date: May 20, 2021
To: Board of Education
From: Kevin Kaardal, Superintendent of Schools/CEO
Prepared by: Alan Lalonde, Assistant Superintendent
Sherri McKinnon, District Principal - Learning Support Services

Information Item: RCMP School Resource Officers

1.0 RELEVANT BOARD MOTION/DIRECTION

After a presentation at a recent District Safe Schools Committee Meeting, a report was requested on the role of the RCMP School Resource Officers (SROs) in the Central Okanagan Public Schools.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Terms

School Resource Officers (SRO) - sworn law enforcement officers responsible for safety and crime prevention in schools.

School Liaison Officers (SLO) - another title used in various jurisdictions that has a similar meaning to SROs.

Youth Officers - Youth Officers are assigned to high schools and work with students at school during school hours, or to/from school. They are also often called to assist with investigations involving youth that occur outside of school hours. Often, they continue as Youth Officers and serve youth when school is not in session.

Community Policing - Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. The RCMP SROs are part of the Community Policing mandate.

2.2 Components of Safe Schools Culture

The Province of British Columbia launched the Expect Respect and a Safe Education (erase) strategy in 2012 to help prevent, identify and stop harmful behaviours by children and adults, whether they occur at school, online or in the community. The comprehensive strategy includes training for educators, police and other community partners focused on violence threat risk assessment and ensuring safe school communities. In 2018, the Province expanded the strategy to address new and evolving issues facing youth in B.C. communities, including gang involvement, gun violence, cyberbullying and online safety, mental health and substance use, and bullying due to sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Ministry of Education in 2019 developed a document titled, “*Maintaining School Safety: A Guide for School and Police Personnel in B.C.*”. The complete document can be found at:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/erase/documents/maintaining-school-safety-guide.pdf>

The document focuses mainly on Violent Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) processes; however, the following section outlines Police in Local Communities.

Police endeavour to develop and maintain relationships with local public and independent schools, parents (that is, legal guardians or custodial parents), and youth to support positive development of the school community and the community as a whole. Police develop these relationships by:

- *Assuming responsibility for student and community safety in an emergency*
- *Participating with local schools, school districts and other community partners in Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) training and on multi-disciplinary teams to address student safety*
- *Communicating (if appropriate) with school officials when a criminal investigation involving students and/or the school environment is ongoing in order to assist with VTRA protocols, safety and intervention plans*
- *Supporting victims of crime*
- *Providing information on community safety concerns to schools, district staff and community partners*
- *Engaging in prevention activities with schools, district staff and community partners*

2.3 Measuring Safety

Measuring Safety can be a challenging task. Safety can be defined in multiple ways. Often it is defined as being physical safety and emotional safety. Municipalities and police departments often measure physical safety by data such as crime rates. Emotional safety is more difficult to measure as it is an emotion or feeling.

2.4 Where do RCMP SROs spend their time?

Each RCMP SRO that works within the Central Okanagan Public Schools was asked to categorize where they spend the majority of their time.

Categories	Central Okanagan SRO Results
Prevention and Education	50%
Liaising with Community Agencies	10%
Referrals to Services	5%
Careers and Student Development	5%
District Requested Enforcement	20%

Prevention and Education Examples

- Presentations to classes (i.e. bullying, community safety, healthy choices and relationships, social media, drugs and alcohol, history of RCMP, law; etc.)
- Presence outside the school at drop off or pick up times
- Attendance at after school social/sporting events
- Converse with youth about unsanctioned events and gatherings involving alcohol and drugs
- Speak to parents in regards to social and emotional support for their families who are new to Canada
- Offer direction and build one on one connections with students that have participated in a crime, or are at high risk to

Liaising with Community Agencies Examples

- Our SROs sit on community committees with dozens of community partners
- District's Safe Schools Committee
- Youth at Risk Committee
- Central Okanagan Immigration Partnership
- SAFE (Supporting Adolescents from Exploitation)
- GRIP (Gang Reduction through Informed Practice)
- Safer Schools Worrisome Behaviour reports
- RCMP Diversity and Inclusion
- KoAST, Greater Westside Hub
- YouthNet

Referrals to Services Examples

- Friendship Centre
- KoAST, Greater Westside Hub
- Foundry Kelowna
- Boys and Girls Club
- Reconnect
- ARC Programs
- Youth probation (MCFD)
- Youth Restorative Justice/ Peace Circles

- Youth Forensics
- Mommas for Mommas
- Interior Health
- Gateway (intro to Trades program and skills program at OC)
- Elevation Outdoors

Careers and Student Development Examples

- One on one interviews with students interested in a career in Law enforcement
- Career Fairs
- MAP presentation participant
- Hosting Take your Kid to Work
- Co-Hosting Is the Force for You with School District No. 23 Careers Department
- Mentoring students at RCMP Cadet Camp
- Rutland Youth Forum
- RCMP National Youth Engagement Conference

School District Requested Enforcement Examples

- Criminal offences that take place in the school
- School zone traffic enforcement
- Threat Assessment investigations and Post Critical Incident Responses
- Post-physical altercation mediation, re-entry, and when necessary ticketing
- Drugs brought, exchanged and consumed within schools
- Custody and court order inquiries from Administrators
- Harassment/bullying incidents
- Well-being checks/missing persons investigations
- Internet investigations

2.5 SROs vs General Duty

Several Principals that have worked in schools with SROs and schools without SROs were asked to share what they thought the difference was when working with the RCMP.

<u>School Resource Officers</u>	<u>General Duty Officers</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific Youth Training • Awareness of school district policies, mission, & values • Educator & Mentor • Consistent relationship with students/staff/admin • Understanding the family and community history/backgrounds • Faster response times to proactive and reactive situations • Threat Assessment, WOB, Critical incidents, GRIP, First Response plans, Safe Schools Provincial Initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfamiliar with school district policy and procedures • Not trained in VTRA • Not always aware of history of interventions and student background • Not always perceived as a safe, familiar member in school setting

2.6 RCMP required training/committees

- RCMP Training Academy – Regina (Depot)
- Bias Awareness for Employees - Mandatory
- Aboriginal and First Nations Awareness - Mandatory
- Consent Law and Common Sexual Assault Myths - Mandatory
- BC - Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) Foundations, Curriculum for Justice, Public Safety and Anti-Violence Community Sectors in British Columbia - Mandatory
- Cultural Awareness and Humility - Mandatory
- Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion Strategy - National
- Project Rainbow - Kelowna Detachment
- Gender and Harassment Advisory Committee

3.0 INFORMATION

3.1 Inquiry Scanning Question

How can we increase our understanding of the role and responsibilities of School Resource Officers on supporting safe school cultures in Central Okanagan Public Schools?

3.2 Inquiry process

What Did We Ask?

- In your time in school, what has been your connection/experience with an SRO?
- What do you think the roles and responsibilities of an SRO are?
- In what ways do SROs help or make a difference?
- In your opinion, what could SROs do differently? or How else could SROs help?
- Any other thoughts?

Who Asked the Questions?

- Empathy interviews were conducted by Principals, Vice-Principals and District SEL staff.
- Parameters for people asking questions: understand empathy interviewing (curious focus), seek diverse perspectives and withhold personal opinion.

Who Did We Talk To?

- 10 Schools across various family zones
- 4 Elementary, 2 Middle, 4 Secondary
- Over 100 Empathy Interviews

Example of information gathering:

<u>Students</u>	<u>Staff</u>	<u>Parents</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes who had SRO presentations • Personal dealings with SRO • Open invite to all students gr. 6-9 • Voluntary invite to students in Law class • Cross representation selection (male, female, meeting and not meeting academic success, ministry designated, BIPOC) • Open invite to two randomly chosen classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open invite to all staff • Teachers who have had an SRO deliver class presentation(s) • Teachers of randomly chosen classrooms • Staff with most SRO interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open invite extended at PAC meeting • Parents who have had direct contact and/or their child has had direct contact with SRO • Former PAC president involved in school for 10+ years

3.3 Data analysis process

- Empathy Interviews brought over 33 pages of data
- Reviewed by District Psychologist as independent reviewer trained in analyzing data (no experience with SROs or awareness of SRO Roles)

3.4 Results of Scan

Responses from parents, students and staff were overwhelmingly positive. A statistical comparison of positive comments versus comments that reflected a concern of any kind, yielded the following statistics:

91% of Parent comments were positive, 8.5 percent indicated concerns

90.6% of Staff comments were positive, 9.4 percent indicated concerns

93% of Student comments were positive, 7 percent indicated concerns

It should be noted that in almost every case concerns that were expressed were accompanied by suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the program.

3.5 Summary of Feedback

<u>Student Feedback</u>
<p>What Did We Learn from Students?</p> <p>93% of student comments were positive and 7 percent indicated concerns of any kind. Students, as well as staff, would appreciate more SRO time. For example: "They could be at elementary schools more".</p>

Students reported:

- He knows my family and my support workers. He knows who to call.
- "I learned a lot and felt more safe" (after attending the SRO's presentation on safety and Halloween in the third grade)
- They help people at school by responding to emergencies
- They encourage you
- They speak about the law and rules
- Help us feel safer
- Teach us about safety
- It is good here. In other places, they don't have it in a way that is positive. It helps students to have access to RCMP, and keeps kids moving towards making better decisions.
- I'm comfortable talking with him more than an officer that I don't know.
- When we see a police vehicle in front of the school, we know it's our SRO and it's OK.
- She wants to make sure that everyone knows they are safe when they are at school, all are welcome, not being discriminated against. Keep the peace.
- Maybe some people are intimidated because of the uniform, so they don't want to talk to them. I guess they have to wear their uniform, so maybe be available by phone if needed.
- A lot of people think "It's still a police officer." Having them connect more on a personal level would help people feel safer.
- I felt the SRO was a bit harsh once. Talking about how much trouble I could get in if I was smoking pot or giving pot to my friends.
- Our SRO is in the office a lot. Maybe walk through the school or come to events like assemblies or talk to us outside at lunch time.

Parent Feedback

What Did We Learn from Parents?

- SROs have intervened proactively in cases of violence and bullying, have consulted with parents, and provided direct assistance that supported effective parenting, (for example) "was very helpful in keeping my son safe and out of trouble. He could have been hurt or in more trouble if she didn't call."
- SROs provide education for students on a broad spectrum of issues and their input has supported good decision-making and safety in the community.
- SRO's establish trust relationships with youth and provide an opportunity for youth to consult and ask for guidance or assistance on a one-to-one basis. This is perceived as less anxiety provoking than having to engage with officers they do not know at the detachment.
- The SRO program provides unique, safe opportunities for youth who have had negative experiences with police, to develop a level of trust.
- That SRO's be 'trauma-informed': "In my opinion as the parent of a young Black teenager I would like to reassure my son that he can feel safe, respected and supported by an officer in uniform especially when engaging with them. I would like the SRO to focus on

<p>building a respectful, trusting relationship that is informed and based in a trauma informed approach especially when engaging with BIPOC students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback also suggests that parents could benefit from receiving more information about the scope of what SRO's do and what they contribute in classrooms and school assemblies <i>as educators</i> on a variety of topics ranging from internet safety, safety on the street, the law as it pertains to youth, bullying, vaping and drug use. • More information could be provided to parents about the role of SRO's in the schools. Some parents are only aware of one or two of the SRO's functions and should have an opportunity to understand the range of services, and the purely educational contributions they also provide for students and families. It would be beneficial if some public education could be presented to the community per se (e.g., through the media), for the benefit of parents who are unable to attend PAC meetings. • SRO's provide guidance concerning youth engagement in the community. "My son was not in trouble or arrested or anything, but I appreciated the phone call. It made me start talking to my son about some decisions he was making."

<p><u>Staff Feedback</u></p>

<p>What Did We Learn from Staff?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff feedback was overwhelmingly positive and there was widespread appreciation of a broad spectrum of educational and support services provided. That said, responses also indicated that some staff are not aware of the range of services provided by SROs and in particular the educational services they provide for students, and support for staff in this regard. • There was staff recognition that although a minority of students are conditioned to view the police in a negative light and may be uncomfortable with a police presence, the SRO program is particularly important for them as it provides these students with unique and vital opportunities for empowerment in this regard. Through one-to-one positive relationships and direct experiences that build trust, SRO's provide students with educational and healing opportunities they will otherwise not likely have access to at any other time in their lives. • Staff have received assistance "in dealing with everything from fights and assaults to drugs and alcohol involving students". • Many staff perceived the value of SRO's as a positive presence in terms of building trust, and "developing a relationship with students" that can "positively influence students' perception of the police". • Staff have reported that many students and families express feeling safe at school because SROs have a presence in the building and can be called upon for support. • One staff member reported that the SRO has provided "a consistent relationship with students she knows by name, through elementary, middle, and high school. Positive connection to the RCMP." • Staff would like to have more SRO time available in the classroom as educators, and have recognized the importance of relationship building: "What we hear in the media is bad
--

<p>stuff, so to establish positive relationships is so crucial. It is important that they come into the classroom then there isn't a problem."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I would love it if she had more time in the building. It would be lovely if there was a dedicated time each week without the context of a problem, but rather they were just available." • "We won't change the perception of the police unless we have consistent engagement with officers in the positive environment of the school." <p>Staff have reported that the SRO contributes meaningfully to students' learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The SRO has regularly visited my Law 12 classes during our 'Criminal Law' unit. Visits were always beneficial to the students' learning, and was a positive factor in their perception and relationship to law enforcement." • SRO's have been described by staff as: "an invaluable resource to teachers as a guest speaker, subject matter expert, or legal professional." • "Answering the difficult questions, providing clarity about the law and social situations involving the law." • Act as a 'subject matter expert' for teachers and students in the area of crime/policing/law enforcement careers <p>Staff also reported that the SRO's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop relationships with students who might be at risk of criminal behavior to establish proactive/preventative measures • Lead extrajudicial measures activities with students who might find themselves in violation of criminal law

<p><u>Overall Summary of Feedback from Student, Parents and Staff</u></p>
<p>SRO's have helped to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide preventative and targeted educational and restorative practices for schools, students, and families – not punitive or consequence-based. This has helped parents in facilitating conversations with their children/youth at home about more responsible decision making, and students feel that they have learned a lot as well. • Keep students out of trouble, rather than getting them into trouble – students feel they have learned a lot from the SRO's and parents feel their children have been supported to problem solve, rather than simply receive discipline. "SROs help students realize that their actions have consequences or ramifications for themselves and others. The consequences are not handed out in a punitive manner but as a way to help the students grow as young adults and show empathy for others." • Keep schools feeling safe by responding to problems and emergencies. • Form relationships with and checking in with students to see how they are doing; liaising between schools and families to see how families are doing; supporting students who are not attending so that families and students feel that they have a trusted ally in the community. • Change/maintain a more positive perception of law enforcement by representing a positive law enforcement role model – reducing the fear stigma associated with RCMP, demonstrates how the community and schools can work together to educate and support

<p>students and families; developing respect among our children and youth for police officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main educational topics – drug, alcohol, and vaping awareness; what an RCMP is and does and the parameters of the law; social media and cyber safety; legal aid and advice for students; answering student questions.

<u>Areas for Improvement/Consideration</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide parents a more detailed outline of the roles, responsibilities, and purpose of SRO. • More time, greater presence and visibility at school – events, assemblies, PAC meetings; provide information sessions and more proactive teaching on special topics. • Regular time at the school for drop-ins and student connection time. • Mental health and trauma-informed practice training for SROs to be able to bring that lens to their conversation with students (e.g., racial tension). • Coming to meet with kids when there isn't a problem. • Uniforms allow for increased visibility and students wonder about plain clothes SROs. • BIPOC connection and input on ways to move forward to increase sense of safety. • RCMP SRO representative on the District's Human Rights Committee.

4.0 SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMENTS

The Superintendent of Schools/CEO supports the partnership between the Central Okanagan Public Schools and the RCMP. After reviewing the inquiry scan, the Superintendent recommends the following:

- District staff and RCMP co-develop a communication plan to educate students, parents, staff and community members about the role of the School Resource Officer.
- District staff and RCMP co-develop measurable goals and objectives to address the recommendation as outlined in the inquiry scan and revisit and revise these goals and objectives on a yearly basis.

5.0 NEXT STEP

Staff will share this report with RCMP and collaborate on steps to address concerns brought forward. The plan to be developed will address the recommendations as outlined in the Superintendent comments.