



Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

June 2023



Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Background

Grand Erie District School Board (Grand Erie) has worked with a number of police services within its boundaries over the years to provide programming to students and classes through presentations, programs and the Secondary School Resource Officer (SRO) initiative. As noted by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, “the SRO/VIP program has existed since the early 1990s. Since then, equity initiatives have shifted in an effort to keep pace with the changing demographics in our communities and ongoing effort to dismantle systemic racism.”

Grand Erie is also governed by the Education Act and policy directives of the Ministry of Education. Professional advisories from the Ontario College of Teachers also support work in this area. In the chart below, four specific documents highlight expectations for our schools and districts.

Legislation	Highlights
Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009	■ barriers and biases, whether overt or subtle, intentional or unintentional, need to be identified and addressed ■ it is now recognized that such factors as race, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, gender, and class can intersect to create additional barriers for some students ■ evidence indicates that some students continue to encounter discriminatory barriers to learning ■ through cyclical policy reviews, boards will embed the principles of equity and inclusive education in all their other policies, programs, guidelines, and practices, so that an equity and inclusive education focus is an integral part of every board's operations and permeates everything that happens in its schools
PPM 119: Developing equity and inclusive policies in Ontario schools, 2009	■ the goal is to support positive learning environments where all members of the school community feel safe, included, welcomed, and accepted ■ there is a requirement for boards to help ensure the principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in all aspects of board and school operations, and that systemic barriers are identified and eliminated
Safe and Accepting Schools Act, 2012	■ all students should feel safe at school and deserve a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting, regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability ■ students cannot be expected to reach their full potential in an environment where they feel insecure or intimidated ■ there is a need for stronger action to create a safe and inclusive environment in all schools, and to support all students

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Background

Legislation	Highlights
Professional Advisory on Anti-Black Racism, Ontario College of Teachers	on the ways in which positions of power and privilege perpetuate and contribute to systemic racism

Other key documents, such as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, and various Grand Erie Documents such as, but not limited to, *Equity and Inclusivity in Education*, *Code of Conduct* and the *Police Protocol* also influence the work in Grand Erie schools.

Beginning in March 2020, when schools were closed and students shifted to online learning, police programs and presentations were not running. As students returned to schools, government policies limited access to schools by those who neither worked nor studied in those locations. Therefore, except in emergency situations, police were not present in schools. The police programs were on pause while the review was conducted.

In order to be responsive to the concerns of our marginalized groups, Grand Erie has conducted an evidence-based review of Police programs in schools for the following reasons:

- To ensure that the principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in all aspects of board and school operations
- To identify and eliminate systemic barriers for students, families, staff and community
- To meet student needs, sense of belonging and well-being
- To ensure that programs and presentations delivered or co-delivered by members of the police services align with Ontario curriculum expectations.

As a Result of the Review:

Police Services in Schools program will be continuing with changes, enhancements and new program offerings, such as training for school and police services, staff. Visits to schools are planned and the purpose communicated, presentations and programs aligned with Ontario curriculum expectations, and regular review of programs and evidence of their impact.

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Methodology

Overview

Grand Erie contracted with Turner Consulting Group to conduct an evidence-based review of the police programs and presence in Grand Erie schools to inform the decision-making about whether and in what way the board will continue with these programs. This work was conducted through an equity and human rights lens, and aimed to centre student voice in the process.



The Review In Grand Erie District School Board

Grand Erie has conducted an evidence-based review of police programs in schools based on curriculum through a human rights equity lens. The review is grounded in the Ontario Human Rights Code and values diverse perspectives of all stakeholders and partners with the intended outcome to capture experiences and perceptions and to make recommendations where required in order to provide positive programming updates.

Turner Consulting Group was engaged to develop a comprehensive approach to conduct the review, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, conduct a literature review, conduct an environmental scan, and to make recommendations. Surveys were developed and opportunity was provided for students, staff and community members to respond to questions about police presence and programs in schools. Interviews with school board staff and police service leaders were held. Student focus groups were conducted throughout secondary schools in the district. The review included current programs offered by the police. The effectiveness, perception of programs, interactions between students and police officers and recommendations that Grand Erie can carry out to further support and enhance program were all part of the review.

This report will summarize the program offerings in relation to the curriculum, participant survey, interviews, and focus group overview.

The review was also sensitive to ensure a non-judgmental, inclusive approach was taken in respect to the confidentiality of all participants, and it was collaborative to ensure all voices were included.

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Surveys Overview

Elementary Student Survey

A survey was administered by teachers to elementary students. 2,761 elementary students completed this survey (this included 233 Indigenous students, 271 racialized students, 53 newcomer students, 78 students with a disability/special needs, and 1,706 who identify as White).

Secondary Student Survey

A secondary student survey was also developed and administered by teachers. 2,612 secondary students responded to this survey (this included 194 Indigenous students, 117 racialized students, 26 newcomer students, 130 students with a disability/special needs, 328 2SLGBTQ+, and 1,327 who identified as White).

Staff Survey

Staff were sent an email inviting them to share their perspectives through an anonymous online survey. 306 staff responded to the survey (this included 8 Indigenous people, 3 racialized people, 8 persons with disabilities, 9 2SLGBTQ+, and 160 who identified as White). The number of staff from the equity-seeking groups is too small to disaggregate their responses in the analysis below.

Community survey

Members of the Grand Erie school community were also asked to share their input through an online survey. 803 community members responded to the survey (this included 47 Indigenous people, 39 racialized people, 11 newcomers, 51 people with a disability, 30 2SLGBTQ+, and 551 who identified as White).

Focus Groups with Staff

Staff were also invited to share their input through virtual focus groups. Eight school-based staff and five Safe and Inclusive Schools staff participated in these focus groups.

Focus Groups with Students

Staff at various secondary schools invited students representing marginalized groups to participate in focus group interviews. These focus groups were conducted by school-based staff who participated in a training overview session by Turner Consulting Group. Fifty-one students participated in nine focus groups. Of note, only students in grade 12 would have had personal experience with SROs in schools.

Interviews

In addition, members of the three police services who offer programs in Grand Erie schools were invited to participate in one-on-one telephone interviews. Interviews were conducted with eleven police service and six school board staff and leaders.

Curriculum Overview

The core function of schools is to provide education based on the Ontario Curriculum. A detailed review of Ontario Curriculum documents for kindergarten, elementary and secondary school students was conducted to identify specific expectations where Police possess a knowledge base that can enhance the learning experiences of students. It is notable that the Ontario Curriculum Documents have all been revised (some with significant changes) since the police programs in schools were written/established.

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Elementary Programs Review

Working with Police Services to develop grade-relevant programs and outreach.

Grade	Course	Police Presentation or Program (existing, new or revised)
K	Belonging and Contributing Frame <i>and</i> Problem Solving and Innovating Frame	Review: Community Helpers and Safety Focus on the four Ws (Where you are going, Who you are with, What you are doing, When will you be back), discussing who a community helper is, practising how to “Stop, Look and Listen” (Children’s Safety Village), practising using crossing signals and learning street signs
1	Social Studies Health/Physical Education	Review: Personal Safety Presentation Focus on “Keeping Me Safe and How to Get Help” Review: Personal Safety Presentation Focus on “How to Respond” and incorporating Grade 1 expectations
2	Health/Physical Education	Review: Personal Safety Presentation Focus on “How to Keep Me Safe, Grade Two,” incorporating Grade 2 expectations
4	Health/Physical Education	Bike and Street Safety
5	Health/Physical Education	NEW: Bullying, Violence and Online Behaviour
6	Health/Physical Education	Review: K.I.D.S. Program Includes Grade 6 curriculum expectations related to Youth and the Law, Healthy Relationships, Online and Social Media Awareness and Online Safety, Substance Use and Mental Health
7	Health/Physical Education	Review: Internet and Social Media Safety and Online Awareness Incorporates Grade 7 curriculum expectations
8	Health/Physical Education	Review: The Impact of Violence in the Community Incorporate Grade 8 curriculum expectations, and co-deliver with relevant police service

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Secondary Programs Review

Working with Police Services to develop grade-relevant programs and outreach.

Grade	Course	Police Presentation or Program (existing, new or revised)
9	Healthy Active Living Education (Open) PPL10	NEW: Internet Safety, Online Behaviour and Consequences NEW: Consent NEW: Types of Violence, Strategies and Consequences
10	Career Studies (Open) GLC20	NEW: Internet Safety, Online Behaviour and Consequences
11	Understanding Canadian Law (University/College Prep) CLU3M Understanding Canadian Law in Everyday Life (Workplace Preparation) CLU3E	NEW: Role of Police in the Legal System NEW: Modern Policing
12	Healthy Active Living Education (Open) PPL40	NEW: Crime, Consequences and Response
	Legal Studies (College Preparation) CLN4C	NEW: Technology and Challenges and Changes in Policing
	Challenge and Change in Society (University Preparation) HSB4U	NEW: Exploitation NEW: Restorative Justice
All	PROSE™ (Police Resource Outreach Supporting Education)	A revised partnership between schools and local officers to support curricular themes and community outreach

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Police Presentations, Programs and Presence Overview

Current Offerings

The following individual programs, as acknowledged through interviews and in collaboration with the police services, have been delivered in Grand Erie schools. It should be noted that some programs are specific to only one or a few of the four police services who provide support to Grand Erie schools.

Elementary

Students in a variety of grades visit the **Children's Safety Village** to learn with civilian community officers. These include practicing stop, look listen before crossing roads, learning street safety, outlining potential risks in the community and practicing bike and road safety skills.

Internet safety programs have been delivered to a number of students in a variety of grade levels with focus on privacy, cyber-bullying, and an awareness of with whom you are communicating online.

T.I.C.K. Brantford (Teaching Intelligent Choices to Kids) organization administers the **K.I.D.S.** (Knowledge, Issues, Decisions, Supports) program which is delivered to students in the junior division. It focuses on youth and the law, healthy relationships, online and social media awareness, substance use, and mental health and well-being.

Adopt-a-School is an outside-the-curriculum-expectations program where officers connect with students in a non-structured extra-curricular way. Police personnel interact with students at recess on the yard, become involved in extra-curricular activities or participate in other school-based events.

Police services are part the **CAA Safety Patroller** program. They provide training and ongoing support and celebration of those students who have committed to becoming safety patrollers.

Secondary

At the secondary level, one-time presentations by police officers tied to specific curriculum expectations occur throughout the school year. There are nine curriculum courses where police can enhance students' acquisition of knowledge and expectations of courses. Presentations can occur on topics such as consent, human trafficking, harassment, policing as a career, the role and challenges of police in society to protect public order and safety, the effect of media coverage of crime and safety impact public perception of crime, law and enforcement, exploitation, hate crimes, and restorative justice.

T.I.C.K. Brantford also supports students at the secondary level through its **Student Leadership Program**. It funds two student-led projects per semester for up to \$500 for students attending schools in the City of Brantford. These projects must focus on making positive choices that align with the five themes of the **K.I.D.S.** program (youth and the law, healthy relationships, online and social media awareness, substance use, and mental health and well-being).

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Police Presentations, Programs and Presence Overview

Secondary

Brantford police services accept four students for cooperative education placements allowing these students to gain a better understanding of police experience working in different areas in the Brantford police service. Students work as part of their **cooperative education courses** for a half-day, every day for an entire semester.

The School Resource Officer (SRO) program, as outlined in this review, varies in how it operates in different school locations and with different police services. There is no defined SRO role description. Individual elements of the SRO program range from investigation and enforcement to community connection and interaction with students to enhancing the perception of the role of police in society.

Summary of Findings

Consultations with Students, Staff, and Community

- While both elementary and secondary students were able to recall the police programs prior to the pandemic, many students had no experience with School Resource Officers.
- White students, staff, and community members expressed more positive sentiment regarding police programs and presence in schools than did those from marginalized groups.
- Community and staff survey respondents were also more positive than students about police programs and presence in schools.
- A number of students described benefiting by learning about bullying, drug use, bicycle safety, fire safety, etc. However, there are also students who expressed concern for the impact of SRO on marginalized students and school climate. They shared that the presence of police causes anxiety.
- The survey asked secondary students, staff, and community members for their recommendations about the future of the SRO Program. When they had an opinion, most of those from each group recommended that the SRO program continue with changes.
 - The largest proportion of secondary students who answered this question did not have an opinion on the matter (53%). When they did have an opinion, the largest proportion of White students (20%), newcomer students (18%) and students with disabilities (17%) recommended that the program be cancelled. The largest proportion of 2SLGBTQ+ students (15%) and racialized students (19%) with an opinion recommended that the program continue with some changes. Indigenous students were more likely to recommend that the program continue with some changes (15%).
 - For community members, the largest proportion of those who identified as Indigenous (36%), living with a disability (36%), 2SLGBTQ+ (26%), racialized (38%), and White (38%) felt that the program should continue with some changes.
 - Close to half of staff (48%) felt that the program should continue with changes.

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Summary of Findings

Focus Groups with Students

- The majority of the students reported that they felt that an SRO would contribute to school safety. Many wanted SROs to help resolve issues such as theft, drug use, fights, vandalism, and vaping in the washrooms.
- A number shared that SROs would only be effective if the right person was in the role and that the person was “approachable,” “kind,” and “had a positive vibe.” They felt that the average police officer should not be in the role and that specialized training should be provided to those in the position. They shared their concern that if the “right” person wasn’t hired into the role, it would harm the school climate and pose barriers to attendance for some students. These students shared that the person should not be aggressive, judge students, have an attitude, carry a weapon, or arrest students at the school.
- While most were supportive of the SRO program, there were some who were not supportive of a police officer in their school. Even those who felt that there may be some benefits, acknowledged that SROs may create a negative school experience for some students.
- A number of students shared that there would be a need for SROs to have appropriate training so that they were supporting marginalized students, rather than contributing to the bullying and marginalization that some already experience. They felt that it would help if the officers in the role were from Indigenous, racialized, and other marginalized backgrounds.

Students were also asked what changes they would like to see to the SRO program if it were to be brought back. Their suggestions included:

- Selecting officers who are from marginalized groups
- Ensuring that officers are not carrying their weapons
- Having SROs in schools on Mondays and Fridays, which are days when more issues occur
- Ensuring the officers are appropriately trained
- Communicating the program to all students and parents, so that they aren’t alarmed when they see a police officer at their school.



Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Summary of Findings

Interviews with school and police staff and leaders

Understanding of the SRO Program

- Former SROs described the program as community building, with the purpose being building relationships with students proactively, while providing enforcement when necessary. This program is seen by police as an important program for community engagement.
- A number of school board staff shared that the SRO program and the role of SROs in Grand Erie schools is not clearly understood.
- Some shared their experience of SROs as engaging in traditional policing, just like in other contexts
- In addition to programs, some staff described that they invite non-SRO police officers to “drop in” to their class, unrelated to curricular outcomes. Some shared that in some cases, SROs became involved in classroom management and disciplinary matters.
- The police services shared that there are no policies, guidelines, or role descriptions for SROs. Among the police officers with whom we spoke, there were differing perspectives about the role of SROs. In addition, the police services take a different approach to their SRO program, which results in different experiences in Grand Erie schools.

SRO Evaluation of Effectiveness

- The activities of SROs are not documented and reported either to the police services nor to the school board. In addition, there is no evaluation of their impact on school safety and school climate, on students, and whether they may contribute to expulsions and suspensions.
- Many police and school staff and leaders agreed that the SRO's role and the effectiveness of the program was highly dependent on the person in the role and their approach to the position.
- Some police officers attribute the recent increase in violence in schools to the pausing of the SRO program, rather than the impact of COVID-19. However, this increase in violence in schools has been documented as occurring across the country, and has been linked to student experiences of isolation, lack of socialization, and an increase in mental health issues since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- While members of the police service expressed their opinion that the program has been very successful, they indicated that the evidence is anecdotal as no evaluation has been conducted of the program.

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Summary of Findings

Interviews with school and police staff and leaders

Understanding of the Impact on Indigenous Students and Students from the Equity-Seeking Groups

- A number of staff and police officers who participated in the consultations did not express an understanding of, and in some cases concern for, students from various identities who may have different experiences of police, particularly those who may already be marginalized by the school system.
- Some school staff and leaders shared that while the program may be beneficial for many students, it can have the opposite impact on other students, creating a psychologically unsafe learning environment for them.
- While many shared that they have not seen or heard of any issues with how students from marginalized groups are treated, there were a few who shared that they have witnessed differential treatment and negative reactions to police presence by students.



Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Next Steps/Action Items

Police Programs and Presentations

Curriculum Alignment

- All curriculum documents produced by the Ministry of Education for Ontario have been revised since the inception and development of police programs in schools. A review of the programs and presentations currently offered at both the elementary and secondary level, with a lens of equity and ensuring curricular alignment, is underway.
- Some police programs will be revised to ensure alignment with the specific Ontario curriculum for identified grade levels.
- Also included in this review is a recommendation for the creation of new presentations to enhance student learning and understanding related to specific expectations.



Decision-Making

- Schools and classrooms differ in their demographics. Not all students and schools will experience presentations and programs in the same way. The Decision Support Tool is a framework to aid with classroom level decision-making around the viability of programs and presentations.

Communication Protocols

- Schools will provide communication to families early in the school year introducing the assigned school resource officer where possible.
- Schools will communicate with families when programs or presentations by police services will be occurring in classrooms/schools
- Students and families are empowered to make choices related to participating in these programs or presentations (this mirrors and honours approaches used with other presentations such as those related to the teaching of specific health topics)

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Next Steps/Action Items

Police Programs and Presentations

Annual Assessments and Review

As part of this curriculum review, Grand Erie requires that programs be assessed in the following ways which honours the cyclical review of programs:

- Staff will assess the impact of programs on student learning related to the achievement of the expectations in the curriculum
- Staff will complete a survey at the completion of the program or presentation
- Where appropriate, students will complete a survey of the program or presentation
- Presenters from police services will be given an opportunity to provide input on an annual basis related to individual programs or presentations
- There will be an annual review of the compiled assessment by staff and students of individual programs or presentations and changes will be made as necessary.

SRO (School Resource Officer) Program

- The SRO program will be renamed **PROSE™** (**P**olice **R**esource **O**utreach **S**upporting **E**ducation)
- Based on feedback received from surveys, interviews and focus groups, the role of **PROSE** will be clearly defined as follows:
 - The **PROSE™** program will focus on community building with the purpose being building relationships with students
 - Consistent expectations and collaborative inservice for **PROSE™** officers and school staff around the program through the lens of human rights and equity will occur on an annual basis in order to ensure alignment across the district
 - **PROSE™** officers may be invited to:
 - deliver classroom presentations in partnership with teachers
 - deliver presentations to staff, parents/caregivers on a variety of topics of interest to these groups
 - be present and participate in school events such as track meets, assemblies, school performances, refereeing intramurals, presenting awards at monthly assemblies, open houses, involvement in games clubs, music and drama clubs
 - conduct informal drop-ins during break times to interact with students in a community-building capacity
 - participate in/help lead community support drives such as a canned food drives, winter clothing drives, back-to-school supplies drives
 - run bike rodeos
 - become involved in mentoring programs where appropriate.

Review of Police Programs and Presence in Schools

Next Steps/Action Items

Training for School Staff

Equity Training

- Equity training will be provided for school staff so that they can understand that not all students experience the police and the school system in the same way.

Additional Training

- Additional training will be provided for teachers and administrators to ensure that they are using **PROSE™** for its intended purpose in the school and are focused on the factors in the school that foster a positive school climate and sense of belonging.

Protocol

- The protocol with the police services will be reviewed and updated as needed. Important also is ensuring that police are responding to emergency calls, given the reports that there have been calls not responded to since this review was begun.

Grand Erie Multi-Year Plan

This report supports the Belonging indicator of Learn Lead Inspire and the following statement: We build a culture of belonging to support an equitable, inclusive and responsive environment for each learner.





Grand Erie District School Board

349 Erie Avenue, Brantford, Ont., N3T 5V3

Telephone: 519-756-6301 | **Toll Free:** 1-888-548-8878 | **Email:** info@granderie.ca | granderie.ca



Follow and join the conversation [@GEDSB](#) on Twitter and Facebook. [@granderiedsb](#) on Instagram.