

DPAC executive motion on School Liaison Officer program - excerpted from Dec 3/2020 minutes

- **The following motion was unanimously approved at Vancouver DPAC's Dec 2020 executive meeting.**

Preamble:

School Liaison Officers have been in VSB schools for 48 years; so long that we now forget or can't articulate the reasons why they are there. Changing something so entrenched is not immediately easy and the DPAC Executive recognizes the many positive contributions that individual officers have made to school communities.

Motion:

The DPAC Executive, in light of our core values for equity along with scholarly evidence, believes the VSB should centre the voices of Indigenous, Black and other racialized people and cancel the School Liaison Officer program as a fundamental issue of equity.

Rationale:

In law, we would have taken as precedent Toronto School District's success after canceling its SLO program as the reason why Vancouver's should be cancelled, following the petitioning of the same by community. Further, sufficient scholarly studies are available using a simple web search to allow any of us to study this issue without further taxing the community in constant consultation, when we know that asking people to put on display traumatic experiences causes further harm. This, and the success of the cancellation of Toronto's SLO program, should be enough to inform VSB and save time and free up precious resources that could be used constructively.

Additional Notes and reading

DPAC supports the cancelation of the SLO program, based on available anecdotal and scholarly evidence, as well as precedents of the same.

Ask of the Executive tonight: to bring to the general meeting a letter for PAC reps to vote on with regards to SLOs that the program be cancelled without review. Barring this outcome, we ask that Trustees immediately suspend the program pending the results of consultation with community.

Reasons: In law, we would have taken as precedent Toronto School District's success after canceling its SLO program as the reason why Vancouver's should be cancelled, following the petitioning of the same by community. A review, such as the one the school board is launching, would be superfluous. Further, sufficient scholarly studies are

available using a simple web search to allow any of us to study this issue without further taxing the community in constant consultation, when we know that asking people to put on display traumatic experiences causes further harm. This, and the success of the cancelation of Toronto's SLO program, should be enough to inform VSB and save time and free up precious resources that could be used constructively.

Precedents:

2017 -- Toronto cancels SLO program.

Quoted from The Star, June 22, 2020, Toronto School Board Superintendent, Jim Spyropoulos: "If you're on an equity journey you can't look at majority and minority the same way. We tried to centre the voices of the students who were most negatively impacted, knowing that what was urgent and important for them would also support students in general.'

"Over the past two years, Spyropoulos said, suspensions have gone down by 25 percent and expulsions are down by half. He stressed the reduction is not just a result of getting rid of SROs, but of the larger conversation around equality in schools that also affected things such as early literacy and academic streaming.

"The landscape changed for us. We just got deeper into the conversations around looking at our data and addressing earlier issues of equity."

Other districts are following suit:

June 2020 -- Hamilton-Wentworth halts its SLO program

July 2020 -- Peel Region stopped the SLO program there. Since that time the Peel Region Police (not the school board) are conducting their own review, and will present a reformed program for Trustees to consider. Trustees have stated clearly if the community doesn't find value in a new SLO program, they will not feel obligated to instate it.

August 2020 -- Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) pulls funding for dedicated police officers at two urban high schools, redirecting money toward programs that benefit marginalized students

September 2020 -- Edmonton School District has suspended SLO program for a year while a review is conducted

Historically, SLOs were brought into schools at the same time as schools were desegregated. Over this past summer during the Black Lives Matter protests in Vancouver, every speaker testified publicly about being profiled and targeted most often on their way to schools, during school hours and on their way home from school. Notably there was no system of accountability of police following these targeted occurrences. It serves to further note that for generations people of African ancestry have been subjected to more than their share of criminalization and over-policing, and as such they experience compounding effects of intergenerational trauma in

regards to police that should be considered with due gravity in any conversations about policing in places of learning.

Indigenous students and their families also experience intergenerational trauma in addition to being targeted as possibly criminal at present. RCMP took their parents and grandparents away from their families, and police are often involved in child apprehensions that have too often been for insufficient reasons (including that a parent was in foster care and therefore incapable of caring for their own children).

It is noticeable that there exists no SLO program at St. George's, Crofton House, LFA, Vancouver College, nor other private institutions. In following the logic of keeping SLO programs to foster relationships, why are the students in private schools exempt from this claimed benefit of the program?

Police in uniforms and carrying weapons in schools send different messages to different populations. While some kids feel safe, others, including targeted communities (specifically BIPOC and some refugees) and some students involved in climate justice activities do not experience the same level of comfort nor care. For example, after a targeted bomb threat was made toward people of African ancestry at one school was reported to an SLO, that officer failed to follow Canadian law and told the student, who was of African ancestry, that they were overexaggerating the effect of that letter and no harm had been caused. What did this teach this student about SLOs and trust? Recently, when a teen heard a parent on a video speaking of a teen arriving in an ER badly inebriated during school hours in the pandemic, they laughed at the idea that day drinking was out of the norm. "SLOs just send kids who are day drunk home." Further, in a culture of care, student use of mind-altering substances must be seen as a symptom that deserves care of a counsellor or other experts, as opposed to a crime put before a uniformed, weapon carrying police officer.

Last spring trustees spoke of the worry of losing funding and activities that the SLO program provides. Examined carefully, we must ask ourselves why public funds are being funneled through one well-funded organization to create programming in another. There are three reasons why this is of major concern:

- The skimming of funds: any program that is administered by the police will have administration costs associated with it.
- Creating exclusion: if a student does not feel safe, or feels monitored or targeted around police, they will likely not participate in the program. Programs in schools should be for all kids, and in particular those from vulnerable communities.
- Propaganda: Police depend on programs such as the SLO one to create "good news stories" that paint police in good light in communities. Using students in PR stories is inappropriate when police are also facing community push back for causing harm.

In the interest and practice rather than performative optics, the act of decolonizing and reconciling with families of Indigenous and African ancestry, and ensuring that their children feel as safe and cared for as every other student in the VSB family. Community members have

already spoken -- we've heard them.

Cancel the SLO program.