

As more schools bring police officers back to classrooms, parents remain divided

Supporters say programs build bridges, critics suggest police presence leaves students feeling surveilled

[Jessica Wong](#) · CBC News · Posted: Oct 05, 2025 4:00 AM EDT | Last Updated: October 5



A police officer visits a Canadian classroom. Less than a decade ago, many Canadian schools were dialing back or reviewing programs that had officers visiting their hallways. Now, they're returning or being contemplated anew — a shift being celebrated by some and sparking outcry from others. (CBC)

As police officers return to Greater Victoria School District 61 this fall, high school principal Heather Brown is among those welcoming them back.

When her school board ended its School Police Liaison Officer (SPLO) program two years ago, the administrator in Saanich, B.C., could still access police in emergencies, but felt she'd lost a valuable connection.

She'd previously teamed with SPLOs to advise and counsel students recruited into gang activity — a major concern in her area. With their help, combined with family and community support, she says they pulled some teens out of those situations.

In the absence of SPLOs, however, seeking police assistance "meant that I was working with people who didn't have [a] relationship with me or relationship with youth in the same way," Brown said.

- [Police returning to Greater Victoria schools with mandate to build trust, chief says](#)
- [Parents, teachers protest bill that could bring back police officers in schools](#)

Less than a decade ago, schools in many Canadian communities began dialing back programs stationing police officers in their hallways. In some schools, the move followed reports that these programs [caused some students to feel uncomfortable and even intimidated](#). Elsewhere, programs ended from [lack of funding or resources](#).

Now, amid [reports of increased violence in schools](#), these programs are returning or being contemplated anew — a shift being [celebrated in some corners](#) and [sparking outcry in others](#).

Whether officers visit on sports days, give safety presentations or discussing safety tips more casually in the hall or on the playground, building relationships is the goal, Chief Const. Dean Duthie of the Saanich Police Department told CBC's *On The Island* just ahead of the school year.

LISTEN | Saanich police chief discusses return of officers to schools:



On The Island8:25 Greater Victoria School District's police liaison program returns

Gregor Craigie speaks with Saanich PD Chief Dean Duthie about adding 25 more schools to his officers' workload.

The programs allow police to get to know students better and vice versa, "because it's all about human relationships and connection that builds trust and confidence," he said, acknowledging that officers understand some people will have fear and anxiety around police or uniforms.

Critics question 'relationship-building'

Calgary parent Michelle Robinson questions how deep those connections actually are.

"They're not always at the school," she said. "And they usually have one officer for multiple schools, so there's no real relationship-building."



Calgary parent Michelle Robinson says if students are to truly feel safe, then police officers should be 'out of the classrooms ... and only called upon if needed.' (CBC)

Robinson, a member of the Yellowknife Dene First Nation whose daughter graduated last year, says that when officers were present at the high school, the atmosphere was one of fear, mistrust and surveillance of certain groups, including Indigenous students.

Calgary's School Resource Officer (SRO) program, [launched in the mid 1970s](#), underwent a review [from 2021 to 2023](#). Robinson believes little has improved since, adding that police also haven't addressed their role in violence against Indigenous people, including the apprehending and forcing of kids into residential schools.



Community advocate Andrea Vásquez Jiménez speaks outside Toronto's Queen's Park in June. The director of the group Policing-Free Schools is among those opposing Ontario's Bill 33, which includes a proposal to reinstate school officer resource programs across the province. (Submitted by Andrea Vásquez Jiménez/Office of MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam)

"Our children are still being watched over by police and that's not fulfilling the Calls to Action and reconciliation in any capacity," she said, referring to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's [individual instructions](#) meant to guide Canadian institutions.

Toronto-based community advocate Andrea Vásquez Jiménez, director of Policing-Free Schools, has heard myriad young people detail the negative impact of officers being at their schools.

"They didn't feel that they belonged. Many students even choosing not to attend a school because of police presence. Many young people had mentioned feeling surveilled and policed within spaces that are meant to be for them," she said.

WATCH | Pushback against returning police to Ontario schools:



Pushback against Ontario plan to put police in schools

June 26

Duration2:01

Demonstrators gathered outside the Ontario legislature to protest a new bill requiring schools to bring in school resource officers when offered by local police. Supporters of the bill say it will make students safer, but opponents worry about the effect on racialized students.

The Toronto District School Board, Canada's largest, [ended its SRO program in 2017](#), but Neighbourhood Community Officers can still visit schools. Earlier this year, the Ontario government proposed [a bill that includes reestablishing SRO programs across the province](#).

- [Ontario MPPs vote in favour of motion to encourage school boards to bring police back into classrooms](#)
- [Police in schools program made students feel 'targeted and unsafe,' report from Winnipeg school division says](#)

Rather than police officers, Vásquez Jiménez believes boosting funding for education (that would allow for smaller classes, more educators and mental health supports) and improved community resources (for tackling food insecurity, before and after school programming and youth employment) are better options to address the root causes of violence.

"Healthy communities — including schools — have more supports and resources, not policing and carceral measures," she said.



A police officer stands in the hall of a Canadian school. Students have said the presence of police in schools made them feel unwelcome and surveilled, says Vásquez Jiménez, adding that some chose 'not to attend a school because of police presence.' (CBC)

No link between safety, SRO programs: researcher

SRO programs are often viewed as popular and seen in a positive light, but that opinion can depend on who's being asked, says University of Alberta criminology professor Temitope Oriola. He's leading a national study of SRO programs slated for release in 2026.

BIPOC students and caregivers are more likely to report negative impacts than their Caucasian counterparts, Oriola says. The popularity of the programs doesn't mean they're without harm, he says, adding that even those who support police in schools question whether all students are treated fairly by officers.

WATCH | Review of Saskatchewan SRO program shows strong support:



Review of school resource officer program shows strong support after calls for program cut

October 12, 2023

Duration 2:09

Police officers have been welcomed inside Regina schools for more than four decades but when some community members called for the school resource officer program to be cut, the public and Catholic school divisions commissioned a review.

Reviews and analysis of SRO programs typically gather experiences from students, caregivers, educators, administrators and officers, Oriola explained, but data that tracks safety, effectiveness or the specific details of program mechanics are lacking.

"Even the most sophisticated studies in the literature — with incredible statistical kinds of analysis — have found no link between school safety and the presence of the SRO program or officer," he said from Edmonton.



University of Alberta professor Temitope Oriola is set to publish a national study into Canadian School Resource Officer (SRO) programs, delving into such programs in B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and P.E.I. (Submitted by Temitope Oriola)

Oriola found many SRO officers to be excellent role models and ambassadors building rapport with students, schools and communities. However, he questions whether those individual efforts lead to institutional change when he says many of the programs have "little to no oversight, little to no ... reporting requirements, certainly not to the public."

He discovered that youth respondents also questioned the role SROs played in their schools, even after praising them for helping coach their sports teams or just being fun to chat with.

- [Waterloo Catholic board used school resource officers to handle student mental health issues, tantrums: review](#)
- [Canada's largest school board votes to end armed police presence in schools](#)

"A lot of the students we spoke with, for example, were clear that they would have loved to see more social workers, psychologists [in school] and so on, rather than an officer. And some of them were genuinely befuddled by what the individual actually did," he said.

"We've got to separate the performance of safety from the real things we need to do to address safety."

WATCH | Edmonton trustees vote to return officers in schools:



Officers to return to Edmonton Public Schools

April 30, 2024

Duration1:41

Edmonton public school board trustees have voted to return officers to school hallways. Travis McEwan has more on the return of the school resource officer program, and the motion to revive it that attracted more than 30 speakers from the public.

Officers in schools 'can be that bridge'

Lisa Gunderson, a Victoria parent of two, says that because police officers are supposed to be who we call in an emergency or dangerous situations, it's vital that they improve relations and form connections with communities they've had conflict with — including in schools.

Due to strained history with police, people from different communities may hesitate to speak up about potential criminal activity or reach out for help, she said.



Victoria parent Lisa Gunderson, who advocated for the School Police Liaison Officer program while her children attended high school, believes it creates a needed bridge between different communities and police departments. (Submitted by Lisa Gunderson)

"Kids are not going to go downtown, walk into Vic PD and go through the doors and say 'Hey, I got something I want to tell you,'" said Gunderson, who served on parent advisory councils while her children attended high school and supported police in school programs. "But where's a place that kids go every day? They have to go to school."

Gunderson has seen school-linked officers share valuable info at parent council meetings, deter gang recruitment on school grounds and help families navigate the court system.

If these officers can build trust among students and become an adult presence they feel comfortable being around, then she says "SPLOs can be that bridge" and offer "a lesson into what the larger police force can be doing and needs to be doing to work with racialized minority communities."

Continuous collaboration and feedback must be included, she says, noting that it's part of the revamped guidelines for Greater Victoria School District 61's revived program.

Gunderson says she'd also like to see police undergo ongoing training about racialized violence, Indigenous spaces, sexual and gender identities and have mandated hours directly working with different groups in the community.

In Toronto, a few police officers have become familiar faces at Aaria Haji's middle school: demoing lockdown procedures, talking to students about their jobs or joining in a dance party.



Toronto middle school student Aaria Haji says she's enjoyed officers visiting her school and would love to see more visits from other community workers, including firefighters, paramedics and doctors. (Nazima Walji/CBC)

That's impacted her classmates' behaviour, says the Grade 7 student. For instance, last year, after someone shoved locks, doorstops and more into school toilets and peeled paint off the walls, she says officers paid a visit to discuss consequences youth could face for vandalism.

A few people subsequently owned up to it, says the 12-year-old, who's currently lobbying for a female officer to visit for better representation.

"As soon as a police officer steps through that door, that's when they get back in line," she said.

With files from Nazima Walji

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