

## Uniformed police will be allowed back in Ontario schools, ministry says. Here's how

Career days, mentorship programs among the activities uniformed police can't be barred from attending, education ministry says.

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Black parents and their allies rallied outside of Queen's Park to protest the return of school resource officer programs to schools.

Andrew Francis Wallace/Toronto Star

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By [Kristin Rushowy](#)Senior Writer

Boards will have to allow uniformed officers to attend safety-related or student mentorship programs in schools — including career days — and must work to build positive relationships with police, the education ministry says.

Its new regulations, now open for feedback, are a part of [Bill 33 — legislation the province recently passed](#) giving it more power over boards — that also mandates “school resource officer” programs in cities where forces offer them.

But the regulations also outline a number of other scenarios where police can’t be excluded from school premises, including career days — a requirement that comes after a handful of boards refused to allow officers to attend or present while in uniform, even if they had a child in the class.

The issue of police in schools is controversial, with the Toronto public board eliminating the resource officer program in 2017 after conducting a survey that found a minority of students felt uncomfortable or intimidated by programs that placed armed officers to boost safety but also run extracurriculars and take part in other activities.

While some argued the program fostered good relations among students and police and made schools safer, [critics said racialized students](#) were disproportionately targeted and felt unsafe.

The possibility of the program returning has prompted a number of protests at Queen’s Park.

Toronto police [have said they won’t revive the program](#), though it is up and running in other municipalities.

Police already have access to schools in case of emergencies or threat, and boards do work co-operatively with them on some safety programs.

However, the province’s proposed regulations detail what’s expected, including providing police “with access to school premises, and participation in school programs” for safety drills, school

resource officer/youth engagement officer programs, road or driving safety, mentorship, student well-being and any other initiatives “to build relationships between local police services and students.”

“School boards would also be required to permit police officers both access and participation at career days, extracurricular events, festivals, fundraisers or any other activity or event involving parents, guardians or other members of the community who may also have access to the school premises,” the proposed regulations state.

“School boards would be required to permit officers to participate at these events whether they are in uniform or in plain clothes,” it adds, while also working with police “in a manner that promotes” safety and “builds and maintains positive relationships.”

Emma Testani, press secretary to Education Minister Paul Calandra, said “school resource officer programs help foster positive relationships between students and law enforcement, ultimately making our schools safer.”

She said the ministry has “been consulting with police agencies, parent groups, and school boards across the province on how we can bring back school resource officers and youth engagement programs that will help support students and make our schools safer.”

But the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario has called the move an “egregious overreach,” saying it has “long opposed the use of (school resource officer) programs. Numerous Ontario school boards removed police from schools based on data, community feedback and human rights concerns,” and noted the province’s Human Rights Commission had said Black and racialized children could be subjected “to a higher level of surveillance” impacting their mental health and education.

Before Bill 33 passed, the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association urged the province to pause forcing the school resource officer program and commit “to an evidence-based provincial review of (such) programs, centering the lived experiences of marginalized and historically underserved students.”

This school year, the province has also mandated that one professional activity day for teachers include information about the school resource officer program, as well as the role of police.

In 2023, the Ottawa-Carleton board landed in hot water after [banning a parent from speaking](#) to her child’s school about her policing career if she wore her uniform or arrived in a police car. The board had ended its school resource officer program in 2021.

Also in 2023, a police officer was told not to attend his child’s career day at a Grand Erie public school. The board later apologized.

