

# Perceptions of YSOs

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## Findings from Interviews

# Overview

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To provide sufficiency of perspectives about YSOs, interviews were undertaken to gather data on the sentiments of key interest-holders of the Beaverton School District about the value, challenges, and recommendations of Youth Service Officers (YSOs) in schools. Interviews were conducted with a sampling of the following groups:

- School Principals
- School Staff
- High School Students
- Multilingual Parents
- Peer School Districts

Interviews were conducted in-person, virtually, one-on-one, and in focus groups. Data were collected and analyzed for themes, findings, and recommendations. Essential insights are provided in this discussion to inform the decision-making about YSOs in the Beaverton School District.

# Voice of School Principals

*As the administrator who is at the at the end of the line, making sure safety is established and maintained in a school, I want to know that I we can reach out to our youth service officers anytime. If they don't exist, I don't feel like our kids will be as safe.*

Interviews were conducted with 8 school principals. Data from the interviews were analyzed for themes in three categories: the value of YSOs, concerns about YSOs, and recommendations for YSOs. The most salient themes are represented in the following discussion.

## The Value of YSOs for Schools

### 1. Relationship Building and Trust

The foundation of effective YSO programs rests on building authentic relationships with students. Administrators consistently highlighted how YSOs prioritize positive interactions over enforcement actions, which gradually transforms students' perceptions of law enforcement. This relationship-building represents a strategic investment in breaking cycles of distrust between communities and police. The focus on connection allows students to see officers as accessible resources rather than threats, which creates pathways for communication during both everyday situations and crises. This approach aligns with research showing that procedural justice and legitimate authority are more effective than coercive enforcement in creating safe environments.

*They are heavy on the relational factor, and it's important because a lot of our students don't have a lot of interaction with law enforcement, so they don't know this other side of them.*

*Our 30 Latino boys know he is here for him. They have no doubt they know him.*

*I appreciate [the YSO] is not trying to get kids in trouble. He's trying to help me help kids.*

### 2. Cultural Competency and Breaking Barriers

Cultural competency emerges as a critical dimension of successful YSO implementation, particularly in diverse school communities. Administrators emphasized how YSOs who understand and validate students' lived experiences can effectively bridge historical divides between law enforcement and marginalized communities. This theme reveals the importance of acknowledging systemic issues without defensiveness as a first step toward building new relationships. YSOs who share cultural or demographic characteristics with students may have advantages in initial rapport-building, but the interviews suggest that cultural responsiveness can be developed through training and authentic engagement regardless of background.

*I've been very vocal about my support of YSO, and I stress my identity as a black woman because I know historically, there has not been a good relationship between the black community and police officers, and I'm*

*very supportive of it.*

*[The YSO] doesn't operate in that the perception that a lot of marginalized groups think of police officers. He's not coming in aggressively. He's coming in very soft.*

*I use opportunities for our students to talk to Potter to demystify what it means to be a police officer.*

### **3. Preventative Approach vs. Punitive**

The preventative orientation of YSOs represents a paradigm shift from traditional law enforcement approaches in schools. Administrators consistently characterized YSOs as actively working to divert students from the justice system rather than funnel them into it. This perspective challenges criticisms that police presence leads to criminalization of student behavior. Instead, the interviews suggest YSOs use their discretion and understanding of adolescent development to implement restorative rather than punitive responses when possible. This theme reveals a sophisticated understanding among administrators that student safety and student success are complementary rather than competing goals.

*[The YSO] said, "Listen, we can deal with it, right? If the police get involved, his whole life trajectory is going to change. So let's work together.*

*It's hard to quantify [the value] because there's a number of things they do that aren't going to result in any sort of case or discipline or things like that because they're so preventative.*

### **4. School Safety and Crisis Response**

YSOs contribute significantly to comprehensive school safety plans through both their presence and expertise. Administrators value the visible security that YSOs provide, which creates reassurance for the school community and potential deterrence for those considering harmful actions. Beyond symbolism, YSOs offer practical benefits during crisis situations through their rapid response capabilities and professional training in emergency management. The interviews suggest that administrators view YSOs as an essential layer in a multi-faceted approach to maintaining safe learning environments rather than as the sole solution to school safety concerns.

*When I see his car there, I do feel that the community of parents can feel secure that the officer is there, and so anybody who had anything unkind on their minds just might pass by.*

*My husband made the comment that he feels safer, as a spouse of a principal with me in this role.*

### **5. Training and Specialized Youth Focus**

The specialized training that differentiates YSOs from regular patrol officers emerged as a crucial factor in their effectiveness. Administrators consistently noted how YSOs' understanding of adolescent development and trauma-informed approaches allowed them to interact appropriately with students. This theme reveals the importance of not simply placing officers in schools, but ensuring they receive specific preparation for the educational environment. The contrast administrators drew between YSOs and regular officers demonstrates

that the success of school-based law enforcement depends significantly on tailored training that emphasizes de-escalation, relationship-building, and developmental awareness.

*These YSOs have been trained in child psychology, and all of that, and their approach is so gentle and so soft, and they always stand back.*

*Building positive relationships with our YSO does directly link to a child's experience and immediate safety because if they're able to build that positive relationship at school when they go out in the community, that's their immediate safety.*

## **6. Information Sharing and Collaboration**

Effective information sharing between YSOs and school staff creates a more comprehensive understanding of student needs and potential safety concerns. Administrators valued YSOs' ability to provide contextual information that helps guide appropriate responses to behavior and safety issues. Rather than viewing this information sharing as invasive surveillance, administrators framed it as creating "guardrails" that protect students by ensuring responses are proportionate and supportive. This theme highlights the importance of clear protocols for information sharing that balance privacy considerations with safety needs while maintaining focus on student wellbeing rather than punishment.

*We are in constant communication when we need them... and he has access to a lot of social media, and he's able to really look into things quickly for us and give us insight.*

*He can give us the back story quickly so we can understand what's going on, so we're not coming into it fresh.*

## **7. Strong Administrative Support**

The unequivocal support for YSOs expressed by all interviewed administrators reveals their assessment that the benefits significantly outweigh any potential drawbacks. This support appears rooted in direct experience rather than abstract policy positions, with administrators describing YSOs as essential partners in maintaining safe and supportive learning environments. The passion behind some statements suggests that administrators perceive criticisms of YSO programs as disconnected from the daily realities of school management. This theme highlights the importance of including school leadership perspectives in policy discussions about school-based law enforcement, as administrators have unique insights into how these programs function in practice.

*I don't know how to do a job without a YSO. I don't know if I'd want to do my job without a YSO.*

*It seems pure insanity to think of removing YSOs from our schools. I cannot. I don't know how someone could come to that conclusion based on anything but incredible ignorance.*

## **8. Misperceptions vs. Reality**

Administrators consistently identified a gap between public perceptions of YSOs and the reality they observe daily in their schools. They acknowledged how media portrayals and historical experiences shape negative

assumptions about police in schools, while emphasizing that their YSOs operate in ways that contradict these stereotypes. This theme reveals the communication challenges in public discussions about school-based law enforcement, where theoretical concerns may overshadow actual practices. The administrators' accounts suggest that opposition to YSOs may sometimes be based on misconceptions about their role and activities, highlighting the importance of transparent communication about how these programs actually function.

*I think people think they are there to aid their BPD investigations or something to spy on kids, but not at all, not so. I think people think that they are there to arrest our kids, no, not at all.*

*I think that is the misconception. It's that police are not here to support in general, you know.*

*I mean, like, you see on the news, right? They like, why so taking down an elementary school kid in the middle of the classroom, right? Like, yeah, with the partnership here, that's not what happens.*

## **9. Supporting Vulnerable Students**

YSOs play a particularly valuable role in supporting students experiencing various forms of vulnerability or crisis. Administrators described how YSOs provide specialized support for students facing unstable home situations, mental health challenges, or recovering from traumatic experiences like sexual assault. This theme highlights how YSOs can contribute to a school's broader social support system rather than serving purely as security personnel. The examples provided demonstrate how YSOs with appropriate training can help navigate complex situations that require both sensitivity to student needs and knowledge of legal systems and resources.

*Our YSO sat down with her for a good half hour after a shift was over and counseled her through what it looks like to go back home when you don't feel safe and what your options are.*

*Especially around those sexual assaults and dealing with our young people who've been victims...we have to be very careful in those situations as school folks that we're not doing something that might impede a future investigation.*

## **10. Proactive Community Engagement**

Successful YSOs actively engage with the broader school community beyond responding to incidents, which helps normalize their presence and build wider trust. Administrators described YSOs participating in school events, conducting educational outreach, and building relationships with feeder schools to establish connections before students transition to higher grade levels. This proactive engagement represents a community policing approach adapted to educational settings. The theme suggests that the effectiveness of YSOs depends not only on how they respond to problems but also on their integration into the everyday fabric of school life.

*When we're out forecasting, and we're going to our middle schools, and we see him there because that's his other assigned school, yeah, and he's prepping those kids, building those relationships.*

*Having him kind of excited at the football games when we get a touchdown, I think, makes him become part of the community.*

## 11. Career Pathway Modeling

YSOs serve as career models for students, particularly when they reflect the demographics of the student population. Administrators noted how YSOs can inspire students to consider careers in law enforcement who might otherwise never envision that path. This theme reveals an additional dimension of representation beyond immediate relationship-building – the potential to diversify future law enforcement through positive exposure. The example of an officer who returned to serve at his alma mater demonstrates how YSOs can embody positive civic engagement and community investment.

*They're also an example of how a student may change their trajectory and choose a career that's fun and exciting.*

*Diego is a perfect example of career fulfillment, being happy there, coming back, and giving back.*

## 12. YSOs' Accessibility and Responsiveness

The immediate accessibility and responsiveness of YSOs creates significant practical advantages over calling for general police response. Administrators valued the ability to quickly consult with officers who already understand school protocols and culture, which saves crucial time during emergencies. This theme highlights the operational benefits of having dedicated officers familiar with educational environments rather than relying on general patrol officers. The contrast with experiences in districts without YSOs demonstrates how this responsiveness contributes to administrators' sense of efficacy in managing safety concerns.

*His accessibility, that's not physical, it's like, we have an assistant principal, our social workers, counselors call him if he's not there for whatever reason, they'll text me, and he's like, Okay, I'm on my way.*

*If Joey's not there, I also know there are three or four others that know our system enough that can come over, and it won't be like, Hold on. Let me explain how we do things in schools. They'll just be able to jump right in just as well.*

# Cautions and Challenges with YSOs in Schools

Based on the interview data, while administrators overwhelmingly supported YSOs, they did acknowledge several cautions and challenges.

## 1. Historical Community Distrust of Law Enforcement

Administrators acknowledged that historical distrust between law enforcement and certain communities presents a significant challenge for YSO programs. This distrust, particularly prevalent in communities of color and immigrant communities, stems from negative personal experiences and systemic issues. Administrators emphasized the importance of validating these experiences rather than dismissing them, while simultaneously working to build new, positive relationships. This balance requires sensitivity and authentic engagement with community concerns rather than defensive responses or minimization of past harms.

*I have seen personally the devastation of the breakdown in a partnership within a personal connection, a Personal community and law enforcement, and not only because of the nuances with immigration, which is an added component, but also with just experiences that you have.*

*I have a nephew who he would tell me, as an educator at that time, even I will never talk to a police officer because of an experience that he had which was real to him and was real to us as his family.*

*I don't ever want to forget about the other side of why their presence sometimes is impactful in a very negative way to our communities, but I would love to just focus on the bridging of that to a positive relationship, but never by denying and not validating the experiences that some of these communities have had with law enforcement.*

## 2. Lack of Diversity Among YSOs

The lack of diversity among YSOs emerged as a significant limitation of current programs. Administrators noted that having few officers of color or those who speak languages other than English restricts the program's ability to connect with diverse student populations. This representation gap is particularly concerning in schools with large populations of students of color or multilingual students, where shared cultural understanding and language can accelerate trust-building. Administrators saw this as not only a staffing issue but also a missed opportunity for students to see themselves represented in law enforcement roles.

*I would love for our students to see themselves represented in our YSOs as well. You don't have a lot of YSOs that speak Spanish or any other language at that other than English. You don't see a lot of ISOs that are people of color.*

*It's different when say, 'Oh, you speak Spanish.' Eyes just [light up]. It builds that rapport, and immediately it brings that level of anxiety that kids might or might not feel.*

*There's truth in cultural and cultural competency, not just competency, but, relatability as well. I know when you say, 'Last night I stayed up late because we're celebrating Dia de los Muertos,' and a YSO says, 'Yeah, I did it too.' They're not used to talking to adults that experience, their experiences."*



### 3. Challenging the Misperceptions

A persistent challenge involves the gap between public perceptions of police in schools and the actual training and function of effective YSOs. Administrators noted that media portrayals and historical roles of law enforcement create preconceptions that can be difficult to overcome, regardless of how differently YSOs actually operate. These perception challenges affect not only students and families but sometimes staff as well, requiring continuous education about the specialized training and approach that distinguishes YSOs from traditional law enforcement officers.

*I think that the misconception is that police are not there to support in general, you know?*

*You see things on the news. But with the partnership here, that that's not what happens.*

*I think police are trying to become more proactive, which is a historical image to change, which is tough.*

### 4. Inconsistent Training Across Agencies

Administrators identified inconsistencies in training and approach between different law enforcement agencies as a significant challenge, particularly for schools that fall within multiple jurisdictions. These disparities result in students receiving different levels of service depending on which agency responds, undermining the consistency needed for effective educational environments. The interviews suggest that some agencies have embraced youth-centered, relationship-based approaches more fully than others, creating a patchwork of YSO effectiveness rather than a uniform standard.

*There are aspects of my schools that are in the county. I have seen that when we when there's an issue in the county, I'm getting a different level of service than I'm getting from the Beaverton Police Department. I think I get a much better level of service and support with Beaverton police.*

### 5. Visual Identification and Uniform Issues

Traditional police uniforms can trigger negative reactions in students and families despite YSOs' different role and approach. Administrators noted that visual cues like uniforms carry powerful associations that can override verbal explanations about an officer's function. While some departments have taken steps toward visual differentiation through casual elements like athletic shoes, administrators suggested more comprehensive approaches might be needed to truly distinguish YSOs from general law enforcement in the minds of students and families.

*Fair or not, when they're in their police uniform, they're seen as police officers. Even when I know they're striving to change that with our kids.*

*"If we really want to show that the youth service officer is different than a beat cop, we should address th [uniform]."*

### 6. Stress on Students of Police Presence

Administrators expressed concern about situations where YSO presence might be imposed without adequate sensitivity to community readiness or specific contexts. This challenge acknowledges that even well-trained

YSOs might not be appropriate in all situations or for all communities without thoughtful implementation. The interviews suggest that effective YSO programs require ongoing assessment of community needs and responses rather than a one-size-fits-all approach that ignores historical or cultural contexts.

*My biggest concern is, and I haven't experienced it here, but if I would have any concerns, it would be the forcing a presence right in a community that might not be ready for that.*

*I do fear the perception that is out there of just police officers in general, and the impact that it has on communities. I'm always going to be thoughtful of that, and I think that strategically and thoughtfully the incorporation of YSOs in our schools need to be done.*

## 7. Navigating Dual Roles and Responsibilities

YSOs face inherent tensions in balancing their law enforcement duties with their educational support role. Administrators noted that without clear guidelines, these dual responsibilities can create confusion about appropriate boundaries and interventions. This challenge requires ongoing communication and explicit protocols to ensure YSOs respond appropriately to different situations without defaulting to traditional law enforcement approaches when educational or supportive responses would be more effective.

*If you're a police officer, your instinct when, when there's chaos or there's a disruption, is to respond. But if you're in a building and it's something that technically you're not supposed to respond to, [then you need to refrain.]*

*We have document that we have, like, a flow chart of like, this is when you involve a YSO. This is when you don't this is when you consult with the yso, and it's front facing, like, parents see it, teachers see it.*

Some administrators' comments suggested a potential for schools to become overly dependent on YSOs for situations that might be addressed through other means. While not explicitly identified as a concern by the administrators themselves, this reliance could potentially limit development of complementary approaches to student support and safety. Balancing YSO involvement with other interventions from counselors, social workers, and mental health professionals may be necessary to ensure comprehensive student support systems.

# Recommendations

## 1. Increase Diversity and Representation

The most frequently mentioned recommendation was increasing diversity among YSOs to better reflect the student populations they serve. Administrators emphasized that YSOs who share cultural backgrounds, languages, and lived experiences with students can more quickly establish rapport and trust, particularly with historically marginalized communities.

Having more YSOs of color and those who speak multiple languages would help address historical distrust between law enforcement and certain communities. This diversity would also provide career modeling for students who might not otherwise see themselves in law enforcement roles. The recommendation extends beyond hiring to ensuring YSOs have cultural competency and awareness regardless of their own backgrounds.

*I would love for our students to see themselves represented in our YSOs as well. You don't have a lot of YSOs who speak Spanish or any language other than English. You don't see a lot of YSOs that are people of color.*

*It's different when kids go and be like, 'Oh, you speak Spanish,' like eyes just go and that. It builds that rapport, and immediately, it brings that level of anxiety that kids might or might not feel.*

## **2. Distinguish YSOs Visually from Regular Police Officers**

Several administrators suggested creating clearer visual distinctions between YSOs and traditional patrol officers. While acknowledging practical challenges, they believed that different uniforms or dress codes would help students and families distinguish the specialized youth-focused role of YSOs from general law enforcement.

This visual differentiation would help address the psychological impact of traditional police uniforms, which can trigger negative reactions based on past experiences. Some administrators noted that small steps in this direction (like wearing casual shoes) were already helping, but more comprehensive approaches to visual distinction could further emphasize the unique role of YSOs.

*I think that the dunks [shoes] are one thing, but if we really want to show that they're that the youth service officer is different than a beat cop or whatever is their address [uniform].*

*Even just for their sake, whatever we can, if there is dress or imagery or something that we could do to like, show that like, no, we hear you.*

## **3. Maintain and Expand Specialized Youth Training**

Administrators emphasized the critical importance of specialized training that prepares YSOs specifically for educational environments. They recommended continuing and expanding training in adolescent development, trauma-informed approaches, de-escalation techniques, and cultural competency.

Several noted the significant difference in approach between YSOs and regular patrol officers without such training, highlighting the need to protect and enhance the specialized preparation YSOs receive. Some administrators contrasted the training in Beaverton favorably with other districts or states, suggesting these successful training models could be expanded.

*If our YSO, if the training would go away, I would be fearful of that... all these great things are happening because of the level of training with specific neat youth, which is different than interactions with adults.*

*I value so much the work that Beaverton School District has done... in really thoughtfully training our YSOs to work with youth.*

## **4. Standardize Approaches Across Law Enforcement Agencies**

Administrators identified inconsistencies between different law enforcement agencies as problematic, particularly when schools fall within multiple jurisdictions. They recommended standardizing training, protocols, and approaches to ensure students receive consistent support regardless of which agency provides their YSO.

This standardization would help ensure that all YSOs operate with the same youth-centered philosophy and approach, regardless of their departmental affiliation. Administrators specifically noted differences between city police departments and county sheriff's offices that should be addressed.

*I value so much the work that Beaverton School District has done... in really thoughtfully training our YSOs to work with youth.*

## **5. Expand Proactive and Preventative Programs**

Several administrators recommended expanding YSOs' proactive and preventative work beyond crisis response. They suggested more educational outreach to parents and students about topics like drug trends, social media safety, and healthy relationships.

They also valued YSOs building relationships at feeder schools before students transition to higher grade levels, creating continuity of support. This proactive approach was seen as leveraging YSOs' expertise to prevent problems rather than merely responding to them.

*I think the more we can get that preventative piece with parents, with kids, ours is able to speak to parents through our monthly parent meeting... What should parents know about current drug trends? What should parents know about current sexting stuff?*

*The more we can do to show that, like, No, we hear you. We're trying to. We want a safe presence, but we also want to show that this is a different relationship or a different position.*

## **6. Increase Transparency and Communication**

Administrators recommended clear, public-facing documentation about YSOs' roles, responsibilities, and protocols for involvement in various situations. This transparency helps address misconceptions and builds trust with the community by clarifying when and how YSOs will engage with students.

Several administrators valued recent improvements in this area, including clearer guidelines about when to involve YSOs in different scenarios. They suggested further expanding these communication efforts to help families and community members understand the actual function of YSOs in schools.

*We have a document that we have a flow chart of when you involve a YSO. This is when you don't this is when you consult with the YSO, and it's front-facing, like, parents see it, teachers see it.*

*I think that transparency has been very appreciative, right?*

## **7. Maintain Collaborative Decision-Making**

Administrators emphasized the importance of collaborative approaches to determining when and how YSOs engage with students. They recommended maintaining systems where administrators and YSOs work together to determine appropriate interventions based on student needs rather than rigid protocols.

This collaboration extends to being sensitive about when YSO presence might not be appropriate for certain communities or situations. Administrators valued YSOs who understood the educational mission and worked as

partners rather than imposing a law enforcement approach.

*I think that we should collaborate on when it's appropriate to have that presence or not and then have that discussion.*

*The more proactive we can be to have any type of catastrophe or any type of big event from happening is to be involved and to be proactive about it.*

## Summary of Perceptions of School Administrators

Based on the interview data, administrators are overwhelmingly in favor of having Youth Service Officers (YSOs) in their schools. Every administrator interviewed expressed strong support for maintaining YSOs as part of their school communities.

Some of the most direct statements supporting YSOs include:

- *I don't know how to do a job without a YSL. I don't know if I'd want to do my job without a YSL.*
- *It seems pure insanity to think of removing YSOs from our schools. I cannot. I don't know how someone could come to that conclusion based on anything but incredible ignorance*
- *I'm worried about a misperception taking away this preventative protection that we have.*

While administrators did acknowledge challenges and areas for improvement (such as increasing diversity among YSOs, improving visual distinctions between YSOs and regular police officers, and ensuring consistent training across agencies), these were presented as recommendations for enhancing the program rather than reasons to discontinue it.

Even administrators who explicitly acknowledged historical tensions between law enforcement and certain communities (particularly communities of color and immigrant communities) still strongly advocated for YSOs, seeing them as bridge-builders who could help repair these relationships through their specialized training and youth-focused approach.

The data shows that administrators value YSOs for multiple reasons, including relationship building with students, preventative safety measures, crisis response capabilities, supporting vulnerable students, and providing specialized expertise that regular patrol officers might lack. Their recommendations focused on strengthening these aspects rather than questioning the fundamental value of having YSOs in schools.

# Staff Voice

A sampling of 26 staff were interviewed, providing perspectives on YSOs from the view of the staff experience. The most salient themes are represented in the following discussion.

## Value of YSOs from the Perspective of Staff

### 1. Building Positive Relationships with Students

YSOs create meaningful connections with students through regular, friendly interactions in hallways, cafeterias, and at school events. Staff who were interviewed reveal that relationship-building changes officers from intimidating authority figures to trusted adults whom students feel comfortable approaching. Through small gestures like distributing stickers or Pokemon cards, YSOs establish rapport and make it more likely for students to communicate openly with officers they know and trust.

*He builds relationships. Most kids see him as the guy with stickers, the sheriff with stickers. And they know how to deal with kids in a really serious situation.*

*Our YSO comes to things, and he's always in the hallway walking around, greeting kids, and trying to build those relationships.*

*When they're here, they really do make an effort to stand in the hall and talk to kids. I think that's cool, and maybe they could build a bridge for especially kids of color and the police.*

*When he walks around the halls and sees the kids, he's like another staff member.*

### 2. Improving School Safety and Security

YSOs provide an immediate response to safety concerns and contribute to a more secure environment.

The presence of YSOs provides on-site response capability during emergencies. Staff consistently report feeling more secure knowing a trained law enforcement professional is readily available rather than having to wait for an emergency response. YSOs' familiarity with the school layout, procedures, and community context allows them to respond more effectively to situations ranging from behavioral crises to potential threats.

*I would feel less secure not knowing we have somebody who knows our community, culture, and kids.*

*His presence and his visibility provide a sense of security, and we have somebody who's protecting us, who's visible.*

*Being able to respond to an active shooter without having any type of defense, I think, leaves us exposed. And so having someone on campus, if a situation like that elevates, [is important]. We also have had many situations where students are dysregulated, and the only thing that can happen is they need to be contained at that point in time.*

### 3. Creating Non-Confrontational Exposure to Law Enforcement

YSOs help students see officers in a positive, non-threatening context, which can reduce fear and change perceptions. This experience counteracts negative perceptions some may have developed through media or personal experiences. By interacting with officers in casual, everyday situations, students learn to see law enforcement as helpful community members rather than threats. This regular, positive exposure helps desensitize anxiety around police presence and builds a foundation for healthier community-police relations in the future.

*When a YSO comes in, hangs out in the hallways, and gives kids high fives, students realize that when they see them out in the community, they don't have to be so nervous or afraid of them.*

*I've seen some change in students with regard to police. When it comes to that, it also allows me to teach kids how to treat police properly.*

*This allows students to be exposed to officers in a very casual way and see them every single day. Some students will come on campus and see an officer in uniform, and that could cause anxiety. But when you see that officer day after day, all he's doing is greeting you, or she's greeting you and saying, 'Hey, I hope you have a great day. It kind of desensitizes them to maybe negative feelings that they've had.'*

### 4. Specialized Training for Working with Youth

Interviewees among the staff recognize that YSOs receive specialized training specifically designed for working with young people in educational settings, distinguishing them from regular patrol officers. This training equips them with age-appropriate communication skills, an understanding of adolescent development, and strategies for de-escalation that align with educational rather than purely law enforcement objectives. Staff consistently note the marked difference in approach between YSOs and regular patrol officers who might respond to calls, highlighting the value of this specialized preparation.

*We're going to have to have an officer sometimes for specific issues. And the value of a YSO is that they are trained specifically to work with kids. They come at it with a different perspective than just whoever might respond to a call.*

*I've had experience with YSO officers who can come to school, and then on the days when YSO officers are unavailable, I've had patrol folks. There is a distinct difference between the two and the way they interact with the public. Most importantly, when they interact with my kids, they have a different mindset than the YSOs.*

*I have had a couple of problems with police officers off the street and their interactions with students because they go immediately to a different mindset. But the YSOs are a great group of people and well-trained.*

*I don't know if they go through special training on how to deal with kids, but they definitely figure it out.*

### 5. Contributing to a Positive School Culture

YSOs become integral members of the school community, participating in events, supporting extracurricular activities, and contributing to a positive culture beyond their security role. Their presence at sporting events, assemblies, and school celebrations demonstrates investment in student success and community building. Many YSOs voluntarily participate in school traditions and fundraisers, modeling positive citizenship and reinforcing the message that law enforcement is part of the community fabric rather than separate from it.

*The YSOs that I have worked with are very well trained to deal with students, and so when we have to call them in for some sort of an issue at school, they have a way of working with kids.*

*They come to our football games, and the kids say hi to them. This shows the community that we're in this together. Even though they're part of a different group of people, we're still here to make the community we can, and we're doing this as a partnership.*

*He's really involved. He comes and jokes around with the kids. We're also very lucky because he's bilingual, which has been super awesome. He's really able to connect with every kid.*

*The YSO who works with our school has been here. He played soccer with our kids when we had a staff-student soccer game. He comes and hangs out with the kids at recess.*

*We had an event where you had to pledge money to have ice water dumped on you. He volunteered and earned a lot of money. I think it was for Breast Cancer Awareness Month.*

## 6. Support for School Staff in Difficult Situations

YSOs provide valuable expertise and assistance to teachers and administrators when challenging situations arise. School staff rely on YSOs for consultation, expertise, and support when handling challenging situations that may have legal implications. YSOs provide valuable guidance on issues ranging from suspected abuse to threats, helping staff navigate complex situations while ensuring appropriate procedures are followed. Their availability as a resource for staff creates a collaborative approach to student welfare and school safety that leverages both educational and law enforcement perspectives.

*I think they are just extra support for us when it comes to pretty dangerous situations here at school.*

*I consult with them if I think that we might have a DHS or a legal issue. There are 1000s of things that they do for us every day. When we do have a threat, which has happened a few times since I've been here, I know that at least the ones that I've worked with have relationships with people in the building and that they're going to do whatever they need to do to make sure that this community is safe.*

*We've talked about various things, not just law enforcement, but how to try and help our kids stay out of those situations.*

*The biggest value has been the quality of people we've had. We've had several since, and this is my fifth year. We've had maybe three or four different ones, but they've all been skilled. [I think he] handles the kids' challenging situations respectfully.*

## 7. Quick Response to Critical Situations



Having YSOs on campus enables immediate response to urgent situations without the delay associated with calling emergency services and waiting for unfamiliar officers to arrive. This rapid response capability is crucial during incidents requiring law enforcement intervention, from locating missing students to addressing threats or managing behavioral crises. Staff emphasize that this timely response often prevents situations from escalating and provides crucial support during emergencies.

*I know that the response is really fast and that they will just keep us safe.*

*I also think that having somebody on campus who can respond that quickly with a firearm, to be honest, I think, needs to happen.*

*When we've had scary events happen, they're here and appreciated.*

*They also give us their cell numbers. If I've got a suspicious car, I can call them right away. And even though they can't maybe come right over, they can put me in immediate touch with somebody that can help, instead of calling non-emergency and waiting through all that.*

## 8. Destigmatizing Law Enforcement for Students of Color

YSOs help bridge cultural gaps and build trust with communities that may have historically distrusted law enforcement. Through positive, consistent interactions in the school setting, YSOs help students from marginalized communities see beyond stereotypes and develop more nuanced perspectives on law enforcement. Officers who share cultural backgrounds with students or have cultural competency training are particularly effective in this bridge-building role, helping to reduce fear and build trust across demographic divides.

*Officer Dunn is able to come when there's not an issue, and he sees the kids in the hall or he sees the kids that are coming to the office. We've got one student who wanders a lot. Officer Dunn and that student have built a relationship.*

*Our current YSO, right now, has a really good well, I've the last three I've worked with have a really good demeanor and a calm tone. Their voice tone makes a big difference, smiling, shaking hands when they do that, our parents calm way down.*

*So many of our kids relate to our current YSO because he looks like them, he talks like them, and he is in their neighborhood. He comes to school, he comes to lunch with them, he comes and does recess with them, and he just builds this wonderful community that the kids can tell him anything.*

*In my experience, it has also developed a little bit more community among some of our marginalized populations. When YSOs come in and hang out in the hallways and give kids high fives, students realize that when they see them out in the community, they don't have to be quite as nervous or afraid of them.*

*I've seen great interactions, even during tough conversations, when we've needed to have a YSO or a police officer come in. Having the YSO that they recognize, I think, makes those conversations easier.*

*In particular, our YSO grew up in the community as a young kid, coming over into the Hispanic community. So he also has insights into that community, culturally, that he can share not just because he's a Hispanic man*

*but because he realizes those interactions and what it feels like to be a young kid dealing with figures of authority and the resources that they may or may not know how to access early on.*

## 9. Prevention and Education Rather than Punishment

YSOs focus on helping students learn from mistakes rather than punishing them. The YSO approach emphasizes prevention, education, and positive development rather than punitive measures, aligning with educational rather than criminal justice goals. Officers focus on helping students learn from mistakes, understand consequences, and make better future choices rather than simply enforcing rules. This orientation toward growth and learning rather than punishment creates opportunities for students to develop more positive relationships with authority and better decision-making skills.

*When you see a police officer nowadays or just in general, you can see a power dynamic, and that's just natural. The YSO needs to build relationships with the students, and positive relationships are not built on punitive progress, like "I'm here to get you." No, I'm here to serve you and help you.*

*This guy is great here. It's my first year, and he is awesome. And I'll be perfectly honest: I have a bias, open bias, against YSOs because I've seen so much negative racial profiling in the last 20 years. I've seen relatively few good YSOs. I'll just be honest, this guy's great. He goes to the kid's house. He's serving them. He's not there to, like, get them or bust them for drugs or this or that, or, like, try and set up a sting, which I've seen.*

*Our current YSO has a really good demeanor. The last three I've worked with have a calm tone. Their voice tone makes a big difference. When they smile and shake hands, our parents calm down.*

## 10. Supporting Students with Special Needs and Challenges

YSOs provide valuable support for vulnerable students, including those with special needs, behavioral challenges, or difficult home situations. Their understanding of these students' unique circumstances allows for more appropriate and effective interventions when issues arise. YSOs often develop particularly meaningful relationships with higher-needs students, creating an additional layer of support that helps these students navigate school more successfully.

*I'm a special education teacher, and I work with highly impacted students, so I feel that when our students can see police officers, maybe in the school building rather than in the community, you know, I think some of our students have a hard time relating to a person.*

*I also believe it's a learning time for the YSOs within the building. So if they encounter anyone in the community [with a disability], you know they could act appropriately or understand how to interact with those people on a daily basis. It's not just in schools, but I think it'll help them as well evolve as you know better police officers in the community.*

*I've had some good ones, and then I've had some that have come in with kind of their own agenda or their idea of what needs to happen in a school. I like YSOs that come in, and they're open to the fact that the school is a little bit different than what they're used to and that they're open to the fact that we work with students more than we have to hold them accountable and not hold accountable, but the consequence, I should say, and when they come in with that approach, we're able to just get a lot more accomplished.*

*I know the YSO that's over at West View, and I know the YSO pretty well. I think he does a couple of our middle schools because they show up when our YSO is not here, and all of them I would go down fighting for all of them to stay because they're all great, like I said, great with kids and building relationships, and they enhance the job that I can do to keep the school safe and to keep the kids kind of they take the stance, and this is an important point they take.*

## 11. Community Connection and Knowledge

YSOs provide a unique bridge between schools and the broader community because they understand both contexts and can share valuable information. They serve as vital bridges between schools and the broader community, bringing valuable neighborhood knowledge and community context into school settings. Their awareness of community dynamics, family situations, and out-of-school influences helps school staff better understand and address student behaviors and needs. This contextual understanding enables more effective intervention and support strategies that consider the whole child rather than just in-school behaviors.

*They know the kids in the community, and they are an asset for us to be able to get a better picture of Who our kids are interacting with and what they're being exposed to, and maybe even participating outside of that may affect the culture here in the school.*

*They have access to information that we don't have, we have access to information, you know, just because we know the kid and we can partner, and we're able to find, we've been able to find students, in my opinion, sooner.*

*Sometimes, he's a conduit for some of that communication of what's going on. Sometimes, he is the keeper of the whole picture to help everybody else kind of see that picture.*

## 12. Helping Families Navigate the Legal System

YSOs provide valuable support when students have interactions with the legal system. When students become involved with the legal system, YSOs provide invaluable guidance to help families understand and navigate unfamiliar processes. They can explain procedures, connect families with appropriate resources, and serve as liaisons between the school, family, and legal system. This support is particularly important for families with limited English proficiency, lack of legal knowledge, or fear of authorities, helping ensure students receive appropriate interventions rather than becoming lost in complex systems.

*I know that our officer has volunteered to come in and do accident reports. I'm a math teacher, and so allowing him to be able to come in and show how math can happen in the real world, or just being able to have him speak with the students, is just another really cool level to recognize the fact of, here's real-life math.*

*We know that we have a YSO who knows them, may know their family members, or may know a little more detail about how the system works for them and where they are in the system while we're trying to support them and their families on the academic and social-emotional sides.*

*The YSO was talking to me at one point, and she said, this student needs more support, and it's not support that you or I can give. We need them to have support from juvenile counselors because they're getting*

*themselves into some really dangerous situations in the community.*

### 13. Helping With Mental Health Crises

YSOs assist with mental health emergencies and connect students with resources. They play a crucial role in responding to and managing mental health crises in school settings, working alongside counselors and administrators to ensure student safety. Their training in crisis management, combined with their established relationships with students, makes them effective first responders when students experience acute mental health emergencies. YSOs can help facilitate appropriate interventions, including connecting students with mental health resources, while maintaining a supportive rather than punitive approach.

*We had to help take a student that wasn't in a good place. They had to help take them to the hospital.*

*They come at it with an often much different perspective than just whoever might respond to a call. If we just call for someone, and I've had, you know, after hours or things like that, I've sometimes had just whoever happens to be on duty be the one that responded. And the differences can be pretty big.*

*We've had a couple come in. You know that is great, and what they do well is they try to get other YSOs from other schools to come over, which is helpful, but it's just when they're out on training or when they're out on leave or vacation days and things like that. School still happens, and that's when the inconsistency can feel like we're not being supported in the way that we need to.*

### 14. De-escalation of Conflict Between Students

YSOs help resolve conflicts and prevent situations from escalating. YSOs effectively de-escalate conflicts between students, leveraging their training in conflict resolution and their established relationships with the school community. When tensions rise, YSOs can intervene in ways that reduce rather than amplify confrontation, helping students find peaceful resolutions. Their ability to recognize and address potential conflicts before they intensify contributes significantly to maintaining a safe and positive school environment.

*Even at the football games, when the different students are greeting them, it's just really cool to be able to see again how we are all one community. And it does bring in kind of a familial feel to having the officers on campus at the football games and they're able to greet students by name, which could de-escalate things really fast.*

*When they know the kid we can consult. I've just been doing it a long time, and I know how to handle a lot of stuff, so I don't need them as much, but I just need to be able to get a hold of them.*

*When parents can feel like the YSO is there to work with them, next to us, and be willing to develop a relationship or a partnership with them. When our parents feel that, I see the uneasiness go away.*

### 15. Voluntary Basis and Personal Investment

The effectiveness of YSOs is greatly enhanced by the fact that most choose this specific assignment based on a genuine interest in working with young people in educational settings. This voluntary commitment and personal investment translate into officers who are motivated to build positive relationships and support

student success. Staff consistently emphasize that the best YSOs demonstrate authentic care for students and a commitment to the educational mission beyond basic law enforcement duties.

*I can only speak on the officers that I've come in contact with here at Beaverton. They need to be willing to be here, having them assigned would not do well, I don't believe. Because I think your heart really needs to be willing to be part of the community.*

*I think the fact that they are part of it, they're here because they like to be, not because it's, oh, this is your duty. I'm pretty sure they volunteered to be at that level, so they actually genuinely care about students and engage with them.*

*I am a student success coach, but I have had the pleasure of being also an eighth-grade counselor and a math teacher for seventh, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade in the three years that I've been here, and we have a very good relationship with our YSO. Diego is amazing. He comes in and takes time to get to know the kids and then also get to know their connections.*

## 16. Creating Accessibility and Helping Disadvantaged Students

YSOs provide an especially important connection for students who might not otherwise have positive experiences with authority figures. They provide particularly valuable support for disadvantaged students who might otherwise lack positive connections with authority figures or access to resources. For students facing challenges related to poverty, language barriers, or family instability, YSOs can become trusted adults who provide consistency and connection. Their ability to communicate in students' home languages (when bilingual) and understand cultural contexts further enhances their accessibility to diverse student populations.

*It makes a huge difference. And then, in addition to that, he knows all of us as staff, so not all of us, I'd take that back, but you know those of us that tend to work with him more, so the administration counselors, some of those people, our campus supervisor, certainly like he knows us as staff. And so there's just that easy relationship where there's already been trust established.*

*They're not just there to lecture or lay down the law. There are just a lot of different approaches when we're not working with youth service officers. Their ability to have an equity mindset is different, and I think that we're less likely to have bias when we have our youth service officers.*

*You get a really friendly rapport because it's not their job at that moment in time to get students to go to class. Their job is to establish relationships with them. And so they get to recognize the fact of, okay, so even though this person is here as an authority figure, they really just want to know who I am.*

## 17. Improving Communication During Emergencies

During emergencies such as threats, lockdowns, or other critical incidents, YSOs provide essential communication coordination between schools, emergency services, and families. Their understanding of both school procedures and law enforcement protocols allows them to bridge communication gaps that might otherwise impede effective response. This communication role is crucial in ensuring clear, consistent information flow during high-stress situations when miscommunication could have serious consequences.

*At the very beginning of the school year, we had a bomb threat, and somebody threatened to bring a gun, and we had our YSOs here all the time. So many parents said, "Oh, I'm so glad you have that here. I'm so glad that you've got somebody on site."*

*I think God forbid if anything did happen where all of our practice with lockdowns and that kind of stuff. I think having that face that you are looking for, that has a connection, knowing that that would be the person who would be one of the first people there. I think that's key. I think those kids will know who to look for, and that would be beneficial at that point.*

## Reservations about YSOs

Despite the overall positive perception of Youth Service Officers (YSOs) in Beaverton schools, the interviews revealed several concerns and hesitations from staff members. These concerns provide important context for understanding the complex relationships between schools and law enforcement personnel.

### 1. Concerns About Impact on Students of Color and Immigrant Families

Some staff members expressed concern about how police presence might affect students of color and immigrant families who may have had negative experiences with law enforcement or fear deportation. These concerns reflect awareness of broader societal tensions around policing and marginalized communities.

*I think we certainly have people of mix, like immigration status in their families, and with a lot of what we see in the news and all those things there can be some fear around that.*

*Suddenly, we have these deportations happening. And I think that certainly right now we have some families in our community that are very nervous around any kind of an officer. I can't speak to how that feels exactly, but I'm sure that plays a part.*

*I have a bias, an open bias, against YSOs because I've seen so much negative racial profiling in the last 20 years. I've seen relatively few good YSOs.*

### 2. Concerns About Potential Criminalization of Student Behavior

Some staff expressed worry about the risk of normal adolescent behavior being treated as criminal rather than as developmental or educational issues when law enforcement is present in schools. This reflects tension between educational and criminal justice approaches to student behavior.

*I think, like I said, the more liberal Portland types would be leery of someone if they don't know their kids. You wouldn't want someone there if a kid makes a mistake at school; you don't want to cop there just to bust them so they can get into the jail system, which a lot of them are afraid of.*

*I know sometimes people use YSOs for disciplinary action, which I don't know how that would be appropriate. I'm trying to think of where it was where they had physically disciplined the student. And I thought that would be really unnecessary and very odd.*

### 3. Budget and Resource Allocation Concerns

Some staff questioned whether the financial resources allocated to YSOs might be better spent on other educational supports, particularly in times of budget constraints. This reflects broader considerations about prioritization of limited school funding.

*Probably the only other question I would have is, What's the cost to us? When we're looking at budget shortfalls, maybe it's not a significant amount of money, but I remember being at a board meeting once and seeing some numbers. It seemed like enough money that if we're going to be cutting things that impact more kids all the time, then that doesn't seem like a priority.*

*I just say, do we want that, or do we want another teacher? Or do we want another mental health person or whatever.*

*There might be a financial cost, you know. Every year we worry about our budgets, and different things like that.*

### 4. Inconsistent Coverage and Availability

Staff noted frustration with inconsistent YSO availability, particularly when officers are assigned to multiple schools or work hours that don't align with the school schedule. This creates gaps in coverage that can undermine the effectiveness of having YSOs.

*The only concern that's hard, and I don't think there's an answer, is when we need them, we can't get a hold of them, and then I have to rely on non-emergency.*

*Their schedule doesn't fit the middle school schedule either. They're usually off by three, but we go until 4:05, and so situations always happen at the end of the day. Having somebody who can be with us at least until 4:30 is key to their schedule, but it just doesn't match.*

*If anything, give them more time to be here with the schools, to develop more of a relationship, and maybe have them bring back some of those drug and alcohol like DARE that my kids did in school. Maybe some of those programs bring back some of those.*

### 5. Power Dynamics and Authoritarian Approaches

Some staff raised concerns about YSOs who adopt a power-focused or authoritarian approach rather than a relationship-based, educational mindset. This highlights the importance of officer selection and training.

*I've had some good ones, and then I've had some that have come in with kind of their own agenda, or their own idea of what needs to happen in a school.*

*I think when they walk around like they own the place, almost, for lack of better term, you know, it just sets off a bad about just with everyone.*

### 6. Concerns About Uniform and Visual Symbolism



The police uniform itself was mentioned as potentially intimidating or triggering for some students, creating a barrier to relationship-building despite officers' best intentions. This reflects awareness of how visual symbols of authority can affect perception.

*I think the uniform, in our society, has a bad rap. Maybe if they didn't have the uniform, maybe they came in like, you know, you see detectives, and maybe you see even POS whenever they come into the school, or you see them throughout the community, they look like normal citizens dressed, you know, in just normal street attire.*

*If you were to lose the whole uniform appeal, maybe he would fit in normally with the rest of us, just kind of wearing normal, business casual work clothes. Maybe he still has a Washington County patch on a sleeve or a chest, but maybe that's just something that might lessen the anxiety that somebody might have if there is one.*

## 7. Lack of Clarity Around YSO Role and Purpose

Some staff mentioned confusion or misconceptions about why YSOs are present in schools, suggesting a need for better communication about their purpose and role. This highlights how incomplete understanding can lead to suspicion or resistance.

*I think the dialogue that we're having is helpful to get you to know those opinions [of staff].*

*I think sometimes parents might not know the reason, or they might think they're there because something bad happened or that this is a bad school. Knowing more about what the role is and why they're at school might help change a little bit that mindset.*

*We did have a parent one time when our officer was here just hanging out with us. It was at the end of the day, and the parent said, "Why is he here?"*

## 8. Variability in YSO Quality and Approach

A recurring concern was the inconsistency in quality and approach among different YSOs, suggesting that the effectiveness of the program depends heavily on individual officers rather than systematic training or expectations.

*You know, I've been very lucky with all my interactions, and I've been very lucky with the places I've worked that's always had really nice cops that seem to really like children. Because, I mean, kids aren't stupid, and they could tell if you don't like them. They can tell when you're annoyed with them, and they can tell if you don't want to be there.*

*Just like any teacher, like if any person in any profession, like if all the kids are saying it and like, it's probably some element of truth to it or not all. But like the majority you talk to, like, if a teacher, which happened to Ida B Wells, if a teacher is on Instagram, I'm talking to students inappropriately on his personal account, and all the kids are saying that, well, you've got to start looking at the teacher.*

*I would be really curious how maybe some of those high school kids feel and some of those kids that are getting disciplined and maybe entering the juvenile justice system, and are we participating in that? I just think*



*that gets a lot more complex, maybe at that age.*

These concerns, while not as prominent as the positive feedback in the interviews, highlight important considerations for implementing and evaluating YSO programs in school settings. They suggest areas where careful attention to selection, training, communication, and program design could address legitimate concerns while preserving the valuable aspects of having YSOs in schools.

## Recommendations

Based on the interview data from Beaverton School District staff, several meaningful and significant recommendations emerge for optimizing the YSO program in the future. These recommendations address both enhancing current strengths and addressing identified concerns.

### 1. Emphasize Relationship-Building Over Enforcement

The most consistent theme across interviews was the importance of YSOs prioritizing relationship-building with students. Future programs should explicitly structure YSO roles to prioritize positive interactions, community building, and student support over enforcement activities.

*I think encouraging them to take the time to have positive interactions with the kids. [The YSO] comes in here and he's passing out Pokemon cards or, you know, stickers, or just shooting the breeze with the kids in the lunchroom on the playground, just to have that positive interaction.*

### 2. Increase YSO Staffing to Ensure Consistent Coverage

Many staff members mentioned the need for more YSOs to ensure better coverage across schools and throughout the full school day, including after-school hours when incidents often occur.

*The only recommendation I would have is if we could have more so they would have more time to be in the buildings. It's such a positive thing for the students to see that.*

*If anything, give them more time to be here with the schools, to develop more relationships.*

### 3. Enhance Equity Training and Cultural Competence

Several respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring YSOs receive comprehensive equity training and develop cultural competence, particularly for working with diverse student populations.

*Give them some training on equity. I don't think police officers get this training.*

*We've been making efforts to bring in more youth service officers who speak more than one language, especially Spanish, in this community. I know there's efforts to bring in youth service officers that are, you know, more bicultural, and certainly we are moving in that direction.*

### 4. Standardize and Communicate Emergency Protocols

Staff emphasized the need for clear, standardized protocols for handling various emergency situations, with consistent implementation across schools.

*Just when it comes to certain threats of shooting and missing students, I would say those two things are the ones that are hardest for me, and I know it can be dependent on the student that you're working with, for sure, but I would just like us to be able to pull it up and then go through it together.*

*I had a situation with a gun threat, and another school that my son goes to eighth grader had a similar situation almost at the same time. Their protocol was different than mine, and it probably shouldn't have been.*

## 5. Improve Parent Education About YSO Role and Purpose

Better communication with parents about the purpose and benefits of having YSOs in schools was frequently mentioned as a way to reduce misunderstandings and build community support.

*Sometimes, parents might not know the reason, or they might think they're there because something bad happened.*

*We actually had our Latino Parent Night, and we invited public safety. And so the families met the YSO. It was nice for the families to know their role here at school.*

## 6. Clarify Expectations and Boundaries with Staff

Clear communication about the YSO role, including their legal obligations and limitations, was identified as important for effective collaboration with school staff.

*Sometimes, we forget they are officers, too, and there are laws.*

## 7. Consider Modifying Uniform or Appearance in Some Contexts

Some suggestions involved reconsidering the traditional police uniform to reduce potential intimidation while maintaining appropriate identification.

*I think the uniform, in our society, has a bad rap. Maybe if they didn't have the uniform, maybe they came in and looked like normal citizens dressed in just normal street attire.*

*Maybe he still has a Washington County patch on a sleeve or a chest. Maybe just that might lessen the anxiety that somebody might have if there is one.*

## 8. Integrate YSOs into Staff Development and School Community

Creating more opportunities for YSOs to participate in staff development and introduce themselves to the school community was suggested as a way to build stronger integration.

*Maybe we could see them during staff development at the beginning of the year.*

## 9. Create More Educational Programming Opportunities

Several staff members suggested expanding the YSO role to include more educational components such as internet safety, conflict resolution, and substance abuse prevention.

*I was hoping that they could be more incorporated in classrooms talking about topics like drug prevention, you know, Internet safety, conflict resolution, like what that looks like in the outside world compared to what it looks like in the school world.*

*I know teachers are knowledgeable about certain things, but we're not subject matter experts when it comes to crime prevention or maybe like gang affiliation, you know, just different things.*

These recommendations, grounded in the direct experiences and observations of school staff, offer a roadmap for enhancing the effectiveness and community acceptance of YSOs in school settings. They emphasize relationship-building, equity, clear communication, and integration into the educational mission as critical components of successful programs.

## Summary of Sentiment of Staff

Based on the interview data, educators in the Beaverton School District are overwhelmingly supportive of having Youth Service Officers (YSOs) in their schools. While there are some nuanced concerns and suggestions for improvement, the general sentiment is strongly positive.

### Overall Support for YSOs

The vast majority of educators interviewed expressed clear support for the YSO program. Many were emphatic about the value YSOs bring to their schools:

*I would feel, I think I'd feel a little less secure not knowing that we have somebody who knows, knows our community, our culture, and our kids.*

*The only concern that I would have was if we could have more so they would have more time to to be in the buildings.*

*I am very concerned about them not being on campus and they're not here all the time or anything like that.*

The interviews reveal that most educators would actually prefer to have more YSO presence rather than less, with several specifically mentioning that their concerns center around not having enough YSO coverage rather than having too much.

### Educators with Mixed or Nuanced Views

A smaller number of educators expressed more nuanced or mixed opinions, acknowledging both benefits and potential concerns:

*I've had a bias, an open bias, against YSOs, because I've seen so much negative racial profiling in the last 20 years. I've seen relatively few good YSOs. I'll just be honest, this guy's great.*

*I'm also think of some of our families of color, and I also personally have a daughter, a black daughter, and so I know what that can mean for folks. I feel a little conflicted, like I really like them personally, and I do see value, and they certainly are appreciated that they're here. And I wonder, like, do we necessarily need that? I could argue either side.*

These educators still generally support having YSOs but express concerns about implementation, equity considerations, or resource allocation.

## Lack of Opposition to YSOs

Notably, there were virtually no educators in the interview sample who took a clear position against having YSOs in schools. Even those who expressed concerns or identified potential drawbacks still generally supported the program with adjustments rather than advocating for its elimination. One staff member noted hearing others express concerns, but did not personally share them:

*I think there are definitely some staff in place who very strongly feel like we shouldn't have officers, definitely. And there are people I really respect their opinions too. I guess I'm not quite as far on that.*

## Context for Understanding Support

Several factors appear to influence the high level of support among educators:

1. **Positive personal experiences:** Most educators cited specific positive interactions they've witnessed between YSOs and students.
2. **School safety concerns:** In an era of heightened concern about school security, many value having trained law enforcement readily available.
3. **Relationship quality:** The particular YSOs currently serving in Beaverton schools appear to be especially skilled at relationship-building with students.
4. **Voluntary participation:** Several noted that YSOs choose this assignment because they want to work with youth, resulting in better fits for the role.

In summary, while there is a spectrum of opinion with some nuance and recognized areas for improvement, the interview data indicates that Beaverton educators are predominantly supportive of having YSOs in their schools, with many emphasizing their value for safety, student relationships, and community connections.

# Student Voice

In five focus groups including 85 students, the following sentiments are represented:

## Students' Valuing of YSOs

To a great extent, students participating in this study valued YSOs, who they are and what they do. Among the most significant areas of appreciation are the following:

### 1. Enhanced Sense of Safety and Security

In focus groups, students consistently mentioned that YSOs contribute to an overall feeling of safety. One student directly stated that having a YSO "gives off this visual field of safety" and "when you're here with the [officer], you feel safe." Another student explained that "it just makes it feel safer," suggesting that the mere presence of a trained officer provides reassurance.

Students recognized that the YSO serves as a safeguard against potential threats. One student said, "We're trying to prevent [something bad] happening, right?" Another student elaborated on this preventative value: "It's like an incidental thing. We wouldn't realize how much we needed until something bad happens, and then we'd be, Wow, we really need this. It's good to just have on hand."

### 2. Specialized Training and Response Capability

Students appreciated that YSOs have specialized training that teachers and administrators lack. One student explained the difference in emergency response capabilities:

It's not like administration or teachers are going to have any sort of weapon to protect people. I think that's the difference between an officer and administration that is trained. It's kind of that one person [in] your school that has those resources on them to actually respond to a threat.

Another student reinforced this point: "Even if you want to have safety stuff, the idea of having someone who's trained and has done it before can be a little bit more comforting. If there was a safety incident, and even though we've done the drills and stuff, it's natural to like panic. [So to] have somebody who has done that and knows it can be a little bit more reassuring."

### 3. Positive Relationship-Building with Law Enforcement

Students valued how having a YSO helped build positive relationships between students and law enforcement. One student noted that the YSO "gives them a chance to see that [police officers] are human and people just like us." Another explained that "for a lot of students, maybe the idea of talking with an [officer] out of school can be scary or intimidating. It's important to have them make connections with the students." The friendliness of the YSO was frequently highlighted as crucial. Students described their YSO as a "sweet guy, very

accessible, very approachable." They spoke positively about his approachability. One said, "When I've interacted with him and talked to him, he has been very nice and friendly."

## 4. Community Integration and Belonging

Students appreciated that their YSO was specifically chosen for their school, with one student noting that "he actually went to Southridge" (their school). When told that YSOs are "hand-picked for that specific school," students responded positively, with one saying, "I think it definitely contributes to the sense of community and his approachability. And I think he was perfectly selected for our school." This integration into the school community was important. One student commented, "He feels less like a security guard and more like just a person who's around, just a member of our community."

## 5. The Importance of Officer Demeanor and Approachability

Students placed significant emphasis on the YSO's personal demeanor as critical to their effectiveness. One student explicitly stated that "their demeanor and the way they treat students and their relationships with students might be one of their most important roles in the school, because their job and their uniform and their weapons can be a negative message." This theme was reinforced by another student who said, "His demeanor is integral in his relationship with students," and added, "if he was in the corner, mugging everyone all the time, I would feel a lot differently." The students consistently noted that the approachable nature of their current YSO made a substantial difference in how they perceived him, with one noting that "not just any police officer can be a YSO. I think it has to be a very specific type" who can "appeal to the kids."

## 6. Shifting Student Perceptions of Law Enforcement

The interviews reveal that the YSO's presence helps reshape some students' perceptions of law enforcement. One student noted that their friendly YSO "can change some people's perspective on police officers and firearms." Another student suggested that "people who maybe do have negative opinions on police officers or firearms are able to see another side of it and how it really can just be used as protection and not like a negative thing."

## 7. Student Awareness of the YSO's Specialized Training

When informed about the specialized training YSOs receive, students expressed that this information should be more widely shared. One student noted, "I feel like it's not spoken about enough how much training they go through, like how specific they are for our age group and for exactly what they're doing in our school."

# Student Reservations about YSOs

Based on the focus groups, students generally expressed positive attitudes toward YSOs, they did raise several specific concerns:

## 1. Presence of Firearms in School Environment

Some students expressed discomfort about YSOs carrying firearms. One student directly raised this concern: "Do they have like guns on them? Well, I think that is definitely scary just to have that in the school." This sentiment reflects anxiety about having weapons present in an educational setting, regardless of who carries them.

Another student elaborated on this concern by noting: "It does add a weapon to the building, even if it is in the right hands, which could be a concept that worries people." This suggests an awareness that introducing any weapon into a school environment creates potential risks, even when carried by trained professionals.

## 2. Potential for Intimidation or Triggering Reactions

Students recognized that the presence of uniformed officers might be intimidating or triggering for some of their peers. One student acknowledged, "I can see how that could cause somebody else to get upset or triggered easily because of that."

Another student noted, "For a lot of students, maybe the idea of having an [officer] out of school can be scary or intimidating." This suggests awareness that past negative experiences with law enforcement might affect how some students interact with YSOs.

## 3. Lack of Clarity About the YSO's Role

A significant concern raised by multiple students was confusion about what exactly the YSO is responsible for in the school setting. One student said, "I wish I heard from you guys about what his role is. Because then I would know exactly what falls under his jurisdiction and what doesn't. Because right now I don't really know much of the difference."

Another student reinforced this concern: "I came from a private school, and I had no idea what he was doing here. That was a little bit surprising for me to see the police car and the police officer in school when I first came here." This student specifically recommended "making sure that everybody knows this is why he's here. This is what he's here for. So then, everybody's on the same page about that."

## 4. Questioning the Necessity of YSOs

Some students questioned whether YSOs were truly necessary given other security measures. One student said, "I can't really think of a situation that we've had, at least here at South ridge where we would need an actual police officer."

Another student suggested that if other security measures were sufficient, a YSO might be redundant: "Just as long as the security is good, then I think it's probably fine. If the security [is] locked doors, and there's no way of an intruder getting in. If harm can't get inside, then does he need to be here? Better to have him here, probably, but either way. But if he's not really needed, that's probably better."

## 5. Concerns About School Entry Points

While not directly related to YSOs themselves, students expressed concerns about general security that relate to the YSO's effectiveness. One student noted: "Sometimes it feels like it's very easy to get into our school, like

someone walking through the front door. It feels like I can walk by with nobody even recognizing my face."

This student further explained that even when doors are locked, "people will still let you in. If they see you knocking on the door, they think they're being friendly, and it might be a vulnerability." This suggests concern that a YSO's effectiveness might be limited by broader security practices within the school.

These concerns, while not overwhelming, indicate that students have a nuanced view of YSOs and recognize potential challenges alongside the benefits they provide.

## Student Recommendations for YSOs

From the focus groups, students offered several thoughtful recommendations for improving the YSO program in the future:

### 1. Clearer Communication About YSO Roles and Responsibilities

The most prominent recommendation was to better communicate the YSO's purpose and jurisdiction. One student said: "I wish I heard from you guys about what his role is. Because then I would know exactly what falls under his jurisdiction and what doesn't. Because right now I don't really know much of the difference." Another student said, "I think that making sure that everyone knows this is why he's here. This is what he's here for. So then, everybody's on the same page about that."

### 2. Prioritize Officers with Strong People Skills and Community Connections

Students emphasized that the selection of officers with the right interpersonal qualities is crucial. One student noted: "Not any, not just any police officer can be a YSO. I think it has to be very specific type" who can "appeal to the kids." They particularly valued officers who could build relationships with students. When told that their YSO was an alumnus of their school, students responded positively, with one saying: "I think it definitely contributes to the sense of community and his approachability. And I think he was perfectly selected for our school."

### 3. Better Awareness of YSO Training and Qualifications

Students suggested more transparency about the specialized training YSOs receive. When informed about this training, one student said, "I feel like it's not spoken about enough how much training they go through and how specific they are for our age group and for exactly what they're doing in our school." Another student said, "If students knew the differentiation between YSO and other positions of authority in the school have to be beneficial."

### 4. Integration with Other School Safety Measures

Students implied that YSOs should be better integrated with other safety personnel and systems. One student noted the lack of distinction between YSOs and hall monitors: "I do kind of feel like he holds the same, if not less, power than our hall monitors. It just feels like the only difference between them is the uniform." This



suggests a need for clearer delineation of responsibilities between different safety personnel in the school, allowing the YSO to focus on their specialized role.

## 5. Continued Focus on Approachability and School Community Integration

Students strongly recommended that YSOs maintain their approachable demeanor. One student explained that "their demeanor and the way they treat students and their relationships with students might be one of their most important roles in the school." Another student emphasized that YSOs should feel "less like a security guard and more like just a member of our community," suggesting that future officer selection and training should prioritize community integration.

## 6. Consider Student Comfort with Firearms

While not an explicit recommendation, students' discussions about firearms suggests that schools should address concerns about YSOs carrying weapons. Their comments indicate that open discussion about why YSOs carry firearms, along with safety protocols, might help alleviate some students' anxiety.

These recommendations reflect students' desire for YSOs who are approachable community members with clear roles, who can effectively contribute to school safety while building positive relationships with the student body.

# Student Voice

## Combined Summary: Student Feedback on YSO Presence and School Safety

Student feedback was collected during three separate sessions regarding school safety and the role of Youth Service Officers (YSOs). The responses reflect a variety of perspectives across different campuses, student demographics, and school types.

### 1. What Makes Students Feel Safe at School?

- Strong relationships with trusted adults (teachers, counselors, wellness staff)
- Presence of safety roles like YSOs and campus monitors
- Consistent staff engagement and supervision
- Use of security features like intercoms, key card systems, and cameras
- Knowing there are peers and staff they can turn to in times of concern
- Programs that support students at risk (mentorship, counselor check-ins)
- Open communication and normalization of reaching out for help

### 2. Where Do Students Feel Unsafe or Vulnerable?

- Portables and exterior classrooms with easy access
- Unlocked or unsecured front doors
- Limited or no exterior surveillance
- Bathrooms known for illicit activity (e.g., vaping, sex), unclean or lacking privacy
- Parking lots, bus transfer hubs, and overcrowded or unsupervised spaces
- When students experience or witness bias and discrimination
- In environments where it's hard to be vulnerable or ask for help
- When potentially dangerous items can be brought in without detection

### 3. Perceived Benefits of Having a YSO on Campus

- Immediate availability in emergencies
- Deterrent to dangerous behavior
- Visible safety presence (especially near entrances or parking lots)
- Ability to support with emergencies, surveillance footage, and safety follow-up
- Escorting duties at early colleges or large campuses
- Provides a sense of reassurance to both students and parents

### 4. What Makes Students Feel Uneasy About YSOs?

- Presence of weapons (especially guns)
- Intimidating gear and uniforms
- Perceived lack of clarity about their role
- View that their purpose is to “find something bad”
- Distrust, especially from marginalized populations
- Negative portrayals in media and lack of relational presence
- Some students don't notice them at all, suggesting weak relationship-building

### 5. Student Recommendations for Improving YSO Impact and Relationships

- Introduce YSOs at the beginning of the year and during assemblies or advisory
- Explain their role clearly to students (via lessons, teachers, or admin)
- Allow informal, positive engagement opportunities (lunch tables, conversation, celebrations)
- Ensure YSOs are visible and integrated into the school community
- Reduce intimidating presence (e.g., avoid displaying weapons when possible)
- Provide a known, accessible location for students to find and talk with YSOs
- Encourage consistent interaction to build trust and reduce stereotypes
- Clarify reporting pathways — who to go to for what type of issue (YSO, counselor, campus security)

#### **Themes Across All Sessions:**

- Visibility and approachability matter: students want to know who YSOs are and trust their presence
- Safety is both physical and emotional: having caring adults and peer support is key
- Relationship-building with YSOs is just as important as their function
- Clear communication and consistency can reduce fear and build connection

This student input offers valuable guidance for shaping safe, welcoming, and well-supported school environments through the effective use of Youth Service Officers.

## Summary of Student Sentiment

The overall balance of evidence demonstrates that students are supportive of having YSOs in school.

1. No student explicitly advocated for removing YSOs from schools.
2. Even students who questioned necessity still expressed preference for having YSOs.
3. The majority of comments reflected positive impressions or explicitly supported having YSOs.
4. Concerns raised were generally about implementation (clarity of role, approach, communication) rather than the fundamental concept of having YSOs.
5. When directly asked by the interviewer about concerns, multiple students responded with "no" or couldn't identify concerns.

In conclusion, while the data shows some nuanced perspectives, the balance of evidence from these student interviews leans decidedly in favor of having YSOs in schools, with students primarily suggesting improvements to the existing program rather than questioning its fundamental value.

# Voice of the Multi-Lingual Parents

During the study, 40 multi-lingual parents were interviewed. The following discussion represents the most significant themes from the interviews.

## Value of YSOs

There are several significant themes regarding why multilingual parents value having Youth Service Officers (YSOs) in schools:

### 1. Enhanced Security and Safety

Many parents express feeling increased comfort and security knowing that YSOs are present on school grounds. They view YSOs as authority figures who can respond quickly to emergencies and prevent dangerous situations. Several parents specifically mentioned that the visible presence of uniformed officers deters negative behaviors and keeps "suspicious visitors away." One parent noted, "I feel much safer knowing they are there," while another stated, "Seeing them in their uniform make me feel safe."

### 2. Prevention of Concerning Behaviors

Parents value YSOs for their role in reducing problematic student behaviors, particularly in middle and high schools where students may be more likely to engage in fights, bullying, or substance use. One parent mentioned that "students show more respect at school because they are there," while another observed that YSOs "put thing in orders at middle school." Parents believe YSOs' presence encourages students to "make better decisions" and may "prevent shady people to hang around school yard."

### 3. Positive Relationship Building

Several parents appreciate the potential for YSOs to build positive relationships with students. They value officers who make efforts to engage with students, with one parent hoping YSOs can "engage more with students and teachers." Another suggested that "if the officer is a part of staff and every student knows him (her), it is not uncomfortable." Some parents expressed interest in YSOs teaching classes, organizing clubs, or conducting safety seminars to further strengthen these connections.

### 4. Immediate Response to Threats

Parents value having a trained professional on-site who can immediately address safety concerns. One parent shared an anecdote about how "a thief or a stranger entered our School and the officer removed him from the School." Parents appreciate that YSOs are "trained to know how to handle any situation" and can respond promptly to potential threats, with one noting they "can respond quickly in an emergency."

### 5. Providing an Important Educational Role

Some parents value YSOs for their potential educational impact. They appreciate when officers "talk to the students about what will happen if they get involved in good activities" and hope YSOs might "hold some safety seminars" to raise awareness. Parents see value in YSOs teaching students about boundaries, respect for differences, and appropriate behavior, with one parent hoping for conversations about "the importance of attendance."

## 6. Responding to Specific Concerns

While many parents feel elementary schools are relatively safe, they particularly value YSOs in secondary schools where issues like bullying, fights, substance use, and truancy become more prevalent. One parent specifically said, "My daughter had hard time in high school and I had so many meetings with principal because of bullying, I like to see YSOs at those meetings to draw the line for students to stop the bullying."

## 7. Cultural Bridge and Language Support

Some multilingual parents appreciate when YSOs make an effort to communicate in their language, seeing it as an additional layer of support. One parent noted that "when they make an effort to communicate in our language, it can feel like an added layer of protection." This suggests YSOs can serve as cultural bridges for immigrant families who may otherwise feel disconnected from school safety systems.

## 8. Mentorship and Role Modeling

Parents value YSOs as potential mentors and positive role models for students. One parent specifically mentioned appreciating YSOs' "potential to mentor" students. Others expressed that YSOs can demonstrate positive values and show students "how they can be better people," suggesting they see officers as figures who can guide youth toward positive life choices beyond just enforcing rules.

## 9. Parent Communication and Engagement

Several parents mentioned appreciating YSOs who communicate directly with families. One parent noted, "The YSOs talked to the parents, they had a meeting with us and that is a good start." This engagement helps build trust between families and school safety personnel, particularly for immigrant families who may have different experiences with law enforcement in their countries of origin.

## 10. Addressing Community-Specific Concerns

Some parents from different cultural backgrounds expressed that having YSOs helps address fears specific to the American school context. One parent mentioned, "Before moving to the U.S., I was a bit worried after hearing about many incidents in U.S. schools." The presence of YSOs helps alleviate concerns about school violence that may be particularly salient for families who moved to the U.S. from countries with different safety profiles.

## 11. Clarity and Structure in School Environment

Parents value how YSOs contribute to a structured, orderly school environment. Several comments suggest that parents appreciate the clarity of boundaries and expectations that come with having official safety

personnel. As one parent put it, YSOs "represent law and the students, who are about to break the rules might think twice before doing something bad," suggesting they value the behavioral structure that YSOs help maintain.

## 12. Cultural Shift in Perception of Safety

Some responses indicate that while parents might initially feel uncomfortable with law enforcement in schools based on their cultural background, their perception shifts over time. One parent noted, "At first, it felt a bit strange to see police cars at the high school, but living in the U.S., it doesn't seem unusual anymore," suggesting an adaptation to American school safety norms.

## 13. Trust Compared to Home Country Experiences

Some parents specifically contrasted their trust of YSOs in U.S. schools with their experiences in their home countries. One parent said, "I feel comfortable here, that the police officers are inside the school, I wouldn't feel safe in my country, but here I do, I trust the police more here." This suggests that for some immigrant families, the presence of YSOs represents a more trustworthy authority figure than what they experienced in their countries of origin.

## 14. Support for Vulnerable Students

Parents of smaller or more vulnerable students specifically value YSOs as protectors. One parent mentioned, "Especially since my child is smaller than peers, having an adult around to protect the students at school would be very good." This indicates that YSOs are seen as advocates for students who might otherwise be at risk of bullying or intimidation due to physical differences or other vulnerabilities.

## 15. Extended School Perimeter Security

Several parents value YSOs for monitoring areas beyond the immediate school building. Some mentioned concerns about the areas around schools, with one parent specifically noting a desire for "police presence around Meadow Park MS" after observing concerning behavior "around the basketball courts." This suggests parents value YSOs' role in securing not just the school building but the broader campus environment.

## 16. Continuity Across Grade Levels

Some parents value having YSOs present throughout their children's education, seeing benefit in students building relationships with officers from elementary through high school. One parent expressed hope that "students will know that YSOs is presence in school are necessary for safety to all and to build a relationship with them from elementary schools all the way to high schools," suggesting they value the continuity of safety personnel across their children's educational journey.

## 17. Supplement to Home-Based Values

Several parents view YSOs as reinforcing values they teach at home. One parent specifically noted, "The staff do a lot for our children at school, the biggest job and responsibility starts at home," suggesting they see YSOs

as complementary to, rather than replacing, their own role in teaching children about safety, respect, and appropriate behavior.

## 18. Addressing Emergent Social Media Concerns

While not explicitly stated in many responses, some parents allude to concerns about social media-driven behaviors like filming fights or other inappropriate activities. One mentioned students "watch and take photos" during fights, suggesting they value YSOs' potential role in addressing new types of concerning behaviors facilitated by technology and social media that traditional school staff may not be equipped to handle.

# Reservations

## 1. Fear vs. Protection Balance

Some parents worry that YSOs might create an atmosphere of fear rather than genuine safety. One parent expressed this concern: "The balance between protection and control is delicate. Without careful oversight, the presence of YSOs could unintentionally foster an environment of fear rather than one of genuine care and safety." Another parent similarly worried that "If the presence of YSOs continues to evoke fear rather than genuine protection, I worry it could erode trust in the school system."

## 2. Law Enforcement Background Concerns

Some parents expressed uneasiness about the law enforcement background of YSOs potentially overshadowing their supportive role. One parent stated they were "uneasy because their law enforcement background sometimes overshadows the supportive intent," suggesting concerns about how officers' training might affect their approach to student issues.

## 3. Cultural Sensitivity and Targeting Concerns

There are concerns about potential bias and disparate treatment based on cultural background. One parent said, "I'm uneasy because a YSO's approach can mirror the aggressive tactics of traditional police---a reality that has long targeted communities like mine." This suggests fears about discrimination or unequal treatment of students from certain cultural backgrounds.

## 4. Weapons on Campus

Some parents specifically mentioned concerns about YSOs carrying firearms in schools. One parent said, "I don't think YSOs should bring their guns inside, this might cause student to worry, they might think something bad has happened." This indicates discomfort with the visible display of weapons in an educational environment.

## 5. Student Intimidation

Some parents have concern that some students might feel intimidated rather than protected by YSOs. One parent noted, "I am afraid some students might feel more concerned than safe by having the presence of YSOs at school," while another mentioned "I just think schools should be somewhere everyone should feel safe at," implying that YSOs might make some students feel less safe.

## 6. Need for Training and Accountability

Some parents expressed that they would be more comfortable with YSOs if there were clear training standards and accountability measures. One parent stated they "would need to see strict accountability, ongoing cultural sensitivity training, and clear limits on their enforcement role before feeling more supportive." Another mentioned they would feel more at ease "if YSOs were clearly separated from punitive measures through rigorous training and community input on their practices."

## 7. Unfamiliarity with the Concept

Some parents noted they were unfamiliar with the concept of YSOs, particularly those from countries where such roles don't exist. One parent mentioned, "I don't know what YSOs are and their responsibility is at school. We don't have YSOs in my country (Japan)." This unfamiliarity could contribute to uncertainty or hesitation about their value.

## 8. Concerns About Stranger Presence

Some parents worried about YSOs who are unknown to students. One parent stated, "if the officer is a stranger, the students might be scared," suggesting that having YSOs who are familiar and integrated into the school community would be preferable to rotating or unfamiliar officers.

## 9. Concerns About Appropriate Training for School Environment

Some parents express worry about whether YSOs receive specialized training for working specifically in educational environments with children. This is reflected in comments hoping "new staff at schools will be trained by YSOs" and wanting confirmation that officers understand the unique nature of school settings versus regular policing contexts.

## 10. Concern About Inconsistent Implementation

There appears to be concern about inconsistency in how the YSO program is implemented across different schools. Some parents mention not seeing YSOs at their children's schools at all ("I have never seen YSOs at my child's school"), while others indicate regular interaction, suggesting uneven distribution of resources that might create disparities in safety support.

## 11. Concerns About Over-reliance on YSOs

Some parents implicitly worry about schools potentially using YSOs as a substitute for other necessary supports. Comments like hoping the YSO presence will "not intimidate the students" suggest concern that schools might over-rely on authority figures rather than developing comprehensive support systems for students.



## 12. Worries About Communication Barriers

For multilingual families specifically, there appears to be concern about potential communication barriers between YSOs and non-English-speaking students or parents. The appreciation expressed when YSOs "make an effort to communicate in our language" suggests an underlying worry about language barriers affecting the effectiveness of YSOs in supporting diverse student populations.

## 13. Concerns About Creating Dependency on Law Enforcement

Some responses suggest worry that relying on YSOs might create an unhealthy dependency on law enforcement for handling school issues. One parent noted that "if we have YSOs in my child's school, I hope their presence promote safety," implying concern that their role might extend beyond appropriate boundaries.

## 14. Fears About Reinforcing Negative Topics

One parent mentioned concern about YSOs potentially reinforcing negative themes: "It seems to me that the school should also reinforce the theme of 'killing people' as video games do, sometimes children talk about killing easily and it should not be normalized." This suggests worry about how safety discussions led by YSOs might inadvertently normalize violence rather than promoting positive behavior.

# Recommendations

## 1. Enhance Community Engagement and Relationship Building

Parents strongly recommend that YSOs build deeper relationships with students and families. Several parents suggested that YSOs should "talk to the students" regularly, "establish a relationship," and "meet with the students." One parent specifically appreciated that "YSOs talked to the parents, they had a meeting with us and that is a good start," suggesting the desire for ongoing engagement. Parents value when YSOs are familiar faces rather than strangers, with one noting that "if the officer is a part of staff and every student knows him (her), it is not uncomfortable."

## 2. Provide Educational Programs and Safety Seminars

Parents recommend that YSOs take on more educational roles. Several suggested that officers should "hold some safety seminars" and "teach classes or organized clubs for students." One parent specifically mentioned wanting YSOs to help students "learn more advocacy for how to sit boundaries, respect other people differences and how to keep their hands to themselves." Parents see value in YSOs contributing to safety education, with one hoping "the school district can strengthen safety education, especially for middle school students."

## 3. Ensure Cultural Sensitivity and Language Accessibility

Parents recommend improving cultural competence and language accessibility among YSOs. Some parents specifically mentioned the need for "ongoing cultural sensitivity training" and appreciation when officers "make

an effort to communicate in our language." This suggests YSOs should receive training that helps them work effectively with diverse student populations and develop communication strategies that reach all families, regardless of their primary language.

#### 4. Focus on Secondary Schools

Several parents specifically recommend prioritizing YSO presence in middle and high schools rather than elementary schools. One parent said, "I think at the elementary level, school staff are doing their best to keep all kids safe, elementary students rarely have fights with severe injuries or bullying. I am happy to know that we will have YSOs at secondary level schools." This suggests strategic deployment of YSOs where they're perceived to be most needed.

#### 5. Increase Visibility in Problem Areas

Parents recommend that YSOs increase their visibility in specific areas where problems occur. One parent specifically requested "police presence around Meadow Park MS" after observing concerning behavior "around the basketball courts." Others mentioned wanting YSOs to "patrol the campus more frequently" and monitor areas like back entrances where "strange people have approached students."

#### 6. Establish Clear Boundaries and Accountability

Parents recommend creating clear guidelines for YSO roles and responsibilities. Some parents wanted to see "strict accountability" and "clear limits on their enforcement role." This suggests a desire for transparency about what YSOs can and cannot do, how they interact with students, and what oversight mechanisms exist to ensure they're fulfilling their supportive role appropriately.

#### 7. Address Specific Behavioral Concerns

Parents recommend that YSOs focus on particular behavioral issues that concern them. These include bullying ("draw the line for students to stop the bullying"), drug use (concerns about "e-cigarettes and other drugs available"), attendance issues ("talk to the teenagers about the importance of attendance"), and fighting ("some male students have been fighting at school, and no one intervenes").

#### 8. Balance Authority with Approachability

Parents recommend that YSOs find the right balance between representing authority and being approachable to students. One parent specifically praised a female officer at their child's school who is "very kind" and has befriended their child. This suggests parents value YSOs who can maintain order while still building positive, supportive relationships with students.

#### 9. Integrate YSOs Throughout Educational Journey

Parents recommend creating continuity in YSO relationships across grade levels. One parent specifically hoped "students will know that YSOs presence in school are necessary for safety to all and to build a relationship with them from elementary schools all the way to high schools." This suggests a desire for a consistent YSO program that allows students to build familiarity with officers throughout their educational experience.

## 10. Provide Mental Health Support Collaboration

Parents recommend YSOs work closely with mental health resources. One parent specifically mentioned that school staff should "closely monitor students' mental health issues," suggesting YSOs should collaborate with counselors and mental health professionals rather than working in isolation. Another parent wished "there were an adult (counselor or teacher) at school whom my child could talk to about feeling safe," indicating a desire for integrated support systems.

## 11. Ensure Proportional and Appropriate Interventions

Parents recommend ensuring YSOs respond to situations with appropriate levels of intervention. Comments about wanting YSOs "clearly separated from punitive measures" suggest parents want officers who understand the difference between educational discipline and law enforcement, using their authority proportionally to the situation.

## 12. Increase Parent Communication About the YSO Program

Several parents mentioned not knowing what YSOs are or what they do, suggesting a need for better communication about the program. Comments like "This is the first time I've heard of YSO" and "I didn't know there was a program called YSO" indicate that schools should better inform parents about the purpose, role, and benefits of having YSOs on campus.

## 13. Address Campus Security Gaps

Parents recommend YSOs help address specific security vulnerabilities they've identified. One parent worried about an "open campus" high school where "teenagers gets to leave any time they want," while another was concerned about a school with "no fence and anyone can gets in." These comments suggest parents want YSOs to help implement comprehensive security measures beyond just their presence.

## 14. Train School Staff in YSO Best Practices

Parents recommend cross-training between YSOs and regular school staff. One parent specifically hoped "new staff at schools will be trained by YSOs to have an idea on how to make safety priority," suggesting YSOs should share their expertise with teachers and other personnel to create a more cohesive safety approach.

## 15. Maintain Program Despite Opposition

Some parents specifically recommend continuing the YSO program despite potential controversy. One parent directly stated, "I hope the school district can continue this practice and not be influenced by those who oppose it," suggesting awareness of debates about school resource officers and a desire to preserve the program they see as beneficial.

## 16. Involve YSOs in Anti-Bullying Initiatives

Parents specifically recommend involving YSOs in addressing bullying concerns. One parent mentioned wanting YSOs present at meetings about bullying to "draw the line for students to stop the bullying," suggesting they

see officers as potential allies in creating clearer consequences for bullying behavior.

## Summary of Sentiment Toward YSOs

Based on an analysis of the interview data, the evidence predominantly supports having YSOs in schools, though with important nuances and qualifications.

The majority of parents expressed comfort and appreciation for having YSOs in schools. Many statements directly support this sentiment:

*"I love seeing YSOs present at school, it puts thing in orders at middle school."*

*"I love seeing YSOs at my children schools. Seeing them in their uniform make me feel safe."*

*"I feel very comfortable the YSOs are present at Schools."*

*"Nothing makes me uncomfortable with YSO in school."*

*"I feel much safer knowing they are there."*

Multiple parents specifically requested more YSO presence, with comments like "Would help to have on in Jacob Wismer" and "I think there needs to be police presence around Meadow Park MS."

Even among parents who expressed concerns, many still supported having YSOs but wanted improvements in implementation rather than removal of the program. These parents often used conditional language:

*"I would need to see strict accountability, ongoing cultural sensitivity training, and clear limits on their enforcement role before feeling more supportive."*

*"I would feel more at ease if YSOs were clearly separated from punitive measures through rigorous training and community input on their practices."*

Only a very small minority of responses suggested strong opposition to YSOs. The concerns expressed were significant but generally focused on improving rather than eliminating the YSO program. Some parents specifically advocated for continuing the program despite opposition, with one directly stating, "I hope the school district can continue this practice and not be influenced by those who oppose it."

The data reveals that most multilingual parents value having YSOs in schools while also wanting thoughtful implementation that respects cultural differences, focuses on relationship-building, and maintains appropriate boundaries. The evidence suggests parents favor keeping and enhancing the YSO program rather than removing it, particularly at the middle and high school levels.

# Voice of Peer School Districts

Representatives from three peer school districts were interviewed as part of this study. Seven individuals in leadership positions at North Clackamas, Tigard-Tualatin, and Salem-Keizer participated in providing perspectives about YSOs (at times, called SROs).

## Value of YSOs in Peer Educational Districts

### 1. Relationship Building with Students and Community

The interviews consistently emphasize how SROs develop meaningful relationships with students, which creates trust and understanding that wouldn't exist with regular patrol officers.

*Our SROs aren't just the cop in the building, they're developing relationships with the students. When something does happen, there's an existing relationship.*

*A regular patrol officer responding to the school looks much differently than going through the criminal justice process.*

### 2. Enhanced Safety Response and Expertise

SROs provide specialized knowledge during emergencies and can coordinate effectively between schools and law enforcement.

*Last week, we had an incident where there was SWAT coming to an apartment complex that was like two blocks away from one of our schools. And had there not been an SRO that I could communicate with to try to help manage how we're going to release students at that school, it just would have been [difficult].*

*I couldn't imagine doing my job effectively without knowing I had an SRO in the building, whether taking weapons off of kids, dangerous situations, having an SRO, knowing that I had somebody close by, made me feel a lot better about being able to deal with dangerous situations.*

### 3. Diversion from Criminal Justice System

SROs often help keep students out of the criminal justice system by using their discretion and understanding of the school context.

*We've had situations where, if we didn't have an SRO in our schools, the outcome would have been catastrophic. It would have been, it would have ended poorly from even from a political standpoint of how something could have been handled.*

*How it's kept kids out of the system, how things could have blown up, and it was resolved at the lowest level, with accountability, but yet, it was relational.*

### 4. Educational Value Beyond Security

SROs contribute to education by teaching in classrooms and providing specialized knowledge about law and safety.

*The law-related education is super valuable for the school community, not just for safety purposes, but for all the education that gets provided.*

*Our SROs also go into classrooms and teach. They have built such a relationship with our staff that staff invite them in depending where they're at, whether it's a social studies class or some other class.*

## 5. Investigative Expertise and Support

SROs provide critical investigative knowledge that school administrators often lack.

*What you'll miss [if you don't have YSOs] is the investigative piece. Serious crime taking place on your campus, even minor crime sometimes where you're like, hey, "Can you help me? Can you help me walk through this?"*

*We are, removing the houseless from our campuses, interrupting domestics that occur in our parking lot, things like that. We had to come up with some more professional training for them.*

## 6. Essential Communication Bridge Between Schools and Law Enforcement

SROs serve as translators between the educational and law enforcement cultures, facilitating better outcomes.

*We are playing a little bit of that conduit or translation between the two entities [of law-enforcement and schools].*

These strengths collectively show how SROs/YSOs provide multifaceted value to school districts beyond just security presence, serving as educators, mentors, and creating a bridge between law enforcement and educational institutions.

# Keys to YSO Effectiveness

Based on the interview data, several factors are helping Youth Service Officers (YSOs)/School Resource Officers (SROs) be effective in their roles.

## 1. Clear Role Definition and Expectations

Establishing well-defined roles and responsibilities helps YSOs focus on appropriate tasks.

*We sat down and we really started talking about the expectations. We wanted that position to be more than just a cop sitting in the building waiting for something to happen.*

*We've had an opportunity to redefine what's the role of our security officers is within the school, and what the role of an SRO in the school. It's not the same for both of them now.*

## 2. Strong Communication Structures

Regular communication between school administrators and law enforcement agencies creates better understanding and alignment.

*We're widening or expanding on that day-to-day communication so that we can understand and hear their concerns.*

*We are having meetings. We are the bridge between the police and sheriff's departments that we partner with. And we're also having internal meetings with our school leaders, school superintendents and secondary leadership.*

## 3. Intentional Selection of Officers

Not all officers are suited for the school environment, so careful selection is crucial.

*It takes a special person to be an SRO. You wouldn't want anyone to be in that role. When there's an opportunity for a transition, it is the district, it's the police department, it's the community. It's a lot of folks. We just don't pick the next [person]. [Not everyone] might not have the right skill set personality to fit in and work with our students.*

## 4. Training in Cultural Responsiveness

Specialized training helps YSOs better understand and respond to diverse student populations.

*That process was grueling, but the end result was a new contract with our city partners around some different expectations around cultural responsiveness, our SROs being more engaged in some trainings in our schools.*

## 5. Continuity and Longevity in Position

Allowing officers to remain in schools for extended periods builds relationships and institutional knowledge.

*I think our SROs have some continuity too. [Our YSO] has a 10-year contract. So we know that we're going to have him in that role for a long time.*

## 6. Community Integration

YSOs who are part of the community they serve develop stronger connections.

*[The YSO] lives in our community. His kids went through this school district. There's some buy in there. They're not just a police officer that drives around and does nothing right there.*

*They're coaches within our schools or within our systems and our youth organizations. So they are here for our community and it shows.*

## 7. Active Debriefing After Incidents

Conducting thorough reviews after incidents helps improve responses and understanding.

*When we do have a major incident at one of our buildings, we always have a debrief with the folks that were involved, making sure that we think that we're getting folks to be open and honest.*

## 8. Visibility and Engagement in School Life

YSOs who actively participate in school activities build trust with students.

*You can find [YSOs] at the door greeting kids. Just watch our SROs interact with the kids. The younger kids come up to them asking for whether it stickers or they're kind of the rock star.*

These elements collectively create an environment where YSOs can effectively serve as both safety resources and positive influences in the school community.

## Possible Alternatives to YSOs

Based on the interview data, several alternatives to having Youth Service Officers (YSOs) in schools were discussed. Here are the key alternatives mentioned in the interviews:

### 1. Expanded Internal Security Teams

Without YSOs, there would be a need to implement an expanded internal security team.

*We've seen a little bit of what the struggle Portland public's experiencing with their lack of SROs there. They've had to take a different approach and really expanded what I'll call their internal or private security teams.*

*Since that time [of discontinuing SROs], we have spent the last five years, restructuring that program. I'm going to need to boost my security numbers.*

### 2. Restructured Campus Safety Staffing

Without YSOs, districts increase their campus safety personnel to offset the loss of SROs.

*I think we were about 40 campus safety. We restructured the entire thing so we now have a manager, four field coordinators, and then we're now running like 60 or 62 campus safety across the secondary systems.*

### 3. Contracted Detectives Instead of Full SRO Program

Without YSOs, districts maintain some law enforcement presence by contracting specific detective positions rather than a full SRO program.

*I was allowed to keep two contracts, and so I have two detectives from the Kaiser police department. We pay for 100% for two detectives.*



## 4. Administrators Taking on Law Enforcement Liaison Roles

Without SROs, school administrators often have to take on liaison duties with law enforcement.

*What we're seeing is our assistant principal and dean of students are having to try to step into the role of law enforcement, obviously not their area of expertise.*

*Essentially, I do a lot of [coordinating]. I have a lot of really good relationships, but even that is starting to change with retirements.*

## 5. District-level Point Person for Law Enforcement

Creating a specialized position at the district level to coordinate with various law enforcement agencies:

*You'll have to have someone internally who understands the revised statutes.*

## 6. Designated Department Liaisons

Establishing specific contact points with different law enforcement agencies.

*Now we have liaisons at every department. We have people that we can call directly.*

## 7. Mobile Patrol Teams for Elementary Schools

Creating specialized mobile teams to serve elementary schools that wouldn't normally have full-time security.

*We did not have a mechanism to send anybody. We didn't have any cars to help the elementary schools. That was born of the field coordinator model. They have marked cars and amber lights and all that stuff. And they are the ones who, during the daytime, support our elementary schools.*

The interviews consistently emphasized that these alternatives required significant restructuring, additional funding, and several years to implement effectively. The contribution of interviewees suggest that it took "probably about three years" to get things "working functionally well" after the transition away from SROs.

# Recommendations for BSD Regarding YSOs

Based on the interviews, these are the specific recommendations offered for the Beaverton School Board as they consider decisions about their Youth Service Officer program:

## 1. Maintain the YSO Program With Clear Expectations

The overwhelming recommendation across all interviewees was to maintain the YSO/SRO program:

*I would say, for me, it's an absolute recommendation of yes. I've experienced it as a building principal... just all the benefits that it brings.*

*I wouldn't want my son or daughter going to a school without an SRO.*

*I almost would say, it's a disservice to the school community for families and students to not have SROs.*

## 2. Develop Clear Accountability Structures

If maintaining YSOs, develop clear expectations and reporting mechanisms.

*[The YSO director's] ability as a certified police officer to go in and actually develop a set of board protocols or board standards that they want to see out of the SROs, and then a quarterly report coming back on that, arrest statistics, demographics, you know, seriousness of crime, things like that.*

## 3. Focus on Building a True Partnership

Rather than viewing YSOs as vendors, cultivate a genuine partnership approach.

*Ensuring it's a true partnership, that we're both working together, and even though we may have different views, we're working towards the same end goal, and treating it as a partnership is critical.*

## 4. Establish Clear Communication Structures

Create formal channels for ongoing dialogue between schools and law enforcement.

*[It's important to have] clear roles and responsibilities and accountable communication structures.*

## 5. If Transitioning Away, Prepare for Significant Changes

If the board decides to remove YSOs, they should be prepared for substantial restructuring.

*If this is the route you guys go, of course I'll help with whatever I can. We'll be there to support. But you will have a whole new pathway. You'll need to have budgeted funds to offset whatever.*

*You'll need additional. Our behaviors changed after COVID. I can't tell you if that has anything to do with a lack of presence of SROs in schools or not. I can just tell you that kids are different than they were pre pandemic, and our schools are not the same places, which is why we have weapons detectors sitting in our buildings.*

## 6. Address Community Concerns Through Education and Outreach

For addressing community concerns, focus on education and relationship-building.

*I think that it's an ongoing process, but just continue with community outreach and community meetings, just putting our face out there.*

## 7. Consider the Practical Investigative Benefits of YSOs

Remind the board of the practical investigative value that YSOs bring.

*The biggest thing is that the one-to-one ability to...work through investigations, talk to investigations, receive investigative information from law enforcement sources.*

## 8. Address Cultural Responsiveness Concerns Directly

If cultural concerns are driving the discussion, address them directly with training and accountability.

*The end result was a new contract with our city partners around some different expectations around cultural responsiveness. Our SROs are more engaged in some trainings in our schools, and then some community outreach that we currently do.*

The consistent message across all interviews is that while YSO programs can be improved and refined, removing them entirely would create significant gaps in school safety, student support, and law enforcement relationships that would be challenging and costly to replace with alternative approaches.