



**Duluth Engage! School Safety
School Resource Officers
Community Conversation
Community Feedback Debrief
February 2022**

All photos taken during Intentional Social Interactions





ISD 707 Measurable Goals

Project Goals	Measurable Indicators of Success
<p>Deliver a transparent engagement process to hear the experiences and recommendations of students, staff and community members related to School Resource Officers and school safety.</p>	<p>80% had a chance to share their perspective of School Resource Officers.</p> <p>80% learned something new about the role of SROs.</p> <p>Transparent reports now available on projects.marnitastable.org, for the community to read, including all raw data and findings from the conversations as of Monday, February 7th, 2022.</p>
<p>Engage a diverse group of Students, Staff, Families, Community Organizations, Unions, Administrators & Local Tribes.</p> <p>We will work with ISD 709 Integration Specialists to center the voices of marginalized community members.</p>	<p>Use polls, in-room counting, and demographic data from sign-in forms to measure those welcomed and engaged throughout the project.</p> <p>80% of participants say that they met or conversed with someone across self-identity (ex: race, culture, age, community role, home school.)</p>
<p>Provide recommendations directly from the voices of the community.</p>	<p>Deliver presentation including major themes and community-based recommendations based on raw and unfiltered reportage.</p> <p>360 report and raw data available online.</p>

We made every attempt to ensure that:



voices of individuals
from communities
that have historically
been marginalized



the process was fair
and unbiased



the widest range of
voices possible

What we found:

- Not just low trust or lack of trust
- Very high distrust, antipathy and assuming the worst

Resulting in:

- Fear of retaliation for speaking
- Assumption that the process would be biased
- Anger that they felt their voices weren't going to be heard or respected
- Anger that an outside organization was hired
- Addition of survey
- Addition of multiple points of contract/Multiple events

Resource Overview

Went from 2 engagements to 8 conversations and an online survey

Budget \$30,000

Actual Expenses to date: \$67,742.96

Equity Grant to ISD 709 \$40K+

Approximately 1/3 Back to the Community

Outreach & Event Support \$5,220.00

Event Food & Beverage \$3,768.10

Outreach & Event Supplies \$856.94

(Not including travel expenses, out for MTI staff utilization of local businesses)

Outreach Overview- IZI Engagements

ISD 709

- Activation of Integration Specialists
- Internal School Communications- Emails & Newsletters

Marnita's Table Team

- Calls and emails to 17 organizations in Spring & Summer
- August Outreach Specialist two-day visit to Duluth to distribute flyers and direct invitations to 9 community businesses; 20 community organizations; door-knocking at west side neighborhood homes
- Commitments from Community Action Duluth, Life House, Adult & Teen Challenge, Women Resource Center, Damiano Center, Mentor Duluth and the Duluth NAACP to share with community members

Outreach Overview – Survey Engagement

ISD 709

- Activation of Integration Specialists
- Internal School Communications- Emails

Marnita's Table Team

- August outreach included paper surveys and was successful in obtaining 17
- October emails to community organizations with commitment from Duluth NAACP to share with membership



**PARTICIPATORY
ACTION
RESEARCH
PROJECT
OVERVIEW**

Events: n = 8

May 27th, September 22nd, 23rd, 30th

Event Participants: n = 222

Survey Participants: n = 225

Demographics: Staff, students, community members. Events: 21% IBPOC, 70% youth (under 24)

Host Schools: Lincoln Park Middle School, Denfeld High School, Ordean-East Middle School, East High School

Languages: English

Mindstorm Themes

Key themes emerging from small-group discussions:

“Black Lives Matter. We need equity to achieve safety. Moving forward we should adopt a better way of engaging with youth. We were in a social justice public school in Seattle, Orca K-8. What helps more than cops is garden class and social events and a playground with climbing structures and stuff to engage youth to play... but instead ISD709 has allowed middle schoolers to use cell phones in school for entertainment, disengaging from one another while creating a class divide. This further divides kids by bringing the element of time-wasting scrolling into the learning and in-person socializing environment. I thought we had until high school to deal with this crap. Speaking of, adapting to a healthier food service would do these kids good. Behavioral problems can often be traced to a high sugar/carb/preservative laden menu. I hope we can use resources better to create a new effective model for Duluth schools. Thank you for listening!” – Family member of student, Lincoln Park **(Survey response)**

“SROs can be a positive addition to school environment and culture. Being clear about the expectation that they are to engage is positive interactions has been powerful. Of course, some of this depends on the personality of the officer. I have been appreciative when SROs are willing to come to my Social Studies classes to discuss with students about their role as it pertains to government, and our rights. Having an officer in the building can help build bridges and trust in communities that historically haven't been provided that. Additionally, with increase of gun, physical, and online violence I feel safer knowing that we have someone trained to respond in an emergent situation. In our society I don't realistically see a future where we don't have some form of law enforcement. Having open conversations and developing relationships will hopefully help to strengthen this divide in the community which could lead to more positive outcomes in the present and future.” – Family member of student, Ordean East Middle School **(Survey response)**

“I've had experience with both [SRO name] and [SRO name] at Denfeld, as a staff member, and with [SRO name], as a Foster Parent. With every case it's always been positive, and we've been able to come to a consensus of what needs to happen. In each situation I would have been at a loss of what to do if they [SRO's] hadn't been there.”

“The SROs are there to uphold the status of the white students. Otherwise, they are intimidating and show [off their] power of being able to arrest you. [The] community is upset with [the] school district. [They have] taken away staff of color. [It's] not a good feeling for students of color because not much staff of color. Students are leaving due no people of color.”

“They are a positive resource when used properly.”

–In-person event participants

- **Need more funding for guidance counselors** and more support staff for larger school populations (1500 students for 3 counselors), **many find counselors and teachers a more useful resource**, sense that “there are other people in the building who do the same thing, but better; **teachers appreciative of communication support from SROs**, and point out that other kinds of support staff with walkie talkies could provide similar function
- **Widespread interest in receiving more detailed information about SROs, job descriptions, duties, training**; expectations of upholding the law without using excessive force, specific concern about tasers and guns (armed presence), many see SROs as escalating force, a few as bulwark against “ghetto kids” suggesting embedded assumptions about what makes a student or an incident a problem, some parents reluctant to see firearms in schools (no matter who is carrying them)
- Questions about **efficacy**, impression among some students that SROs aren't able to help in a worst case (active shooter) scenario, pointing out that **“Parkland had an SRO,”** and that **outside police would in any case be necessary and present during such an event** (redundancy),
- **Fighting at school a primary concern; common view that SROs are most effective at stopping active fighting among students**, less useful for other tasks than conventional police or other school staff, **however social media/video recordings and sense that “school already feels like prison” reported to exacerbate violence and fighting on campuses**, concerns about ability of SROs to address the root cause

Mindstorm Themes

Key themes emerging from small-group discussions

“Consequences shouldn’t be punitive. We should be trying to understand the root issue: why did the person do what they did? How can we help that person in the future?”

“Schools set-up people for the rest of their lives. We need to recognize that responsibility and then honor that by changing the way we engage conflict.”

“If you only see the SRO’s as scary, why should SRO’s expect students to come to them when they feel endangered?”

“There are clear racially discriminatory practices in policing. We need to be able to trust police to be just in their practice; and that’s not happening now.”

“I would much rather have a counselor instead of a police officer and a counselor that doesn’t just do scheduling. East has a lot of mental health issues, and they say they will solve it, or they set up a weird office but then they don’t do anything about it and say that it’s because of funding. I think that instead of paying [for an] (SRO) maybe there should be more counselors. All [the SRO] does it sit there and walk outside. There was a person with a blue lives matter flag and all he did was flag him out. On Tuesday we had a moment of silence for George Floyd, and they drove their trucks and blew air horns, and a hall monitor took the away, it wasn’t [the] (SRO). Every time we expect an SRO to do something they don’t.”

“I think because people are aware of [the SROs], they deter crime.”

“I value that he’s a member of the community, a way to improve other schools is making sure they have an SRO like [ours].”

“As part of the LGBTQ community, I don’t feel safe with the police officer [at my school]. He continues to call me a girl, when I do not identify as a girl.”

“Some minorities may have different opinions because people and cops may be prejudiced against them. I’m gay and I’ve had some bad experiences with the police. Gay people in my family have had bad experiences.”

“Honestly, there is nothing that adults do when I tell them that I’m being bullied. Historical context matters. My family hasn’t had good experiences with police officers.”

“It’s weird how we have police and we’re in middle school.”

“Disorderly Conduct is really subjective; this is the police version of disruption. Those areas that are more of a gray area, how do we address these situations? We need to remove the bias from these situations. There is more to the story in multiple situations.”

“My son struggles a lot with mental health and his experiences with SROs haven’t always been great.”

– In-person event participants

- **No “one-size solution,” need to take IBPOC experiences and context seriously into account; “disproportionate arrests of black students”** for the same offenses committed by other (white) students; concern on the part of **parents reporting SROs targeting boys, esp. Native, Black and other boys of color for undue attention and suspicion** (i.e., frequent unmotivated searches); concerns that SROs known to parents and community are all white and male, **students with mental illnesses and disabilities written up for “disorderly conduct”**
- **Students with positive SRO relationships express sense of safety and comfort with SROs, greater confidence in their efficacy**, SROs viewed as friendly and helpful when they listen to students, take their concerns seriously, treat them with respect and help address challenges students raise; **students with multiple avenues of positive contact who knew SROs by name report better outcomes** and impressions (“the [current SRO] was my football coach,” or “SRO was my friend’s dad, that positive connection was really helpful.”)
- Female student participants especially express **some concern that they would not feel safe or confident** about being taken seriously **when speaking with an SRO about sexual assault**; LGBTQIA+ students describe misgendering, **queer students and students of color less frequently describing interactions as positive or safe**; students asked to speak with SROs about incidents of which they have knowledge commonly report being treated with suspicion, assumptions made, feeling discomfort, sometimes being asked not to tell anyone they’d spoken with an SRO.

Mindstorm Themes

Key themes emerging from small-group discussions:

- **During some students' interactions with SROs, felt as though officers did not listen** to reports about incidents at school and brought faulty assumptions to bear, several not comfortable speaking with SROs at school – individual officers may be exceptions (“They all love [SRO name]... he’s a real resource.”); **students believe SROs are supposed to come speak to classes, but have not experienced this kind of casual, relationship-building** interaction
- **Students enthusiastic about opportunities to provide feedback in a serious forum**, interested in ongoing discussion, some participants pointing to student-lead initiatives to research and report on SROs in their schools positively
- **Students commonly express interest in SROs trained in working with youth and kids**, and occasionally concern about teachers responding to fights, preferring to see SROs intervene in outbreaks of violence and to provide assistance in suppression of drug use on campus; **another contingent of students interested in small-group support and mediation (as in the restorative circle at Lincoln)**
- **General interest in (and gratitude toward) teachers and other staff members who carve out time to listen**, whole school community context important, as is student background and experiences with police outside the school context

“Our counselors are also a great resource. Sophomore year my parents got divorced and I trusted that I could go to them for help. We have a good environment for getting help.”

“I think the SRO should be there to facilitate safety, not to make you feel nervous.”

“Growing up I had bad interactions with police because my mother was an addict. I’m worried school police will treat me the same way.”

“This is the first time we’ve been able to share our voices on this and that’s really great. I wish the school would give us more opportunities to share what we believe. It’s June and this is the first opportunity to share what we believe.”

“A lot of students now don’t support the presence of SROs – there was even a presentation one of the students gave not too long ago about how they don’t want them around...The students took it on themselves to address SROs in the schools. Before that time, the schools weren’t discussing those issues at all. The school had not had any incidents that had made SROs a problem [for decision-makers].”

“When lockdowns happen, teachers make us feel safe.”

Conversation among one community group at Denfeld September IZI:

– Why is there so much conflict in the school?

–It’s not the teachers. It’s the kids having problems with other kids. They fight off school and will bring the drama here to school. The crowd follows winners and make it bigger fights than they would have been. Social media aggravates it by publicizing it. Kids are bound to their phones, quick to record even an argument. The calm argument gets blown outta proportion and the fire is fueled by friends who tell them to beat up the people talking s—t. There’s an attitude of Oh you’re tough, let’s fight. Or, Oh this person beat you up, huh? And then they fight over that. I am willing to fight too even, if I feel like I’m not getting help when I’ve asked for it.

– School feels like dog eat dog. One fight leads to another fight. It’s a real problem.

– How can more SROs help? Can they really get to the root of the problem? Will more SROs even solve these kind of problems?

– [Faculty/staff name]’s room feels safe. Students hang out there after school. Restorative Circle at Lincoln is based on idea that there is a tight group, under 20 people, and you’re responsible to be respectful. Students confront the “don’t snitch” people, or people escalating issues. If you bring more SROs, won’t school feel like prison? Shouldn’t we try another approach?

– **In-person event participants**

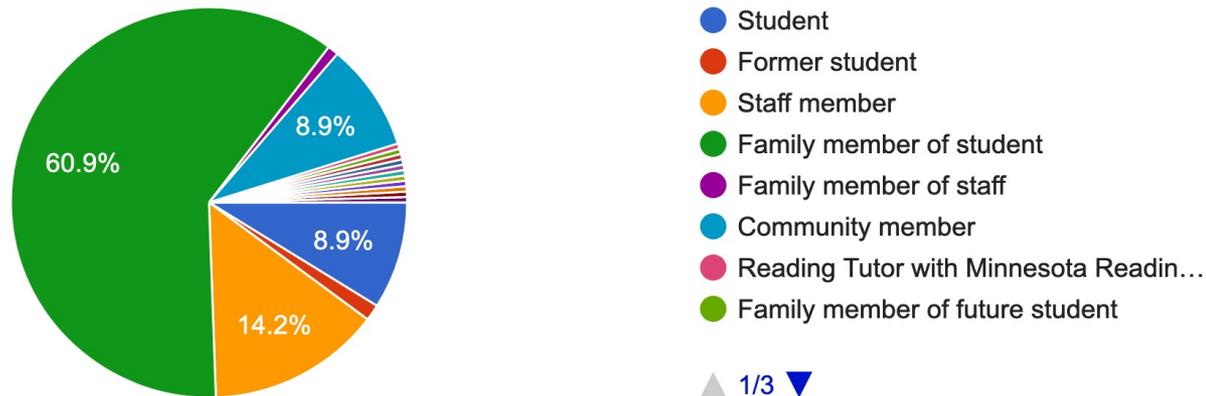
Survey Results:

N = 225

School Affiliations: Denfeld (High), East (High), Ordean (Middle) Lincoln Park (Middle), Lowell (Elem.), Congdon Park (Elem.), Laura MacArthur, (Elem.) Lester Park (Elem.), Piedmont (Elem.), Stowe (Elem.), Homecroft (Elem.), Myers –Wilkins (Elem.), Grant (closed 2011) Harbor City International, UMD

What is your role at that school?

225 responses



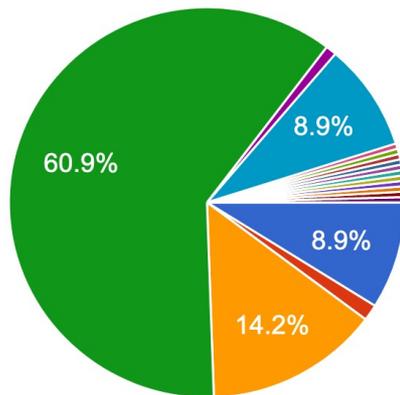
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What is your role at that school?

225 responses



- Staff member AND parent to a child in...
- Former student and now parent to two...
- Parent
- Parent of student
- parent of student and substitute teacher
- retired faculty
- Family & community member & forme...
- family member of both staff and student

▲ 2/3 ▼

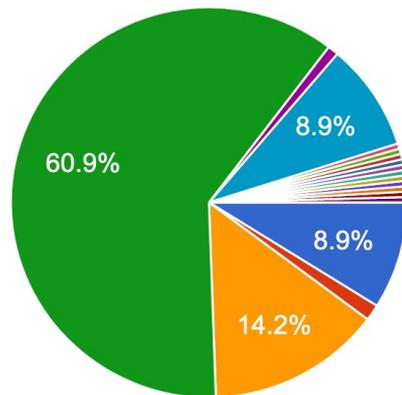
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What is your role at that school?

225 responses



● I am a former staff I have family who currently work at Denfeld and I'm a Community member

▲ 3/3 ▼

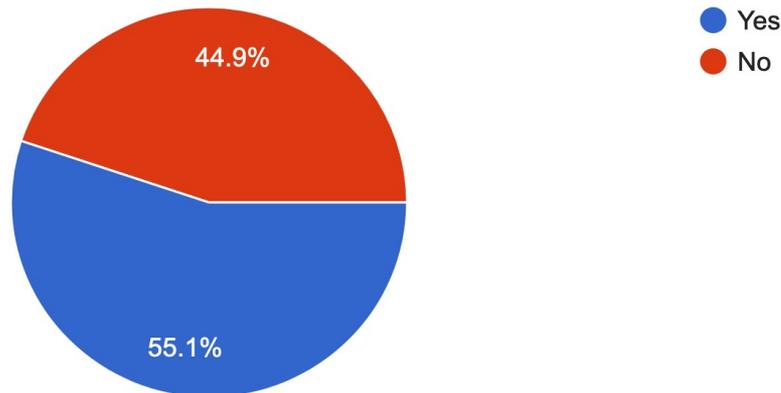
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Have you had any experiences or interactions with School Resource Officers (SROs)?

225 responses



Survey Question: If you have had an experience or interaction [with an SRO] what was it like?

Responses: n = 136

Q Response Rate: 60%

Positive (76%), Negative (4%), Mixed (3%), Neutral (7%), No comment or N/A (10%)

Survey Question: If you have had an experience or interaction [with an SRO] what was it like?

Key Takeaways | **Positive** experiences: n = 103 (76%)

Keywords/themes: “polite,” “professional,” kind/friendly/welcoming, relationship-building, specific officers mentioned by name

Examples: *“My personal interactions with SROs have been very positive. They have been friendly and welcoming. They have been active and engaged in the life of the school (coaching, greeting students as they walk into school, participating in community events) and the students in and out of the building. However, I see things through the lens of a white woman who grew up thinking/experiencing law enforcement to be positive and safe people to turn to when in trouble and with character to emulate. Our son is white and sees things similarly.”* – Family member of student, Ordean East Middle School

– Staff member, Ordean *“I’ve had nothing but positive interactions. The SRO is in the hall, talking to kids and helping them find their classrooms, open lockers. The SRO at my school seems very interested in building positive relationships with staff and students.”*

“Most of my experiences (up until this year) have been proactive. The SRO talking with students about what to expect about court, foster situations, laws, etc. They have also humanized police officers who often shared experiences about being a parent, child, teen and sharing their sense of humor. They have been essential when dealing with reactive experiences as I have had several students take an overdose of pills while at school. Their professionalism and quick actions saved lives. They are the first people everyone looks toward when we have had threats or alarms going off. They are extremely well trained in de-escalation and keeping everyone calm.”

– Staff member, Denfeld HS

Survey Question: If you have had an experience or interaction [with an SRO] what was it like?

Key Takeaways | **Negative** experiences: n = 6 (4%)

Keywords/themes: “uncomfortable,” “frustrating,” “unwanted,” “bias,” “punishment” vs. trauma-informed

Examples:

“Uncomfortable.” – Family member of student, Lowell

“Very frustrating. It involved a criminal sexual assault which was ultimately not investigated.” – Former student, Ordean & East

“I didn't like my interaction” – Family member of student, Lincoln Park

“[They] just talk about needs, not children” – Family member of student, Laura MacArthur

“[There is a] Negative bias against Native/Latinx famil[ies]...[including the] assumption that all siblings in the family were then destined to be 'failures' [after the interaction]. [The focus was on] punishment, consequences versus helping families with underlying intergenerational trauma.” – Family member of student/former student/community member, Lowell

“Unwanted” – Family member of student, Ordean

Survey Question: If you have had an experience or interaction [with an SRO] what was it like?

Key Takeaways | **Mixed** experiences: n = 4 (3%)

Keywords/themes: “polite, but...” [not knowledgeable about next steps/aware of power dynamics, etc.], concerns about minority experiences and school environment for people of color

Examples:

“The SRO was polite, but not knowledgeable. He seemed to feel his job stopped when he issued the citation and had no knowledge of what happened next.”

“Mixed personally [in my opinion as former] staff, [so I have] concerns re[garding the] climate for poc [people of color].”

“I met them through community organizing events and at Marnita's Table event. [The SRO] seemed like a nice person, but maybe a little ignorant about power differentials that exist.”

“[I had an encounter] briefly at the beginning of this year. He was very polite. In my own high school career, I had encounters too and [that SRO] was a jerk, but I didn't grow up scared of cops. I learned keeping my mouth shut and saying ‘yes, sir’ got you a long way. Even if you thought you were right.”

Survey Question: If you had an experience or interaction [with an SRO] what was it like?

Key Takeaways | **Neutral** experiences: n = 10 (7%)

Keywords/themes: “okay,” neutral description of encounter context/details (“casual passing in the halls,” “picking up my child from school,” “reached out for help with my child,” “walking around the playground at lunch,” etc.)

No Comment or N/A responses: n = 13 (10%)

Keywords/themes: responses mostly consist of no comment, N/A, “never had a[n] experience,” or “don’t know/is this new?”

Survey Question: If you know anything about SROs, what do you know?

Responses: n = 183

Q Response Rate: 81%

Key Observations: policing and relational roles central in community understanding, resource for school safety highlighted but defined differently by different respondents, desire for positive interactions among students and SROs

Survey Question: If you know anything about SROs, what do you know?

Key Takeaways | Knowledge about SROs

Keywords/themes: “police officers,” to build relationships, keep the peace, provide safe environment for students and staff, “law enforcement services,” “more than a cop,” role model, to provide positive policing experiences, to prevent school shootings/violence/bullying; some concerns about specialized training for schools, racially differential treatment, aggressive responses to students (taser, arrest) and questions about efficacy of SROs

Examples:

“They are police and will protect the students. [Their job is to] apprehend criminal offenders inside of the school.”

“SROs are police officers, chosen by the DPD. They do not have special training to be in educational settings and vary in the way they interact with students of various cultural backgrounds.” – Community Member, East High School

“They are DPD officers contracted to be on site at the 4 secondary schools. The district pays most of their salaries to the city. They are not intended to be issuing citations or arresting students, though the data on those interactions has not been made readily available. I believe (from DPD’s social media posts) they are all white officers this year, and some are new to the role.” – Family member of student, Lowell

“They serve us by building relationships with kids and by protecting in the event of emergencies.” – Staff member, Lester Park

“There [sic] role is connecting to all families/students. Greet students/staff daily. Work to resolve issues positively. They keep our students /staff safe.” – Staff member, Ordean East Middle School

“Their historic role is for safety and crime prevention in schools.” – Community member, Congdon, Ordean, East, Denfeld and Harbor City

“Building relationships with kids before issues arise is key. SROs do not want to intervene unless absolutely necessary but do so appropriately and swiftly when needed.” – Staff member, Piedmont

Survey Question: If you know anything about SROs, what do you know?

Key Takeaways | Knowledge about SROs

Keywords/themes: “police officers,” to build relationships, keep the peace, provide safe environment for students and staff, “law enforcement services,” “more than a cop,” role model, to provide positive policing experiences, to prevent school shootings/violence/bullying; some concerns about specialized training for schools, racially differential treatment, aggressive responses to students (taser, arrest) and questions about efficacy of SROs

Examples:

“Their role is to provide safety within the school setting. I know there are students who feel safe with them in the schools, and there are students who do not feel safer.” – Staff member, Laura MacArthur Elementary School

“An SRO is in the building to build positive relationships with students that may have had negative interactions with the police. That trust goes into the community when they see our SRO at events etc. Our kids at Lincoln really like Officer [name]. They assist when needed with things such as fights or illegal substances.” – Staff member, Lincoln Park Middle School

“My daughter was involved in a fight the last week of school last year. The SROs did nothing. There is also an SRO that wears and/or has “Blue Lives Matter” materials which is incredibly offensive and can't be very good for that SRO's effectiveness. If anything, it probably inflames unrest.” – Family member of student, Ordean East

“I grew up with SROs and I know that they create an environment of fear and mistrust in schools, especially for people of color.” – Family member of student, Lowell

“[I know] that they can make students of color, lgbtqia+ students and students with disabilities uncomfortable and often unequally targeted.” – Family member of student, East High School

Survey Question: If you know anything about SROs, what do you know?

Key Takeaways | Knowledge about SROs

Keywords/themes: “police officers,” to build relationships, keep the peace, provide safe environment for students and staff, “law enforcement services,” “more than a cop,” role model, to provide positive policing experiences, to prevent school shootings/violence/bullying; some concerns about specialized training for schools, racially differential treatment, aggressive responses to students (taser, arrest) and questions about efficacy of SROs

Examples: *“They foster great relationships with many students, and also are front line protection for students and staff.”* – Family member of student, East High School

“They build relationships with students and offer a feeling of protection at school.” – Staff member, Lincoln Park

“They are available as a safety resource to the school and hopefully help to prevent threat from use of weapons or force to compromise the school/students/staff.” – Family member, Ordean

“A student resource officer is a Duluth police department officer assigned to each school. This officer is a resource for the staff of the school to utilize in the event of a physical altercation, dispute, or have the skills to see drugs, alcohol, etc. on campus. They are also a presence on campus to keep my child safe and also hopefully be a role model to the students.” – Family member of student, Denfeld

“I know two of the officers through youth sports, so I know them on a personal level. Very kind, compassionate individuals. Also, Officer [name] was at East High School and helped prevent a school shooting three years ago. I know that having SROs in the building can help curb that sort of violence. They also establish quality relationships within the community by getting to know the students and family personally.” – Family member of student, Lincoln Park

Survey Question: Are SROs important to have in schools? Why or why not?

Responses: n = 212

Q Response Rate: 94%

Yes (77%), No (16%), Not sure/Don't know/On the fence/No comment (~7%)

Survey Question: Are SROs important to have in schools?

Key Takeaways | “Yes” responses, rationales: n = 164 (77%)

Keywords/themes: concerns about fighting, gun violence in schools; feeling of living in particularly dangerous times, sense of needing protection from outside threats, and often those perceived to be posed mainly by other children – esp. children perceived to be deviant or pathological in some way (punitive expectations for those identified as “problem kids” or families), emphasis on teacher overwhelm and staff safety, reiteration of interest in positive student-SRO socialization (among parents especially), strong interest in deterrence and violence-avoidance, desire to show best & most relational sides of law enforcement (relationship building opportunities)

Examples: *“Yes. In this day and age when mental illness and drug usage is so rampant it’s important to have law enforcement involved in everyday issues at school. My daughter has witnessed the SRO chasing kids down the hall and teachers needing to call for his help. Neither she nor I would feel safe at school if there wasn’t an SRO there. With 7 more children to go through East and future grandchildren as well and the ways of the world (it surely isn’t going to get better) it’s more important than ever for law enforcement presence at the high school level.”* – Family member, Duluth East

“Yes. Duluth has an increase in kids coming from gang and crime ridden areas of the country with no fathers in the picture of their lives. They have no respect for people or property. We need SRO in place to help control some of these disrespectful students.” – Family member of student, East

“Even though some kids and adults view them as threats or as a force to punish kids unnecessarily, most students welcome their presence and protection when they feel threatened or intimidated.” – Staff member, Denfeld

“Absolutely...unfortunately! In recent past some kids’ behavior at school has required it. I understand some may feel uncomfortable with their presence, but my child’s safety is no less important than those kids’ feelings.” – Family member of student, Denfeld HS

“Yes, of course they are. As long as our society is willing to accept physical violence and mass murder in our schools as normal, we surely need to have immediate deterrence and reaction/response resources to save the lives and preserve the safety of our children.” – Family member of student, Denfeld HS

“Absolutely, they provide a skill set within our schools that no other professional has. It is needed now more than ever as many of our students come from highly dysfunctional family environments.” – Family member of student

Survey Question: Are SROs important to have in schools? Why / not?

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Examples: *“Yes because of the dangers of school shooting we need to have trained staff to deal with possible threats to students and staff.”* – Family member of student, East HS

“Yes, police officers are important in the schools, mainly for students to get to know and trust them, and also to be there in emergencies.” – Family member of student, Ordean East

“It’s hard to believe replacing the SRO at EHS is even a consideration with the previous incidences involving guns at the school. Given the history of violence at our middle and senior high schools I do not see how an alternative professional as a viable replacement is an option. I do believe we desperately need more counseling options as well as guidance counselors in our schools. This is IN ADDITION to having the SRO in place. I would not in good conscience be able to safely send my children to public school without an SRO in place in the upper grades. As a family we will consider other options for middle and high school for our children. This would include leaving Duluth, MN for a community and school with priorities of student/staff safety in addition to student mental health.” – Family member, East HS

“Absolutely. The SRO at our school gets to know our students on a different level than a normal police officer would be able to. This relationship flows into the community. The SRO is able to let us know if an incident happened outside of school that is related to or would somehow affect one of our students at school the next day. They are a common face out in public. Our SRO talks about running into kids in Canal Park during the summer – and they run up and say ‘hi’ to him. This is an important relationship, and it benefits the student, school and community.” – Staff member, Lincoln Park

“Unfortunately, we live in a time where the threats to schools seem to be very real. It seems pertinent to offer some option as a safety to the school. It’s hard to expect the teaching/support staff to be all things to the students and it seems good to have an extra set of eyes watching out for the safety of all.” – Family member of student, Ordean Middle School

Survey Question: Are SROs important to have in schools? Why / not?

Key Takeaways | “Yes” responses, rationales: n = 164 (77%)

Keywords/themes: concerns about fighting, gun violence in schools; feeling of living in particularly dangerous times, sense of needing protection from outside threats, and often those perceived to be posed mainly by other children – esp. children perceived to be deviant or pathological in some way (punitive expectations for those identified as “problem kids” or families), emphasis on teacher overwhelm and staff safety, reiteration of interest in positive student-SRO socialization (among parents especially), strong interest in deterrence and violence-avoidance, desire to show best & most relational sides of law enforcement (relationship building opportunities)

Examples: *“YES First - they are there to develop relationships - which they DO !!! All studies show that in doing so it decreases negative behaviors both in school and out of school.”* – Staff member, Ordean East Middle School

“Absolutely.....all schools deserve to feel safe.....the idea that SRO's are there to protect and serve is the message that needs to be emphasized!!” – Staff member, Lester Park

“YES. Our building would be even more terrifying without our SRO and the backup that has repeatedly been brought in so far throughout the year. On multiple occasions we have had 8+ officers here to help (that number is a guess, but I am confident in it). When some of the students get into physical altercations, they are not themselves. They can not be reasoned with or calmed down and we need to restrain them to keep them and others safe. Honestly, one officer is not enough, as usually the fights that happen spin off into multiple altercations happening in different locations throughout the building. Our staff can't handle the violence without support. Staff has been hurt as it is.” – Staff member, Denfeld

“Yes, they're important because they are at the school (on-site) if and when something happens. It's better to have an officer who the kids have a relationship with/are familiar with to handle problems that come up. It's important for the safety of everyone at school (adults and students, both).” – Staff member, Ordean East Middle School

“ABSOLUTELY. No SRO, no me as a teacher. We obviously need police help at our school this year. And every year. For some students/staff SROs may be a trigger, but for the majority of people they are welcomed. Do we have to concentrate on the people in the minority with their attitudes about SROs?” – Staff member, Denfeld

Survey Question: Are SROs important to have in schools? Why / not?

Key Takeaways | “No” responses, rationales: n = 34 (16%)

Keywords/themes: school-to-prison pipeline, desire for more clarity about roles, conflict management alternatives & social service/mental health resources instead, concerns about students of color being targeted or singled out for harsher treatment (some students and families of color feel less safe), proactive approaches preferred, sense that safety can be provided in other ways, interest in having police close by and able to respond to emergency situations rather than in the schools full-time

Examples: *“I don't think they should be in schools. They lead to the school to prison pipeline. Students should not be subjected to criminal records for behavior in school. I understand that students of color receive more citations than white students (both because they are more likely to be referred to SROs by staff and because of potential implicit bias of SROs). Police in uniform and/or carrying guns can trigger trauma in some students, which is not helpful for their learning environment. Staff, particularly those of the majority culture, seem to prefer to have SROs to feel safe. It is more important that students who are already marginalized feel safe and supported in school”* – Community member, East High School

“I don't believe an officer's presence calms or diffuses problems that teens or pre-teens are dealing with. A community focused school should be staffed with therapists and social justice programs to teach youth and community, rather than the ineffective perpetual punishment system that has been failing us.” – Family member of student, Lincoln Park

“No. SROs are not important to the school. While they may bring a feeling of security to privileged white populations, the fact that there is an armed guard is not reassuring to many. And they are unnecessary. We can't live in a constant state of fear, but even if there was an incident of violence, the response from law enforcement outside the school would be necessary and the presence of a single SRO likely not critical to an event like that. On the whole, the investment of that level of funding for a theoretical benefit that also creates an atmosphere of intimidation and instability is not a positive use of limited district resources.” – Family member of student, Lowell

“NO! NO! NO! We cannot have officers in the schools starting the school to prison pipeline. Institutions like DPD cannot be trusted with adults of color, how can we trust them with kids? We need safety, but safety does NOT just look like response. It looks like proactive systems to prevent violence in the first place.” – Community member, Denfeld HS

“No. They are not necessary. LPMS doesn't need people with guns/tasers in our school. They scare me.” – Student, Lincoln Park Middle School

Survey Question: Are SROs important to have in schools? Why / not?

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Examples: *“No: I have been doing a lot of listening in the community, and none of the things that people say they need SRO’s for are specific to police. The de-escalation services, community liaison positions, and ‘feelings of safety’ that some people get from having officers in the school could be provided by non-police services with proper training focused on community development and transformative justice and de-escalation. Bringing police into schools does not make the school safer. And it does make some students less safe, or to feel less safe because of the ongoing dynamics between police and their communities (specifically or more generally across the US).”* – Family member of future student, Duluth East

“It is important to have conflict management, but SROs are not a good option. People trained in law enforcement view people in different, weighted ways, especially with regards to race. Implicit bias along with being trained for violent conflict, not conflict resolution, makes them intimidating for students and less likely to offer reparative solutions in lieu of punitive ones.” – Family member, Laura MacArthur

“No - any interaction with L[aw] E[nforcement] has the potential to be deadly. They do not promote the mission.” – Family member of student, Ordean

“No, police in community respond quickly when needed. Police in schools escalate tensions that can be handled when teachers and staff have small schools and small classrooms, so they know students and families. Decrease class size, increase community building activities so kids feel known, seen, cared about and resources for families are provided. Teach anger management early, much more time outside, break spaces in rooms and buildings.” – Family member of student, East

“I would prefer to see a proactive approach to student safety. Provide the students with what they need (social worker, mental health, social skills, etc.) so that they have the skills they need to cope with life’s challenges.” – Staff member, Laura MacArthur

“No. I’d rather see more qualified school social workers. Especially more people from the BIPOC community.” – Family member, Duluth East

Survey Question: Are SROs important to have in schools?

Key Takeaways | “Not sure/Don’t Know/On the Fence”/No comment responses, rationales: n = 14 (7%)

Keywords/themes: more data needed, depends upon role, conversation and context important

Examples: *“I struggle with this question. As I’ve seen since returning from the Covid quarantine, police officers have been vital to keeping students and staff safe. I wish we didn’t need people to stand in between students who are swinging and students/teachers who are the intended target. I wish we could intervene WAY before a child was traumatized to the point where violence is the response. I wish we didn’t live with fear of mass shootings. I wish we could rebuild a public safety system that isn’t based on slavery and oppression. I honestly don’t know what the answer is, and this conversation is SO important.”*

“I have mixed feelings about this. My previous comments touch on why - at times, these officers offer a convenient and comfortable access to reporting crimes, this is a positive thing. I do worry about the "pipeline to prison" issues that are documented nationwide related to SROs. I don't think OEMS has a great deal of data to show this is a legitimate concern at our school, however, nationwide, I do believe it is a legitimate concern. I would be willing to give up the benefits we receive as a building/district from SROs if it gained us significant trust and support from communities of color and others who have a strong opposition to SROs.” – Staff Member, Ordean East Middle School

“It depends on the role they are supposed to fill, and whether or not they fulfill the role. I think we need some data to evaluate this, and it should be specific to Duluth, and not based on national data.” – Family member of student, East HS

“Until I am truly clear on what their role is, I am on the fence. But I am aware of the school-to-prison pipeline, and I believe it is happening in the 709 school district.” – Community member, Denfeld HS

“Unsure, it would depend upon how their job description was written and how well they advocated for kids.” – Community member, Congdon, Ordean, East, Denfeld and Harbor City

Survey Results:

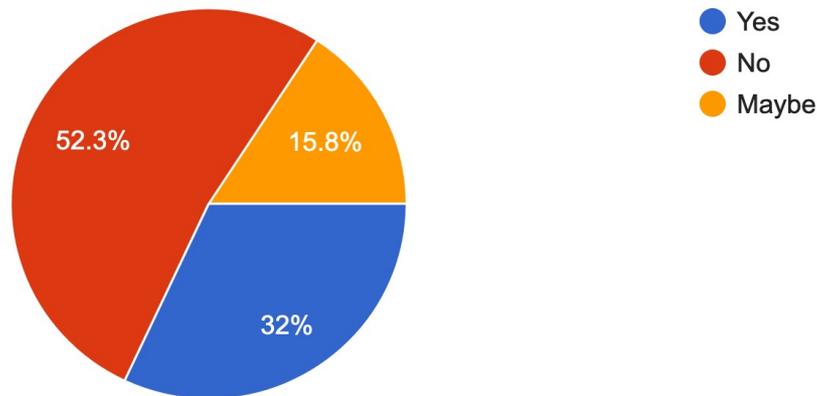
Responses: n = 222 of 225 total surveys

Q Response Rate: 99%

School Affiliations: Denfeld (High), East (High), Ordean (Middle) Lincoln Park (Middle), Lowell (Elem.), Congdon Park (Elem.), Laura MacArthur, (Elem.) Lester Park (Elem.), Piedmont (Elem.), Stowe (Elem.), Homecroft (Elem.), Myers – Wilkins (Elem.), Grant (closed 2011) Harbor City International, UMD

Are you familiar with any alternatives to School Resource Officers?

222 responses



Survey Question: What kinds of alternatives for school safety would you be interested in if you had a choice?

Responses: n = 163

Q Response Rate: 72%

Response Overview: None/more SROs (55%), Specific recommendations (38%), Don't know/Not sure (7%)

Survey Question: What kinds of alternatives for school safety would you be interested in if you had a choice?

Key Takeaways | Alternatives for School Safety

Keywords/themes: social services and more support for mental/behavioral health; more BIPOC staff, administrators and counselors; restorative justice approaches; metal detectors, door security and hall monitors, zero-tolerance policies on violence; trained conflict resolution professionals (unarmed)/training for current staff in conflict resolution and de-escalation; community-based mentoring and volunteer support, culturally-competent relational approaches and whole-family support options, clarity and intention around the meaning of “school safety”

Community responses/recommendations:

- *“A lot more black staff” – Student, Laura MacArthur*
- *“More social workers, unarmed caring adults to connect with students.” – Family member of student, Lowell*
- *Teach kids early. Social justice and acceptance needs to start in preschool. And again, social services would be a more effective tool for the majority of school safety issues. Compassion, empathy, and engagement.” – Family member, Lincoln Park*
- *“I think children and families need more support. There needs to be more staff to allow teachers to connect and develop a working relationship with struggling families. Financial barriers to counseling need to be removed for children that are experiencing trauma or emotional instability.” – Reading Tutor with Minnesota Reading and Math Corps Inc, Laura MacArthur*
- *“More social workers and counselors. Also, student deans for each grade level... we would need more 'man power' if we were to implement other 'restorative justice' type programs in our building.” – Family member of student, Ordean*

Survey Question: What kinds of alternatives for school safety would you be interested in if you had a choice?

Key Takeaways | Alternatives for School Safety

Keywords/themes: social services and more support for mental/behavioral health; more BIPOC staff, administrators and counselors; restorative justice approaches; metal detectors, door security and hall monitors, zero-tolerance policies on violence; trained conflict resolution professionals (unarmed)/training for current staff in conflict resolution and de-escalation; community-based mentoring and volunteer support, culturally-competent relational approaches and whole-family support options, clarity and intention around the meaning of “school safety”

Community responses/recommendations:

- *“Safety from what and for whom? Shooting or other deadly weapons, sexual or other assault, bullying, drug use/selling, theft — I think we need to define what we need to be safe from first.”*
- *“Increasing social workers, integration specialists, community members (either voluntarily or paid) as greeters and hall monitors; also additional staff who are more representative of the student community; student leadership opportunities and mentors; partnerships with community groups—Men As Peacemakers, NAACP, United Way, Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College Law Enforcement C.I.T.S. classes to be inclusive of under represented students in training opportunities for future career paths—just a few suggestions; creative outlets for students - offerings that appeal to youth prior to, during, and after school. A possible goal could be to eventually need/utilize less SRO support.” – Family member of student, Denfeld*
- *“Teacher/counselor trained with special training in safety, de-escalation skills. Needs to be part of education system rather than law enforcement, in my view.” – Community member*
- *“Mental health therapists (i.e. talking circles, more cultural programming – culture is medicine), resources for different abilities and gender diverse folks, regulation spaces/resources (i.e. tapping, investment in sims machines for nervous system regulation, fidgets, things to help regulate and co-regulate nervous system), elders in the school (intergenerational resources)...” – Family member of student and community member, former student, Lowell*

Survey Question: Is there anything that makes you feel un/safe in your school community?

Responses: n = 183

Q Response Rate: 81%

Yes, there are things that make me feel un/safe in school (93%); No, nothing makes me feel un/safe in school (7%)

Survey Question: Is there anything that makes you feel un/safe in your school community?

Key Takeaways | “Feeling Unsafe”

- Bullying and fighting in schools (esp. at Denfeld)
- Availability of guns and frequency of gun violence, armed presence in the halls (police/SROs or otherwise)
- Lack of support for overwhelmed teachers and staff – esp. since the pandemic, staffing shortages
- For many staff and some families, the thought of not having an SRO – for other students and families, their presence
- School lockdowns due to violence, low door security and poor hall monitoring (in the high schools especially)
- Smoking and vaping on campuses
- Possibility of harsh/punitive responses to neurodiverse students if/when dysregulation becomes a challenge/lack of trauma-informed responses
- COVID and pandemic related issues (such as not wearing masks properly)
- Lack of cultural awareness, inclusive signage in Spanish, racially motivated violence/fighting

Survey Question: Is there anything that makes you feel un/safe in your school community?

Key Takeaways | “Safer when” responses

- **Community connection and supportive school relationships are established and healthy, able to feel welcome, included and belonging in the school community**
- **Clear and consistent communication**
- **Awareness among some that context of relationship and qualities of interactions impact whether SROs feel safe or not for particular individuals and families**

“Art and food justice makes people happier. More volunteer encouragement to grow community and in person gatherings for students and parents would make people feel like they belong to a community and will be less likely to want to disrupt that bond. I feel unsafe when I feel disconnected. Social media or a newsletter is not the same as personal outreach.” – Family member of student, Lincoln Park

“The school family/community events make me feel safe at Lowell and Myers-Wilkins. Offering a space and opportunity to meet others in the community builds that safety and stability.”

“Relationships with teachers [make me feel safe].”

“I feel safe, and our children feel safe based on our conversations. However, it seems that often the staff resources of the school are being utilized to react to verbal and physical altercations. I am concerned that staff and students may be injured, or there is potential that these situations could escalate either in the school or out in the community. Also, I am aware that my kids/family historically have positive interactions and experiences to draw upon. Through conversations we realize that negative interactions shape the views of others in relation with SRO, even if not directly with the individual, as the institution of law enforcement and policing.”

Survey Question: Is there anything that could make you feel safer in your school community?

Responses: n = 164

Q Response Rate: 73%

Survey Question: If you needed support because you felt unsafe, what kind of resources would you like to have available? Is there someone you'd want to talk to?

Responses: n = 138

Q Response Rate: 61%

Survey Question: Is there anything that could make you feel safer in your school community?

Key Takeaways | “Feeling Safer”

- More mental health resources and services integrated into the curriculum directly (for students who wouldn't access these otherwise), more support staff on campuses; mental health/crisis support teams who have the support of administration and staff as well as the broader community
- De-escalation training for staff, investment in community- and relationship-building within the school community, preventative work on smoking and drug use as well as emotional, psychological and behavioral health
- More supervision and monitoring support for bathrooms, parking lots, hallways, cafeterias etc. (including options to have unarmed community volunteers or parents providing relational support context), ensuring secure entry
- “Common sense” gun laws/gun reform, SROs without tasers/guns (and engaged education about their role, purpose, and efficacy as well as relationship-building opportunities with SROs and families/students), zero tolerance policies for violence and bullying
- More options for homeschooling and alternative schooling environments for those who want/would benefit from them

Survey Question: Is there anything that could make you feel safer in your school community?

Key Takeaways | “Feeling Safer”

- More teachers and time built in for teachers to develop relationships with students, smaller class sizes, after school activities for all – not just athletes; virtual meetings to get to know families, students, staff and administrators, more accessible school and district leadership; more staff of color (and spaces and tools for connection at school):
 - *“Staff of color who our kids can talk to, spaces and tools, and more to help our kids feel they belong. People to talk to who won't jump to punishment/consequences first but help model and teach how to work through big feelings/emotions because our kids don't always have the words and tools to verbalize and articulate things that happen to them at home or school and beyond.”*
 - *“My daughter tried to meet with the principal who did not show up for their scheduled meeting. She has felt very ignored. I sent multiple emails about the fight which went ignored as well. [Staff member name] finally talked with me on the phone but the lack of response by the administration (including the SROs) was disappointing.”*
 - *“Responsive and empowered immediate administration able to take meaningful action when concerns are raised.”*
 - *“If I'd email the superintendent, I like a response back or even just a consideration.”*
 - *“If my child felt unsafe, I would hope the school would take his concerns seriously. He should be able to go to any adult in the building and report on any activity that makes him feel unsafe. All the staff should be trained in how to intervene and who to contact when there is a problem.”*
- *“Cultural and trauma responsive supports (in curriculum, physical environment, and other ways). All staff need more implicit bias training and understanding to see us as worthy, that we matter, and our ways of being and knowing are just as valid,”* diverse curriculum which takes seriously the experiences of IBPOC and reading groups on race and culture for family and community members

Key Insights & Opportunities:

- Make explicit role, responsibilities, and functions of SROs to students, families and community members;
- Consider ways to incorporate families and students into explicit plans for active-shooter emergency scenarios (or other approaches to redressing concerns about gun violence in schools),
- Provide Duluth-specific data on efficacy of SROs;
- Create more opportunities for relationship- and trust- building among students and families, including safe(r) spaces for minority opinions and unheard voices to emerge;
- Engage proactive planning for de-escalation or prevention of fighting and bullying in schools; considering incorporating more restorative circle models like that at Lincoln
- Make sure students and families are familiar with existing social, emotional, mental and behavioral health support services; provide opportunities for connection/engagement and afterschool programming for all students – not just athletes.

Key Insights & Opportunities:

- Provide more opportunities for student-engaged research and reflection or participatory decision-making in age-appropriate ways, as in the student-led presentation to the board on SROs in the schools
- Consider plain clothes SROs, and remember that students who know their SRO by name and have more positive social connections (friend of family, football coach, neighbor, etc.) more commonly report positive experiences with SROs
- Ensure diversity of representation among SROs and school staff more broadly (LGBTQIA+, IBPOC, women, etc.)
- Model behavior and provide practice opportunities for students who are nervous or unsure about how to start a support conversation with existing counselors, integration specialists and other staff resources

MTI Trust Building Opportunities

- ISD 709 has a high need to address and build trust across the entire ISD 709 community regardless of the SRO topic
- Include SROs in all back-to-school orientations, parent-teacher conferences, with opportunities for students/parents/community members to get to know and build relationships with SROs

Questions?