



**School Resource Officer Programs and  
Alternative Approaches in King County, Washington:  
*Report to King County***

**Prepared by:**

**Harborview Injury Prevention & Research Center  
([www.hiprc.org](http://www.hiprc.org))**

A joint program of the University of Washington School of Medicine  
and Harborview Medical Center

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## **Glossary**

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<b>HIPRC</b>	Harborview Injury Prevention & Research Center
<b>ICRC</b>	Injury research and control centers
<b>SRO</b>	School resource officer; Sworn law enforcement officer assigned to work in a primary or secondary school.
<b>LEO</b>	Law enforcement officer
<b>Listening session</b>	Facilitated discussion with a group of participants, typically focused on a set of key issues or questions.
<b>CRDC</b>	The Civil Rights Data Collection collects US public school data on key demographic and civil rights issues.
<b>ASD</b>	Apple school district
<b>English Learner</b>	Students learning the English Language through primary or secondary school, typically through language instruction educational programs.
<b>IDEA</b>	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
<b>FTE</b>	Full-time equivalency

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## SECTION I. ABOUT THE HARBORVIEW INJURY PREVENTION & RESEARCH CENTER

### WHY HIPRC EXISTS

Together, we have the power to prevent harm and suffering from injury and violence.



### WHO WE ARE

The Harborview Injury Prevention & Research Center (HIPRC; [www.hiprc.org](http://www.hiprc.org)) is a joint initiative of the University of Washington and Harborview Medical Center and is one of nine Injury Research and Control Centers (ICRC; <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/erpo/icrc/index.html>) funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The ICRC network is tasked to find ways to prevent injury and violence. HIPRC is the only ICRC in the western half of the United States. Scientists, trainees and staff at the HIPRC work with diverse communities to identify injury and violence prevention concerns and collaborate with community and policy partners to prevent injury and violence.

### OUR MISSION

Our interdisciplinary faculty and staff conduct research, train scientists, educate public health practitioners, and implement prevention programs to achieve injury-related health equity across the lifespan, because all people belong in the circle of human concern.

### WHO WE SERVE

HIPRC directs its research and programs toward those groups at greatest risk of injury: children, older adults, families living in poverty, people of color, residents of rural areas, and others who are disproportionately affected by preventable injury, mindful of the intersectionality between these population groups. We aim to reduce the rates of injury, violence, and death among these groups from unintentional events such as car crashes and drownings and from purposeful acts such as suicide and murder. Efforts span the continuum of primary and secondary prevention, from epidemiological research to determine injury causes, to acute care of trauma patients, to rehabilitation in the hospital, community, and home.

### WHAT WE DO

- Track the type, causes, treatment and consequences of injuries;
- Use epidemiological tools to identify risk factors for injury;
- Develop and evaluate new injury-prevention programs, using behavior change, community education, government action, and product environment modification;
- Develop more effective ways to resuscitate and treat injury victims;
- Improve rehabilitation strategies by identifying short- and long-term injury-related sequelae and their associated disabilities;
- Train new investigators in injury research; and
- Educate health professionals, policy makers, and the public about the magnitude, costs, and prevention of trauma and violence.

## SECTION II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Background.** In January 2022, King County asked the Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center (HIPRC) to evaluate the current state of school resource officer (SRO) programs in King County, including evaluating the national landscape and perspectives of school personnel, students, and communities. **The first aim** was to investigate whether King County public schools with assigned SROs reported different disciplinary and educational outcomes for students than those without SROs. **The second aim** was to identify the reach and characteristics of alternative programs to SROs in King County.

**Methodology.** The HIPRC used a multipronged approach to this work over seven months (November 2021 – May 2022). We examined: 1) disciplinary and educational outcomes in 119 King County public middle and high schools with and without law enforcement officers (LEOs) using the 2017-2018 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC); 2) 103 print media articles on alternatives to school resource officer (SRO) programs published from May 25, 2020 through January 1, 2022; and 3) local communities' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about SRO programs. In addition, using hybrid in-person and virtual listening sessions and key informant interviews, we examined knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about alternative approaches to SRO in one King County school district. We sought inputs from middle and high school students, parents, teachers, principals, staff, and local community members. Translators were used for communication with communities that preferred other languages to English. Stipend incentives were provided by King County to school and community participants.

The King County and HIPRC teams met weekly during the entirety of the project to define the scope of work, reduce barriers to project conduct, and to complete the work. King County did not participate in data collection nor interpretation. HIPRC conducted all analyses, including synthesis of data, review and interpretation of recorded transcripts, and preparation of this report.

**Main Findings.** **Table 2.1** summarizes the main findings.

**Limitations.** First, we examined only one year of CRDC data to compare disciplinary and educational outcomes between schools with and without law enforcement. Thus, we cannot determine whether law enforcement presence precedes or causes any disciplinary or educational outcome. In addition, local Washington school districts may not submit accurate reports to the CRDC about their school policing programs, reports to the police, or arrests.<sup>1</sup> However, all data submitted to the CRDC is confirmed by a school district supervisor (i.e., superintendent) and thus should be accurate. Second, our analyses of media articles on alternative approaches to school resource officers provided only a broad overview of alternatives rather than specific details. The academic literature on replacing SRO programs is limited, and most research examines the effects of adopting SRO programs. Thus, valuable opportunities exist to further examine alternatives to SRO programs in certain contexts where schools have changed their SRO programs and adopted new alternatives (e.g., Chicago Public Schools). Third, we conducted focus groups, listening sessions, and interviews in only one school district due to challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, these findings may not apply to other school districts or regions.

**Table 2.1.** Executive Summary of Main Findings

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1. In 2018, 51% of public middle and high school principals in the United States reported that at least one sworn LEO routinely engaged in specified practices at school.
  2. According to the 2017-2018 Civil Rights Data Collection database, 28% of Washington's public middle and high schools reported hiring an LEO.
  3. Student demographic characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, English Learner status, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] status) did not significantly differ between schools with and without LEOs.
  4. Schools with an LEO were less likely than schools without an LEO to staff psychologists and social workers but more likely to staff security guards and nurses. Only 3% of schools with an LEO had staffed a social worker.
  5. Schools with an LEO reported a higher rate of student days missed due to out-of-school suspension per 100 students than schools without an LEO.
  6. Schools with an LEO were less likely than schools without an LEO to report students to the police or report student arrests.
  7. Schools with an LEO reported a higher percentage of students who were chronically absent (i.e., missing 15 days or more in a school year) than schools without an LEO.
  8. Media articles in the US discussed four main types of alternative approaches to school resource officer programs: 1) mental health staffing and practices, 2) social services, 3) restorative justice, and 4) non-sworn security guards. Mental health staffing was the most commonly mentioned alternative.
  9. Many school community members (i.e., students, parents, school staff, and school administrators) indicated a lack of knowledge about and experience with SRO programs, partly due to the suspension of the SRO program since the COVID-19 pandemic.
  10. School community members framed alternatives to SRO programs as reforms to existing programs (e.g., changing SRO uniforms, removing firearm, hiring an officer of color) and alternatives to replace the program (e.g., rely on staff for school security and hire mental health specialists/social workers/mentors).
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## SECTION III: BACKGROUND OF SCHOOL-BASED POLICING PROGRAMS

### SCHOOL-BASED POLICING PROGRAMS

US public schools have contracted sworn law enforcement to increase public school safety for over a half-century. The direct integration of police into public school safety programming began in Flint, Michigan, where legislators implemented the Police-School Liaison Program in the 1950s. The program assigned police officers to the city's middle and high schools with three general objectives:

1. Detect and prevent delinquency;
2. Act as a liaison between police agencies, schools, and community in incidents of criminal delinquency;
3. Coordinate communication regarding youth-related problems between several agencies.<sup>2</sup>

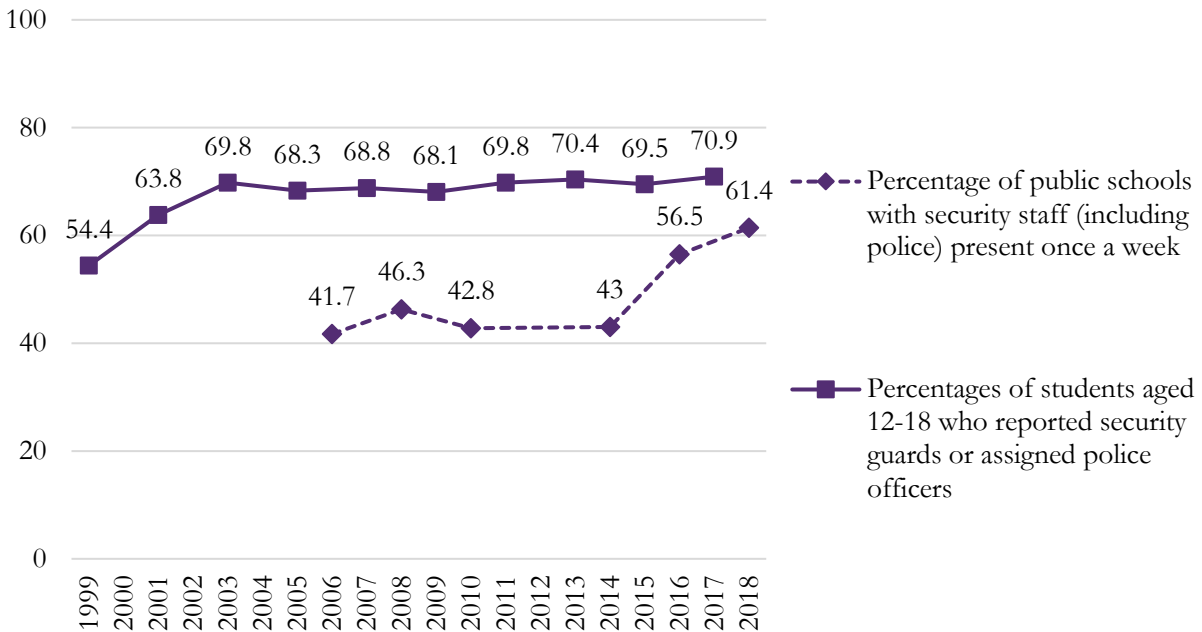
Since Flint's Police-School Liaison Program, scholars and practitioners referred to police officers assigned to schools by multiple titles, including school resource officer, school marshals, school safety officer, and school emphasis officer.<sup>3</sup> The predominant title for police assigned to schools—and the one used in the current report—is school resource officer (SRO).



What defines SRO programs varies in some respects, but most share key characteristics. For most programs, an SRO is a "...sworn peace officer who is employed by the local or county law enforcement agency with the goal of increasing safety and security for the school district or campus." The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) defines the three primary SRO roles as (1) educator, (2) informal counselor/mentor, and (3) law enforcement officer.<sup>4</sup>

Since 1999, sworn law enforcement and security in US public schools have increased (**Figure 3.1**). The percentage of public schools with security staff—including sworn law enforcement—present at least once a week increased by 47% from 2006 to 2018. In 2018, 51% of public middle and high school principals reported that sworn law enforcement routinely engages in specified practices at school. In addition, the percentage of youth ages 12 to 18 years who reported security guards or assigned police officers at their school increased by 30% from 1999 to 2018.





**Figure 3.1.** Trends in Police and Security Presence in US Schools, 1999-2018, School Survey on Crime and Safety & National Crime Victimization Survey’s School Crime Supplement

### THE NATIONAL PUSH FOR ALTERNATIVES TO SRO PROGRAMS

School-based policing programs—including SRO programs—have come under increased review due to mixed evidence supporting their impact on public safety, evident racial and ethnic disparities in policing practices, and the emergence of the widely recognized “school-to-prison pipeline.” A federal report on such programs in the US stated that, “the evidence that exists to date, in the form of research syntheses and quasi-experimental studies, does not suggest that police in schools increase safety and security.”<sup>3</sup> However, evidence does strongly suggest that students’ perceptions of school law enforcement differ significantly between racial and ethnic groups. For example, the California Healthy Kids Survey 2017-2018 indicated that Black students reported fewer positive perceptions of police in their school (e.g., “The officer has a good relationship with students”; “I feel safer with the officer in school”) than White students.<sup>5</sup>

SROs have also been linked to the emergence of the “school-to-prison pipeline.”<sup>6</sup> This refers broadly to policies and practices that remove students from their schools and set them on a path to the juvenile justice system.<sup>7</sup> Police presence on school campuses has been linked to higher rates of student arrests. One study in a large, urban, Southeastern school district found that schools with an SRO for three years reported arrest rates for disorderly conduct four times higher than schools without an SRO.<sup>8</sup>

The murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis Police Department officer in May 2020 ignited the national conversations about racial and ethnic discrimination in policing. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, this tragedy provided the impetus for a social movement to reallocate police funding to alternative approaches to public safety, including petitions to remove SRO programs from public schools and reinvest into other student support services. For example, Seattle Public School



District—the largest school district in Washington state—suspended its multi-year partnership with Seattle Police Department in 2020.<sup>9</sup>



## CALL FOR CONSULTANTS TO STUDY ALTERNATIVES TO SRO PROGRAMS

**In November 2020, Washington’s King County Executive Office approved a \$25,000 budget investment to study alternative approaches to school resource officers.** The proposal requested that a consultant works with the King County Executive Office to compare the racial and socioeconomic profiles, disciplinary metrics, and educational outcomes between schools with SROs and schools with alternatives to SROs. In addition, the proposal requested that the consultant conduct interviews or discussions with relevantly impacted individuals in schools and school districts that employ SROs and where SRO alternatives are in place to determine the interest and feasibility of alternative approaches.

The Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center (HIPRC) at the University of Washington (UW) submitted a project proposal to the King County Executive Office in September 2021. The proposed project focused on three aims:

1. Investigate whether SRO programs are related to students’ disciplinary and educational outcomes in King County;
2. Identify the characteristics, reach, and potential outcomes of alternative programs to SROs in King County and across the US; and
3. Determine King County stakeholders’ knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes SROs and alternative programs.

The current report summarizes the results of these aims.

## CHALLENGES OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges to engaging with school communities. In Washington, new daily reported cases of COVID-19 reach their peak in January 2021 due to the Omicron variant. Throughout Washington, public school districts faced severe staffing shortages further exacerbated by staff absences due to illness. UW had also imposed travel restrictions that limited our team's ability to visit schools and host in-person discussions about SRO programs.

This school staffing crisis hindered our ability to recruit King County school communities for listening sessions and interviews about SRO programs and their alternatives. For example, while two King County school districts were initially interested in participating in these discussions, they requested that the discussions occur at the start of the following school year (i.e., August 2022). Scheduled listening sessions in participating schools were postponed until COVID-19 rates declined, as per UW policy and research limitations. Readers must consider the findings presented in the current report within the context of these limitations.



## SECTION IV: DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

### DISCIPLINARY AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN SRO AND NON-SRO SCHOOLS

**Specific Aim 1.** The first aim was to investigate whether King County public schools with assigned law enforcement officers (LEOs) reported different disciplinary and educational outcomes for students than those without law enforcement officers. We analyzed publicly available data provided by the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) from 2017-2018. CRDC data provides student demographics, disciplinary, and educational outcomes reported by nearly all US public schools in the 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. School administrators provide data via an online submission tool, and then the local educational agency administration (typically, the superintendent) certifies their accuracy. The data aims to “monitor how schools are meeting their responsibility to provide equal educational opportunities to students regardless of race/ethnicity, limited English proficiency, sex, or disability.”

We restricted the sample to 119 King County public schools serving 127,300 students, including 53 public high schools (serving grades 9-12) and 66 middle schools (serving grades 5-9). We excluded alternative schools, special education schools, and vocational schools. A list of all schools is provided in Appendix A.

We compared students’ disciplinary and educational outcomes in King County schools with and without an assigned sworn LEO. Disciplinary outcomes included days missed due to out-of-school suspension (per 100 students), percentage of schools reporting an expulsion, percentage of schools reporting a student to the police, and percentage of schools reporting a student arrest. Educational outcomes included the percentage of chronically absent students (i.e., students who missed more than 15 days in a school year). All outcomes were disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity, English-learning status, and disability status.

**Specific Aim 2.** The second aim was to identify the reach and characteristics of alternative programs to SROs in King County. We again examined the CRDC data from 2017-2018 to calculate the school-based health personnel FTE (counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists) per 500 students in schools with and without assigned sworn LEO. We also calculated the ratios of security guard FTE per 500 students.

### LANDSCAPE MEDIA ANALYSIS OF SRO ALTERNATIVES AND REFORMS

Another component of the second aim was to identify the characteristics, reach, and potential outcomes of alternative programs to SROs across the US through an analysis of print media articles. We conducted a media content analysis on articles pulled from the online database Nexis Uni. We defined three inclusion criteria for the media articles: (1) articles originated in the United States, (2) articles were published in English from May 25, 2020, through January 1, 2022, and (3) articles included discussions about alternative approaches to SRO programs. We chose this date range because it aligned with the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent media attention on the “defund the police” movement. To focus on SRO alternatives, terms included in the search were “school resource officer and remov\*”, “school resource officer and replac\*”, and “school resource

officer and alternativ\*.” This search produced **410 articles**, and **103 articles** met the criteria for further analyses.

From February 1 to April 30, 2022, two trained coders (J.T.S. and P.L.) analyzed newspaper articles for the presence or absence of discussion about alternatives to SRO programs. SRO program alternatives were extracted from each article through a Red Cap survey (see Appendix B). Two project team members (K.L.H. and J.T.S.) independently engaged in comprehensive thematic analysis to identify major characteristics, definitions, and terms associated with SRO alternatives and reforms extracted from the media articles. After completing these analyses, the two team members met to review their respective findings. The team members agreed on all themes and characteristics of SRO alternatives and reforms to be presented in the final report.

## **KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND BELIEFS ABOUT SRO PROGRAMS AND ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

The third aim of the current report was to determine stakeholders’ knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about SRO programs and alternative approaches to school safety in King County public school communities. We recruited one King County school district community to participate in a series of interviews, focus groups, and listening sessions about their SRO program and possible alternative approaches. To protect stakeholders’ identities in this school community, we refer to this district as Apple School District (ASD).

ASD is a demographically diverse school district, with almost 9 out of 10 students being students of color and over one-third being English Learners. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ASD suspended its long-standing SRO program, which initially operated in one high school and one middle school. Since then, ASD has actively sought input from its community about whether and in what form the program should return.

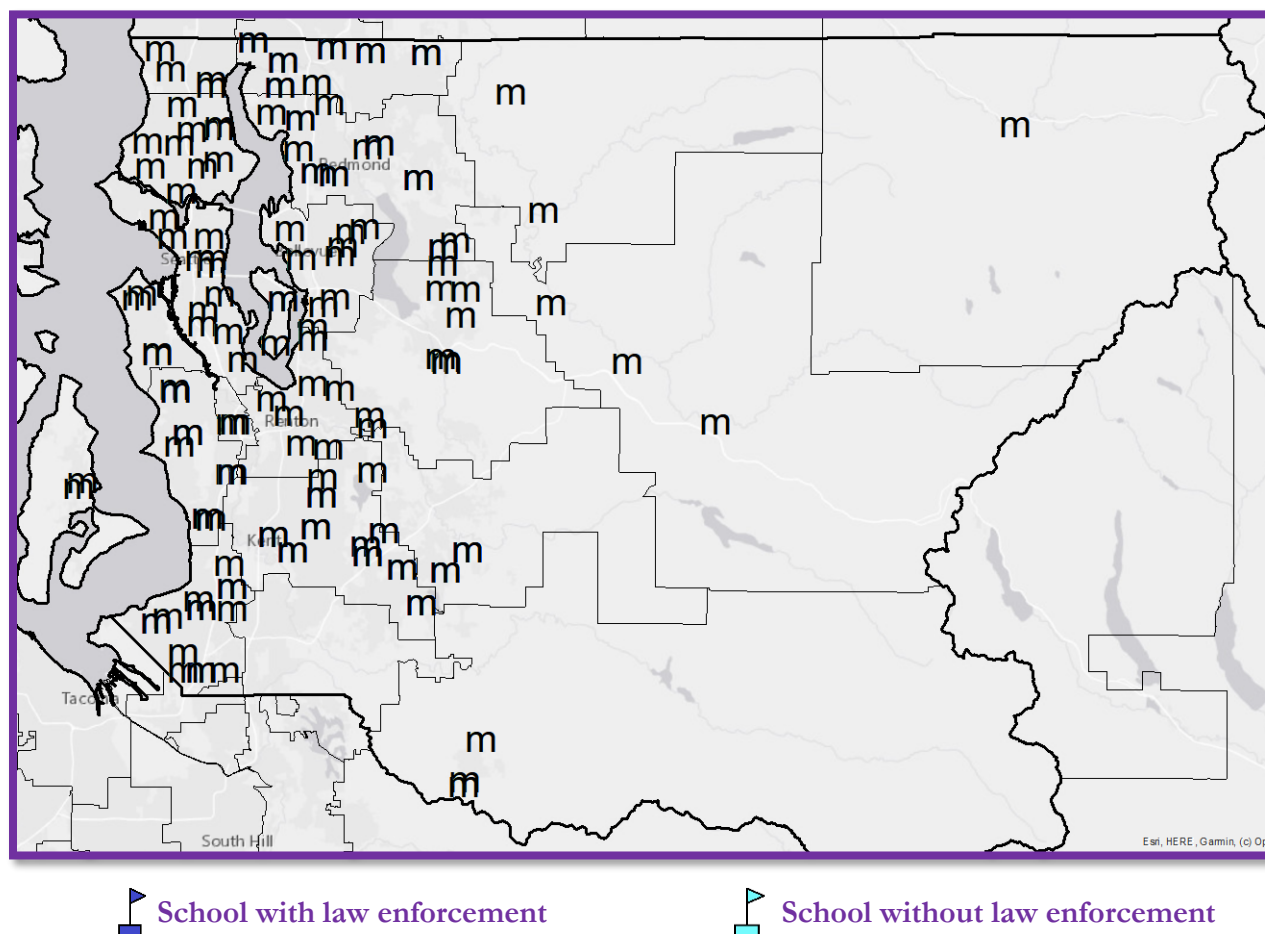
The project team and ASD collaboratively facilitated eight listening sessions and three in-person interviews from December 2021 to May 2022. A listening session and key stakeholder interview guide were created to elicit discussions on SRO programs and possible alternatives to these programs (see Appendix C). The eight listening sessions included three language-based affinity groups from the community (i.e., Burmese, English, Spanish), one community group that spoke multiple languages (i.e., Vietnamese, Arabic, and Nepali), one teacher and staff group, one high school student group, one middle school student group, and one group of law enforcement officers involved in ASD’s suspended SRO program. We used interpreters to translate discussions with non-English speakers. Aside from the high school and middle school student listening sessions, we hosted all listening sessions over Zoom. The three interviews involved ASD administrators: one high school principal, one middle school principal, and the school district superintendent.

Online listening sessions and in-person interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcription was completed using the platform Rev.com. Three project team members (K.H., C.H., and J.T.S.) used iterative coding process along with a comprehensive thematic analysis of all transcriptions. The final themes and subthemes were knowledge, attitude, beliefs, and preferences regarding SRO program and alternatives. All themes were reviewed and agreed upon by the coders through a series of project meetings.

## SECTION V: RESULTS

### ANALYSES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION, 2017-2018

#### *SCHOOL LAW ENFORCEMENT IN KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON*



**Figure 5.1.** Map of King County, Washington Public Middle Schools and High Schools, by Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) Status

Using data from the 2017-2018 CRDC, we examined 66 public middle schools and 53 public high schools in King County, Washington (see [Figure 5.1](#); Appendix A for the list of schools). Of the 119 participating schools, 33 (28%) reported having an assigned LEO in the school. Public high schools were more likely than public middle schools to have assigned law enforcement (42% of high schools versus 17% of middle schools). Reported law enforcement presence in public schools was mostly clustered near the Kent and Redmond areas.

**Table 5.1** describes the student population—including its racial/ethnic characteristics, percentage of English Learners, and percentage of students who qualify for IDEA status—in both LEO and non-LEO schools. We found virtually no difference in student demographics between LEO schools and those served by non-LEO schools. Overall, the student population was mostly White (46% of students). Among the non-White student population, Asian (18% of students), Hispanic (17% of



students), and Black (9% of students) were the most common racial/ethnic groups. Roughly 8% of students were English Learners, and 12% of students qualified for IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) status.

**Table 5.1.** Student Profiles of King County Public Schools, by law enforcement officer (LEO) status

	Total	LEO	No LEO
<b>Percentage of total student enrollment</b>			
By race/ethnicity			
American Indian/Alaskan native	< 1%	< 1%	1%
Asian	18	17	19
Black	9	7	9
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	2	1
Hispanic	17	19	16
White	46	46	46
Two or more races	8	8	8
By English learner status	8	8	8
By IDEA status	12	11	13

IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

## STAFFING PROFILES

**Table 5.2** summarizes the presence of security guards, nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists in LEO and non-LEO schools. LEO schools were more likely than non-LEO schools to have security guards (70% of LEO schools versus 60% of non-LEO schools) and nursing staff (76% of LEO schools versus 70% of non-LEO schools). Almost every school reported staffing at least one counselor (99% of all schools). By contrast, LEO schools were less likely than non-LEO schools to have a social worker (3% of LEO schools versus 15% of non-LEO schools) or psychologist on staff (67% of LEO schools versus 77% of non-LEO schools). Overall, the presence of a social worker was the single largest staffing difference (12 percentage points) between LEO and non-LEO schools.

**Table 5.2.** Health and Safety Staffing in King County Public Schools, by Law Enforcement Status

	LEO	No Leo	LEO – No LEO Difference
<b>Percentage of schools with type of staff</b>			
Guard	70%	60%	+10
Nurse	76	70	+6
Counselor	100	98	+2
Social worker	3	15	-12
Psychologist	67	77	-10
<b>Median staff FTE per 500 students</b>			
Guard FTE per 500 students	0.4	0.3	+0.1
Nurse FTE per 500 students	0.2	0.3	-0.1
Counselor FTE per 500 students	1.5	1.4	+0.1
Social worker FTE per 500 students	0.0	0.0	0.0
Psychologist FTE per 500 students	0.3	0.4	-0.1

We also examined the median health and safety staff full-time equivalence (FTE) per 500 students at the school. However, we found little difference in staffing FTE between LEO and non-LEO schools.

### ***STUDENT DISCIPLINARY OUTCOMES***

**Table 5.3** describes the median rate of school days missed due to out-of-school suspension (per 100 students) and the percentage of schools that used expulsion in LEO and non-LEO schools. We disaggregated all statistics by student gender, race/ethnicity, English Learning status, and IDEA status. Across nearly all student demographic groups, the median rates of days missed due to out-of-school suspension per 100 students were higher among LEO schools than non-LEO schools, except for the Black female student population. The largest difference between LEO and non-LEO schools was observed among English Learning males. That is, the median rate of school days missed due to out-of-school suspension was 3.7 times higher for English Learning males in LEO schools (59.2 school days missed per 100 students) than English Learning males in non-LEO schools (16.1 school days missed per 100 students). For Black, Hispanic, and White males, this figure was 1.4 times, 2.0 times higher, and 2.5 times higher in LEO schools than non-LEO schools—respectively. Moreover, among males who qualified for IDEA status, median rate of school days missed due to out-of-school suspension per 100 students was 1.4 times higher in LEO schools than in non-LEO schools. While females also experienced relatively higher rates of school days missed due to out-of-school suspension in LEO schools, these differences tended to be smaller than males.

Differences between LEO and non-LEO schools in the use of expulsion was more mixed. Across most demographic groups, LEO schools were generally more likely than non-LEO schools to expel male and female students. For example, 36% of LEO schools reported expelling a White male compared to 20% of non-LEO schools. Around 18% of LEO schools reported expelling females who qualified for IDEA status compared to 8% of non-LEO schools. However, LEO schools were less likely than non-LEO schools to expel Black males (15% of LEO schools versus 24% of non-LEO schools).



**Table 5.3.** Median days missed due to out-of-school suspension (per 100 students) and percentage of schools that reported any expulsion by school's law enforcement status

	LEO		No LEO		LEO – No LEO Difference	
	Days missed per 100 students	Any expulsion (%)	Days missed per 100 students	Any expulsion (%)	Days missed per 100 students	Any expulsion
American Indian/Alaskan Native						
Males	0.0	3%	0.0	7%	0	-4
Females	0.0	0	0.0	3	0	-3
Asian						
Males	9.3	15	4.7	7	+4.6	+8
Females	0.0	0	0.0	2	0	-2
Black						
Males	66.7	15	47.8	24	+18.9	-9
Females	6.7	9	10.0	7	-3.3	+2
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander						
Males	8.0	11	0.0	3	+8	+8
Females	0.0	7	0.0	3	0	+4
Hispanic						
Males	54.7	24	27.0	20	+27.7	+4
Females	15.4	6	7.0	6	+8.4	0
White						
Males	33.0	36	13.0	20	+20	+16
Females	6.5	9	3.6	11	+2.9	-2
Two or more races						
Males	36.6	12	14.4	12	+22.2	0
Females	9.6	3	4.5	4	+5.1	-1
English learners						
Males	59.2	24	16.1	13	+43.1	+11
Females	10.0	3	0.0	6	+10	-3
IDEA student						
Males	69.7	36	48.7	25	+21	+11
Females	18.7	18	9.1	8	+9.6	+10

IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

## STUDENT REFERRALS TO POLICE AND ARRESTS

**Table 5.4** provides the percentage of LEO and non-LEO schools that referred students to law enforcement or reported student arrests. According to the CRDC, LEO schools rarely referred students to law enforcement and did not report any student arrests. By contrast, non-LEO schools reportedly referred students—particularly, males—to law enforcement and reported student arrests. Regarding police referrals, 28% of schools filed at least one police report against White males. This figure was 23%, 19%, and 29% for males who were Black, Hispanic, and qualified for IDEA status, respectively. While arrests were far less frequent than referrals to the police in non-LEO schools, around 6% of these schools reported at least one arrest of Black males, and 4% of schools reported

at least one arrest of White male students. Respectively, 5% and 4% of schools reported at least one arrest of males who were English Learners and qualified for IDEA status.

**Table 5.4.** Percentage of schools reporting any law enforcement referral and any arrest of students by school's law enforcement status

	LEO		No LEO		LEO – No LEO Difference	
	Any Report (%)	Any Arrest (%)	Any Report (%)	Any Arrest (%)	Any Report	Any Arrest
American Indian/Alaskan						
Native						
Males	0%	0%	7%	0%	-7	0
Females	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asian						
Males	0	0	11	0	-11	0
Females	0	0	6	2	-6	-2
Black						
Males	0	0	23	6	-23	-6
Females	0	0	9	0	-9	0
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander						
Males	0	0	2	0	-2	0
Females	3	0	0	0	+3	0
Hispanic						
Males	3	0	19	2	-16	-2
Females	0	0	8	1	-8	-1
White						
Males	0	0	28	4	-28	-4
Females	3	0	8	4	-5	-4
Two or more races						
Males	0	0	6	2	-6	-2
Females	0	0	1	0	-1	0
English learners						
Males	3	0	7	5	-4	-5
Females	0	0	1	0	-1	0
IDEA student						
Males	0	0	29	4	-29	-4
Females	0	0	8	2	-8	-2

IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

## CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

**Table 5.5** summarizes the percentage of students in LEO and non-LEO schools that were chronically absent (missing 15 or more days in one school year). Among most student demographic groups, LEO schools reported a higher percentage of chronically absent students than non-LEO schools. For example, chronic absenteeism of male English Learner students was 35% higher in LEO schools (35% of schools) than in non-LEO schools (26% of schools). The percentage of Black male students who were chronically absent was also 17% higher in LEO schools (35% of schools) than non-LEO schools (30% of schools). We also observed higher percentages of chronic absenteeism among LEO schools than non-LEO schools for students who were Asian, Hispanic,

White, who reported two or more races, English Learners, and qualified for IDEA status. By contrast, LEO schools reported somewhat lower percentages of chronic absenteeism for Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, American Indian/Alaskan Native male students, and Black female students than LEO schools.

**Table 5.5** Percentage of students who are chronically absent by school's law enforcement status

	LEO	No LEO	LEO – No LEO Difference
American Indian/Alaskan native			
Males	59	61	-2
Females	64	63	+1
Asian			
Males	14	11	+3
Females	15	11	+4
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander			
Males	49	51	-2
Females	53	57	-4
Hispanic			
Males	29	24	+5
Females	34	27	+7
Black			
Males	35	30	+5
Females	30	32	-2
White			
Males	21	18	+3
Females	24	19	+5
Two or more races			
Males	24	23	+1
Females	27	22	+5
English learners			
Males	35	26	+9
Females	36	29	+7
IDEA student			
Males	36	30	+6
Females	41	35	+6

## MEDIA LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER ALTERNATIVES

Our analyses of **103 media articles** discovered four types of alternative approaches to school resource officer programs discussed in the media. These approaches were primarily characterized by the types of school staffing involved and school-based practices. The two panels of **Table 5.6** summarize these characteristics, including the states in which these novel approaches were tried.

Overall, mental health-focused alternatives to SRO programs were the most common type of alternative discussed in the media articles (**Table 5.6.a**; 75% of articles). These approaches supported students' mental and behavioral health primarily through staffing and school-based practices. Mental health staff included professionally licensed psychologists, therapists, counselors, and nurses. Staff also included behavioral health specialists and drug interventionists. School-based practices included forming school behavioral health teams to coordinate efforts between

administration, mental health staff, and teachers. Other practices included social and emotional supports for students, such as organizing student of color support groups, providing trauma-informed services, and engaging in suicide prevention efforts.

The second most common type of alternative to SRO programs focused on providing social services addressing the socioeconomic needs of and inequities between students (43% of articles). Staffing recommendations included social workers, family support liaisons, and social workers. We found substantial overlap between mental health- and social service-focused alternatives. That is, around 86% of articles discussing social service-focused alternatives also discuss mental health-focused alternatives. For example, social service practices typically include supports for students' social and emotional needs. Several articles also discussed using social workers to effect de-escalation among students and develop community outreach/engagement programs.

Another type of alternative to SRO programs focused on restorative justice practices and principles (27% of articles). Staff that supported restorative justice practices were referred to as restorative justice coordinators and mediation-intervention teams. Practices focused broadly on conflict resolution, such as peace circles/rooms, prioritizing mediation over punishment. Additionally, these practices aimed to promote positive relationships within the school, social-emotional learning, and moving away from exclusionary punishment. For example, an essential component is for schools to move away from zero-tolerance policies that increase the use of suspensions and expulsions. One article also mentioned opening dialogue sessions about issues of equity, race, and power within the school setting.

**Table 5.6.a.** Alternatives to School Resource Officer Programs Presented in Media Articles

Alternative	Characteristics	State	
Mental health	Staffing	California	New York
	• Mental health specialists	Colorado	Ohio
	• Behavioral health specialists	Connecticut	Oklahoma
	• Psychologists	Florida	Oregon
	• Therapists	Georgia	Pennsylvania
	• Counselors	Illinois	South Carolina
	• Nurses	Indiana	Vermont
	• Drug interventionist	Iowa	Virginia
		Maine	Washington
		Maryland	Wisconsin
		Minnesota	
	Practices		
	• Social emotional supports and services		
	• Students of color support groups		
	• School behavioral health teams		
	• Trauma-informed services for marginalized students		
	• Prevention over reactive enforcement.		
	• Substance use prevention and intervention		
	• Suicide prevention		
Social services	Staffing	California	Maryland
	• Social workers	Colorado	Minnesota
	• Family support liaisons	Connecticut	New York
	• Human services specialist	Florida	Ohio
	• Counselors	Georgia	Oklahoma
		Illinois	Oregon
		Indiana	Pennsylvania
		Iowa	Washington
		Maine	Wisconsin
	Practices		
	• Address student economic disadvantages		
	• Address needs of marginalized students.		
	• Address student social emotional needs		
	• De-escalation		
	• Community outreach and development programs		
Restorative justice	Staffing	California	Minnesota
	• Restorative justice coordinator	Colorado	Ohio
	• Mediation-intervention teams	Florida	Oklahoma
		Georgia	Vermont
		Illinois	Virginia
		Indiana	Washington
		Maine	Wisconsin
		Maryland	
	Practices		
	• Mediation over punishment		
	• Conflict resolution/peace circles		
	• Conduct home visits		
	• Fostering positive relationships		
	• Transition away from zero tolerance policy		
	• Focus on social and emotional learning.		
	• Launch dialogue sessions about equity, race, and power.		

**Table 5.6.b** summarizes results from articles focused on security (21% of articles) and other alternatives (38%). Security staffing included off-duty police officers, security/safety specialists (security guards; care and safety associates, etc.) and relying on existing school staff and administration for school safety. One article mentioned increased investment into security technology, such as security cameras, to promote student safety. A defining feature of this alternative approach is that security staff are non-sworn law enforcement who cannot arrest students. Security staff can either be uniformed or non-uniformed, but most would be unarmed on school campuses. Finally, some articles discussed reassigning officers to the community outside the school for both community outreach and promoting neighborhood safety.

The media articles also mentioned other alternatives that did not precisely fit the approaches above. Other types of alternative staffing included special education specialists, student support mentors, and crisis intervention specialists for the students. Some articles discussed reinvesting into afterschool programs but did not detail the types of programs.

**Table 5.6.b.** Alternatives to School Resource Officer Programs Presented in Media Articles (2/2)

Alternative	Characteristics	States	
Security	Staffing	California	Ohio
	• Off-duty police officers/civil service titles	Connecticut	Oregon
	• Security/safety specialists	Illinois	Pennsylvania
	• School administrators as security	Indiana	Virginia
	Practices	Maine	Washington
	• Unarmed	Maryland	Wisconsin
	• Nonuniformed	Minnesota	Ohio
	• Unable to arrest	New York	Oregon
	• Security cameras		
	• SRO reassignment		
	• Community outreach		
	• Neighborhood public safety		
Other	Staffing	California	Minnesota
	• Special education specialists	Colorado	New York
	• Student support mentors	Connecticut	Ohio
	• Crisis intervention specialist	Florida	Oklahoma
		Illinois	Oregon
	Practices	Indiana	Pennsylvania
	• Afterschool programs	Iowa	South Carolina
		Maine	Virginia
		Maryland	Washington

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**Textbox 5.1.** Spotlight on Chicago Public Schools Whole School Comprehensive Safety Plan

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**What is the Whole School Safety Plan?**

The Whole School Safety Plan is a CPS effort to address school safety using a more holistic approach. Each school was encouraged to consider school community-informed recommendations and needs when deciding the school's vision, priorities, and strategies to create an environment of physical, emotional, and relational safety.



The process was designed to achieve three goals:

- 1) Consider Whole School Safety alternative recommendations to the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program;
- 2) Consider whether to keep the SRO Program at the school (Keep 2, 1 or 0 SROs); and
- 3) Hold Local School Council elections on Whole School Safety Plans.

**What was the process?**

***Phase 1: Community-led engagement***

A steering committee composed of five community-based organizations engaged with local communities to develop recommendations for trauma-informed approaches to school safety. The five organizations are known for their work in youth empowerment, wellness enhancement, advocacy for low-income families, and racial justice.

The seven recommendations for schools were:

1. Implement holistic restorative justice led by students, parents, and community members;
2. Increase focus on social emotional learning and mental health practices;
3. Prioritize physical repairs to school buildings to create appealing and structurally safe space;
4. Invest in leadership development and action-oriented activities for holistic student growth;
5. Foster meaningful engagement with parents and community members as partners;
6. Increase and continue training for designated behavioral intervention employees; and
7. Create or bolster behavioral health teams.

***Phase 2: School implementation***

Each school formed a school-specific safety committee to review recommendations from Phase 1 and establish a new school safety plan. As part of these efforts, these committees voted on whether to continue SRO programs and whether to adopt alternative approaches to school safety that would supplement or replace SRO programs.

Of the 51 schools in CPS, 21 (41.2%) decided to keep two SROs at their school, 22 schools (43.1%) decided to keep one SRO, and 8 schools (15.7%) voted to remove both SROs.

The 30 schools that voted to remove at least one SRO committed to hiring alternative staff to either replace or supplement the SRO position. These positions included at-risk student coordinators, climate and culture coordinators, security officers, counselors, social workers, Officer of Social Emotional Learning Programming, and Multi-tiered System of Supports Coordinator.

**References**

<https://www.cps.edu/services-and-supports/student-safety-and-security/whole-school-safety-plans/>



## SCHOOL COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS AND INTERVIEWS

This section reviews our findings from the Apple School District (ASD) listening sessions and interviews about school resource officer programs and alternative approaches. Overall, we observed six major themes in our discussions with the ASD community: knowledge about SROs, attitudes toward SROs, preferences for future SRO programs, and ideas about alternatives to SRO programs.<sup>1</sup>

### KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SROS

In many of the listening sessions, participants indicated a lack of knowledge about SRO programs and SRO presence in the ASD school community, partly due to the suspension of the SRO program since the COVID-19 pandemic. During our discussions, most high school students could not recall having any significant interactions with or knowledge about school resource officers, and the middle school students referred to their experiences in elementary schools. Adults from the ASD school community also expressed similar unfamiliarity. For example, one community member said, *“Okay. I really, honestly, I didn't know that we have SRO in the schools. That means, I don't know if they did good or bad.”* Other community members echoed similarly limited knowledge of SRO roles, training, and responsibilities.

Among those familiar with SRO programs, they spoke to their experiences with SRO programs both inside and outside ASD. Most community members anchored their experiences to prior interactions with SROs at the local high school and middle school, whereas others were informed by their experiences with school resource officers outside of Washington.

### ATTITUDES TOWARD SROS

ASD community's attitudes toward SRO programs were split. In all community listening sessions, at least some participants expressed positive feelings about having police in schools. One community member discussed how police presence assures parents that their children are safe:

*“The thing that's working well for the community, for the student, especially for the parent, is have less stress. And then they feel more confident on their kid that they are safe, because the police officer in the school.”*

Other community members spoke highly about some of the prior SROs in ASD.

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<sup>1</sup> Our focus group with police officers who served ASD's community led to unique themes regarding the officers' experiences working with the ASD SRO program (e.g., challenges serving as an SRO). We summarize these themes in Appendix A and use them to inform the six main themes discussed in this section.

**Table 5.7.** Major themes from community listening sessions and staff interviews about school resource officer programs and their alternatives

Knowledge about SROs	Attitudes toward SROs	Beliefs about SRO Roles
<p>Absence of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are SROs present at their school?</li> <li>- What training do SROs undergo?</li> <li>- What is the role of SROs?</li> <li>- Who is the SRO?</li> <li>- When can students be arrested?</li> </ul> <p>Knowledge based on interactions with prior SRO</p>	<p>Positive attitudes about SROs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discrete handling of situations</li> <li>- Built trust with staff and students</li> <li>- Professional and friendly demeanor</li> <li>- Police as non-threatening</li> </ul> <p>Negative attitudes about SROs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of force on students</li> <li>- Intimidating students</li> <li>- Arresting youth</li> <li>- Racial discrimination</li> <li>- Unfriendly demeanor</li> <li>- Cultural trauma                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Racism-related fear of police</li> <li>- Prior exposure to abusive policing</li> <li>- Intergenerational fear of police</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assure parents that children are safe</li> <li>- Remove criminal offenders</li> <li>- Deter criminal activity</li> <li>- Breakup fights or de-escalate conflicts</li> <li>- Control traffic near school grounds</li> <li>- Prevent and respond to school shootings</li> </ul> <p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mentor students</li> <li>- Attend school events</li> <li>- Address cultural trauma with police</li> <li>- Address negative narrative about police</li> </ul> <p>Resource</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bridge between school and police</li> <li>- Organize educational programs</li> <li>- Directly link to emergency services</li> </ul>
Preferences for SROs	Alternatives to SROs	
<p>Focus on relationships</p> <p>SRO reflects community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Person of color</li> </ul> <p>Attire/Firearm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wear plain clothes without uniform</li> <li>- Do not carry firearms</li> <li>- Firearms as necessary tool</li> </ul> <p>Collaboration with stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborate with social workers</li> <li>- Collaborate with parents</li> <li>- Organize community outreach</li> <li>- Mediator to heal relationships</li> </ul> <p>Expand SRO Program</p>	<p>Relying on existing staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adult figure as a friend or mentor</li> </ul> <p>Unarmed security guards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- With training to respond to school shootings</li> </ul> <p>Parent patrol group to monitor school grounds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote community integration</li> </ul> <p>Mental health staff and social workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a safe space for students in distress</li> <li>- Nurturing mentorship</li> <li>- Address students' emotional and social problems</li> </ul> <p>Restorative justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restorative conferences and mediation</li> </ul> <p>No alternatives possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Police occupy unique position</li> </ul>	

However, some community members also held negative attitudes toward SROs. For example, some discussed racial discrimination in policing and cultural trauma associated with prior experiences with police.

*“And again, the feelings I think are still raw what just happened with George Floyd and the whole, you know, seeing again another black male killed by police officers. So, I’m going to be quite frank. I’m opposing having a security officer, a police officer in the schools.”*

*“When we live in Thai camp, in Malaysia camp, refugee camp, and then a lot of police officer, they are bullying us all the time. Traumatically, we’re already scared the police. If you say police, we are scared to death, all of them here.”*

One student from ASD said:

*“The majority of our school is people of color, and some of us are undocumented and don’t know how to speak English. I feel that kind of a fear going around if there’s going to be a police officer, especially if you had other encounters with them and they haven’t been good. So, I feel like that kind of messes up with the kids’ mentalities and it could make them be afraid of going to school.”*

### **BELIEFS ABOUT SRO ROLES**

The ASD community shared similar beliefs about the three roles of school resource officers: (1) ensure school safety, (2) build relationships with school community, and (3) provide resources to the police.

This community member spoke about SRO’s safety role:

*“The main thing that we are talking about today is safety. The school safety, the community safety, all the safety that we need help from the police officers. So that’s why we really need the police in our school.”*

A police officer who serves ASD’s community also prioritized school safety in defining SRO roles:

*“One of the most important roles as SRO obviously is safety and security of the school...And maybe as a police officer, you think of the worst-case scenario. We want to prepare for that and prevent that, whether it’s just the marked police car parked out front, if it someone or an individual that’s thinking about doing some bad in school, they see that as a deterrent.”*

ASD community members believed that SROs were also responsible for building relationships with students, staff, and community members in ASD:

*“There is that personal connection that I’ve personally seen the kids interact with them at lunch. They do get the opportunity to kind of see that it’s a person and not just a cop. There’s a person behind the badge.”*

They also said building SRO relationships may help students report school-related problems, such as bullying:

*“If we have SROs in the building, then she might build relationship and feel comfortable sharing what’s going on at school. If she has any bullies, or if something happened at school then probably*

*before it comes to home, she will share the feelings with the SROs in the building and will solve the problem right away.”*

Community members believed that building strong personal connections helped officers become a part of the ASD school community rather than “enforcers.”

Finally, ASD community members believed SRO provided resources to the school. For example, one community member recalled the SRO response to a student injury:

*“It was good to have [the SRO] here in certain crisis situations. We had a situation where a student missed a couple steps on the stairs and just landed in a tumble on the ground, and you know for sure she broke her leg. And [the SRO] just got on the radio, and he just radioed it, we had a car here.”*

Police officers from the ASD community also discussed providing SRO-led programs, such as an anti-bullying self-defense program and the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program.

### **PREFERENCES FOR FUTURE SROS**

Community members also discussed their preferences for any future SROs at ASD. Most commonly, participants indicated that SROs should focus on building relationships with the school community. For example, the middle school and high school students wanted officers to “get to know” them and “not be so stiff.” Police officers from ASD’s community gave examples of ways SROs build these relationships:

*“You’ve just heard from Officer [Name] saying he stayed over his shift three or four hours to go to a concert, or I’ve heard of SROs buying lunches for kids or being a counselor, even though we’re not trained to be counselors. So, I think it’s just the caring, like they said, and almost that mentality that you would drop anything to help out one of the kids that you work with.”*

Participants also thought that SROs should be more integrated into the school community. One recommendation was that the SRO’s racial and ethnic identity should reflect the student population at ASD:

*“I was asking about whether or not it was going to be a person of color, because that’s a different interaction with students of color as a police officer and an SRO of color, or just a different interaction with students, period, honestly.”*

High school students also expressed a preference for having a person of color in the SRO position, as they felt intimidated by a White officer because they would have “inherent power.”

One community member thought that having plain-clothed officers (e.g., a polo shirt) who were unarmed or held concealed firearms would help officers be seen as “part of the community.” SRO uniforms and firearms came up several times during the community listening sessions. Some community members suggested that SRO firearms incite fear, particularly among students of color:

*“So, we’re black, and [my son] was talking about the fact that he has had personal trauma from police, and so his anxiety gets triggered when he sees an officer in uniform. But he also sees the need for having an officer around like an association with the school, but he just wishes they weren’t armed.”*

*He's like, "I wish that they weren't armed." And he's like, "But I've been to the listening sessions and I know that they have some requirement that they have to be." So I wish that there was some rule that maybe they weren't allowed to use their weapon."*

Another community member recommended identifiable but plain-clothed SROs, *"They need to be identifiable as law enforcement. But they also don't have to look like they just jumped off the tank that batters down the door of the drug dealer's house."* Even though many community members discussed changing SRO uniforms and removing/concealing firearms, other community members thought that SROs should have firearms because of the potential for school shootings: *"I was thinking that them staying armed...especially [name of SRO]. First, he was on SWAT team. He's done active shooter response, and that's something I really worry about is a school shooting."*

Community members also suggested that SROs develop stronger collaborations with the school community, including parents, social workers, and the neighborhood. The ASD community members, for example, discussed how police could work closely with parents to help monitor school communities:

*"My child is at [Name] Elementary School. And always, we have a police officer over there. At the same time, the parents, we organize and we patrol for an hour. And that also let us integrate the community and support. And we could do that also in the future or now."*

One police officer particularly mentioned opening up dialogue between the police department and various stakeholders:

*"We need students [at the table]. We need teachers at the table. We need school administration. We need the School Resource Officers. We need the administration for the police department, all of us sitting at the table, having discussions about what it is to meet the needs of the students, because ultimately, that's what we're there for."*

This officer also made a specific suggestion to hire a liaison that could help mend relationships between the police and community:

*"And resources for families that have been impacted by their engagement with law enforcement and having that person there as a mediator facilitator to help the student and law enforcement engage in conversations so that they can begin the process of healing."*

## **ALTERNATIVES TO SRO PROGRAMS**

ASD community members also presented several ideas for alternative approaches to school resource officer programs. For example, since ASD removed school resource officers, school staff have filled gaps in school safety planning:

*"I'm wondering who is taking that role to have our students feel safe when they're here. When a fight breaks out in the hallway, who's there to break it up? And right now, I think that role is being filled by our admin and our security. And I feel like some of our teachers are taking on that role too. We're having those conversations. We're reaching out to parents. I feel like that role is filled without having a school resource officer in the building."*

One school community member particularly commended school security for filling the safety and mentorship roles for students and referred to them as “part-time psychologists.” However, some school community members felt that SROs made school violence easier to handle:

*“If you have a fight situation, we have two people to combat. Then you've got to make sure you've got staffing to keep one person in one place, and another person in another place, so that they can't get back and reengage. And I'll be honest, with the officer present they're much less likely to try to reengage.”*

Unarmed security guards were frequently mentioned as viable alternatives to school safety in the absence of SROs:

*“The alternative would be like a security guard, because I remember when my sister used to go to [high school], there was a security guard working there and she really liked him, and they had a really good bond and all the kids did. I feel like without the guns on him, people are more likely to trust them and be more comfortable around it, especially since our school is a lot of kids of color.”*

At the local high school, the security guard had a strong prior relationship with students, which allowed them to resolve and prevent conflicts with the students. These guards were unarmed and in plain clothes. Another form of security came from parents who described how they volunteered time to help monitor school grounds. They also discussed how this practice would help SROs, if the program were to continue.

Aside from existing staff, community members discussed further investment into mental health staff and social workers in lieu of school resource officers. A school community member, for instance, cited an increased need to focus on suicide prevention and dealing with students’ emotional problems. Community members also indicated a need for social workers and mentors:

*“At [high school], we have Mr. [Name 1], Mr. [Name 2]. He's a social worker who kind of is filling some of the same roles that we just talked about, kind of being that like a safe place for kids to go if they're upset, if they're stressed out, if they're worried about stuff...I know that with several of my students, I've seen him put in huge amounts of work to get them through really hard times that might have otherwise ended in bad situations. But he is working so much and it's just him. And he's up to his eyeballs in stressed out kids”*

Investment into restorative justice approaches also frequently came up during discussions about alternatives to SRO programs. Typically, these approaches involved non-punitive approaches to resolving student conflicts occurring at school, such as peace circles, mediation, and conflict resolution techniques. The local middle school, for example, relied on restorative justice even before the removal of SROs:

*“We've been relying on [restorative practices] very heavily...we try to use a restorative conference. We have mediation. We have peer mediators.”*

In addition to these positions, middle school staff held a small card that listed “restorative questions” used to handle conflicts with and among students.



## REVIEW OF FINDINGS

### ***SCHOOLS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS WERE LESS LIKELY TO STAFF SOCIAL WORKERS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS***

In King County, Washington, schools that reported to the CRDC that they had an assigned LEO were less likely than those who did not report having an LEO to report having staff social workers and psychologists. Schools with LEOs were more likely to have security guards (that is, not sworn law enforcement) and nursing staff. We found that the presence of counselors was similar between schools with and without law enforcement, as virtually every school reported having a counselor. In sum, mental health staff may be less common in schools with an SRO.

### ***SCHOOLS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS REPORTED WORSE DISCIPLINARY AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES***

Across most racial, ethnic, and gender groups, students missed more days of school due to out-of-school suspensions and were more likely to be expelled in schools with assigned LEOs than those without. Chronic absenteeism was more prevalent in schools with assigned law enforcement. The largest differences in disciplinary and educational outcomes between schools with and without law enforcement were observed among students who were English Learners and qualified for IDEA status. Altogether, these findings suggest that SROs are more likely to work in schools with higher rates of exclusionary discipline and chronically absent students.





### ***SCHOOLS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS WERE LESS LIKELY TO REPORT POLICE REFERRALS AND ARRESTS***

Overall, law enforcement referrals and arrests in schools were uncommon in the CRDC. However, we observed that schools reporting an assigned LEO were significantly less likely to refer students to law enforcement than their counterparts. In addition, schools with assigned law enforcement did not report any student arrests. In short, we found that SRO presence at school may be associated with fewer criminal justice interventions.

### ***ALTERNATIVES TO SRO PROGRAMS FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES, RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, AND NON-SWORN SECURITY***

Our analyses of media articles found that mental health and social service staffing and practices were most commonly presented as alternatives to school resource officer programs. The discussions primarily focused on schools hiring psychologists, therapists, counselors, and social workers to support students' social and emotional needs. They also addressed ways in which schools could develop trauma-informed services to address students' socioeconomic disadvantages.

Restorative justice practices were also frequently mentioned as alternatives to SRO programs. These practices included school programming that would support conflict mediation over punishment and a greater focus on social and emotional learning when handling student misbehavior. In addition, school staffing to further support restorative justice included restorative justice coordinators or mediation-intervention teams.

Security-related alternatives were mentioned less frequently. Security alternatives included hiring security teams (i.e., not sworn law enforcement), investing in security technology, and reassigning SROs to the school's neighborhood.

### ***ALTERNATIVES TO SRO PROGRAMS MAY SUPPLEMENT RATHER THAN REPLACE SROS IN SCHOOLS***

Our analyses of media articles suggest that alternatives to SRO programs may supplement—rather than replace—SROs in schools. In the Chicago Public School District, for example, nearly half of the schools voted to keep at least one SRO but also supplement student safety with alternative staff like social workers. However, some schools did remove their SRO programs entirely (~16% of CPS schools) and reinvest those funds into alternative staffing and programs.

### ***SOME SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEMBERS SOUGHT SRO REFORMS RATHER THAN ALTERNATIVES***

During our school community discussions, participants generally had positive attitudes toward SROs, as they saw the police as means to promote student safety. Among these participants, discussions around alternatives to SRO programs focused on changing or improving SROs interactions with students. These recommendations included greater SRO focus on relationships with the school community, hiring SROs who are persons of color, changing police uniforms to increase approachability and decrease intimidation, and encouraging greater SRO collaboration with school staff, parents, and students.

### ***SOME SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEMBERS SUPPORTED REMOVING SRO PROGRAMS IN FAVOR OF ALTERNATIVES***

Participants in the school community discussions also expressed negative attitudes toward SRO presence in schools and favored removing police presence from the school district. Among these participants, discussions around alternatives focused on using existing school staff to promote school safety and investing in mental health-focused positions. Additionally, one school in the district relied heavily on restorative practices in the absence of SROs, which they had in place before the removal of the school's SRO.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Our findings have three important limitations.

First, we examined only one year of CRDC data to compare disciplinary and educational outcomes between schools with and without law enforcement. Thus, we *cannot* determine whether law enforcement presence *causes* any disciplinary or educational outcome. In addition, local Washington school districts may not submit accurate reports to the CRDC about their school policing programs, reports to the police, or arrests.<sup>1</sup> However, all data submitted to the CRDC is confirmed by a school district supervisor (i.e., superintendent) and thus should be accurate.

Second, our analyses of media articles on alternative approaches to SROs provided an overview of alternatives rather than specific details. Discussions about replacing SRO programs are relatively new. The academic literature on replacing SRO programs is limited, and most research examines the effects of adopting SRO programs. Yet, there is a valuable opportunity to further examine alternatives to SRO programs in specific contexts, like Chicago Public School, where school communities are considering such alternatives.

Third, we conducted listening sessions and interviews in only one school district due to challenges associated with COVID-19. Further investigation into multiple school communities' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about school resource officer programs and their alternatives is necessary.

## SECTION VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This report investigated SRO programs and their alternatives in King County, Washington, and the United States. The first part of the report compared disciplinary outcomes, educational outcomes, and alternative health-focused staffing in King County schools with and without law enforcement using the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC; 2017-2018). The second part examined alternatives to SRO programs presented in media articles published across the US after the murder of George Floyd. The third part presented findings from community-engaged interviews, focus groups, and listening sessions about SRO programs and alternative approaches in one King County school district. Our findings have **three implications** for SRO programs and alternative approaches to school safety planning in King County, Washington.

First, police tend to work in King County public middle schools and high schools that report higher rates of discipline. This finding may suggest that (a) punitive schools are more likely to hire police, (b) schools with higher rates of student misconduct that lead to punishment are more likely to hire police, or (c) hiring police may lead to higher discipline rates. Our analyses *cannot* disentangle which of these explanations is most accurate. Some research suggests that SROs may increase the use of exclusionary discipline for certain types of misconduct, but causal evidence is unclear.<sup>3</sup> Thus, any policy discussion regarding SRO programs and alternative approaches must consider all three explanations for why discipline tends to be higher in schools that hire law enforcement.

Second, reports to the police and arrests are relatively rare in schools with assigned law enforcement. If this data is accurate (see limitations), this non-intuitive finding questions commonly held beliefs that law enforcement presence increases student arrests. Schools with SROs may see a police report as unnecessary because they can handle incidents “in-house” with the SRO rather than calling the police (e.g., 911). In our interviews with school community members from ASD, one person stated that—in the absence of their SRO—they had to rely on “911” to deal with incidents on campus.

Third, school community discussions lend valuable insight into community preferences for SRO programs and ideas about potential alternatives. School communities vary widely in their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about police and school safety planning. Following our work with Apple School District, we argue that organizing community-engaged discussion groups, listening sessions, and interviews can provide critical information that can guide culturally-relevant policy regarding SRO programs and alternative approaches to school safety.

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## **SECTION VIII. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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Peter Lee

Julian Takagi-Stewart

Their contributions and patience throughout the report were invaluable.

## SECTION IX. APPENDIX

### Appendix A. School list (n = 119), Civil Rights Data Collection 2017-2018

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Ballard High School	Shorewood High School	Mattson Middle School
Bellevue High School	Skykomish High School	Maywood Middle School
Bothell High School	Skyline High School	McClure Middle School
Cedarcrest High School	Tahoma Senior High School	McKnight Middle School
Chief Sealth International High	The Center School	McMurray Middle School
Cleveland High School STEM	Thomas Jefferson High School	Meany Middle School
Decatur High School	Todd Beamer High School	Meeker Middle School
Eastlake High School	Tyee High School	Mercer International Middle
Enumclaw Sr High School	Vashon Island High School	Meridian Middle School
Evergreen High School	West Seattle High School	Mill Creek Middle School
Federal Way High School	Woodinville High School	Nelsen Middle School
Foster Senior High School	Aki Kurose Middle School	Northshore Middle School
Franklin High School	Albert Einstein Middle School	Northwood Middle School
Garfield High School	Beaver Lake Middle School	Odle Middle School
Gibson Ek High School	Canyon Park Middle School	Pacific Cascade Middle School
Hazen Senior High School	Cascade Middle School	Pacific Middle School
Highline High School	Cedar Heights Middle School	Pine Lake Middle School
Inglesmoor High School	Chief Kanim Middle School	Redmond Middle School
Ingraham High School	Chinook Middle School	Risdon Middle School
Interlake Senior High School	Chinook Middle School	Robert Eagle Staff Middle School
Issaquah High School	David T. Denny International Middle	Rose Hill Middle School
Juanita High School	Dimmitt Middle School	Sacajawea Middle School
Kent-Meridian High School	Eckstein Middle School	Sequoyah Middle School
Kentlake High School	Enumclaw Middle School	Showalter Middle School
Kentridge High School	Evergreen Middle School	Summit Trail Middle School
Kentwood High School	Finn Hill Middle School	Sylvester Middle School
Lake Washington High School	Hamilton International Middle School	Thunder Mountain Middle
Liberty Sr High School	Highland Middle School	Tillicum Middle School
Lindbergh Senior High School	Illahee Middle School	Timbercrest Middle School
Mercer Island High School	Inglewood Middle School	Tolt Middle School
Middle College High School	Islander Middle School	Totem Middle School
Mount Rainier High School	Issaquah Middle School	Twin Falls Middle School
Mount Si High School	Jane Addams Middle School	Tyee Middle School
Nathan Hale High School	Kamiakin Middle School	Washington Middle School
Newport Senior High School	Kellogg Middle School	Whitman Middle School
North Creek High School	Kenmore Middle School	
Rainier Beach High School	Kilo Middle School	
Redmond High School	Kirkland Middle School	
Renton Senior High School	Lakota Middle School	
Roosevelt High School	Leota Middle School	
Sammamish Senior High	Madison Middle School	
Shorecrest High School	Maple View Middle School	

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Appendix B. Apple School District Listening Session Guide

## Article Data Extraction Tool

Page 1

Please complete questions below for each article read.

### INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Enter article ID number

(Article ID number is the unique article identifier  
(e.g., alternat\_13))

Enter researcher name

- ☐ Julian  
☐ Peter  
☐ Other

Did the article mention alternatives to school  
resource officer programs?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
(Alternatives to SRO programs include new programs  
or policies that replace, modify, or supplement an  
existing school resource officer program. Removing  
(or reducing) the presence of school resource  
officers DOES NOT count as an alternative.)

Was this article used during training?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No



Select the state the article was published .

- ☐ Alabama
- ☐ Alaska
- ☐ Arizona
- ☐ Arkansas
- ☐ California
- ☐ Colorado
- ☐ Connecticut
- ☐ Delaware
- ☐ Florida
- ☐ Georgia
- ☐ Hawaii
- ☐ Idaho
- ☐ Illinois
- ☐ Indiana
- ☐ Iowa
- ☐ Kansas
- ☐ Kentucky
- ☐ Louisiana
- ☐ Maine
- ☐ Maryland
- ☐ Massachusetts
- ☐ Michigan
- ☐ Minnesota
- ☐ Mississippi
- ☐ Missouri
- ☐ Montana
- ☐ Nebraska
- ☐ Nevada
- ☐ New Hampshire
- ☐ New Jersey
- ☐ New Mexico
- ☐ New York
- ☐ North Carolina
- ☐ North Dakota
- ☐ Ohio
- ☐ Oklahoma
- ☐ Oregon
- ☐ Pennsylvania
- ☐ Rhode Island
- ☐ South Carolina
- ☐ South Dakota
- ☐ Tennessee
- ☐ Texas
- ☐ Utah
- ☐ Vermont
- ☐ Virginia
- ☐ Washington
- ☐ West Virginia
- ☐ Wisconsin
- ☐ Wyoming
- ☐ Not available

Select the state(s) the article discussed

- ☐ Alabama
- ☐ Alaska
- ☐ Arizona
- ☐ Arkansas
- ☐ California
- ☐ Colorado
- ☐ Connecticut
- ☐ Delaware
- ☐ Florida
- ☐ Georgia
- ☐ Hawaii
- ☐ Idaho
- ☐ Illinois
- ☐ Indiana
- ☐ Iowa
- ☐ Kansas
- ☐ Kentucky
- ☐ Louisiana
- ☐ Maine
- ☐ Maryland
- ☐ Massachusetts
- ☐ Michigan
- ☐ Minnesota
- ☐ Mississippi
- ☐ Missouri
- ☐ Montana
- ☐ Nebraska
- ☐ Nevada
- ☐ New Hampshire
- ☐ New Jersey
- ☐ New Mexico
- ☐ New York
- ☐ North Carolina
- ☐ North Dakota
- ☐ Ohio
- ☐ Oklahoma
- ☐ Oregon
- ☐ Pennsylvania
- ☐ Rhode Island
- ☐ South Carolina
- ☐ South Dakota
- ☐ Tennessee
- ☐ Texas
- ☐ Utah
- ☐ Vermont
- ☐ Virginia
- ☐ Washington
- ☐ West Virginia
- ☐ Wisconsin
- ☐ Wyoming
- ☐ Not available

When was the article published?

((Month-Day-Year; e.g., 05-25-2020))

## ALTERNATIVES

Was the alternative related to school security?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(School security refers to school staff--who are not sworn law enforcement--responsible for student safety on or around campus.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Copy and paste)

Was the alternative related to police patrolling?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(SRO patrolling refers to changes to where and when SROs patrol.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Copy and paste)

Was the alternative related to social workers?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(School Social Workers are trained professionals with a degree in social work who provide services related to a student's social, emotional and life adjustment to school and/or society. )

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Copy and paste.)

Was the alternative related to restorative justice or restorative practices?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Restorative justice is a theory of justice that focuses on mediation and agreement rather than punishment. Offenders must accept responsibility for harm and make restitution with victims. For example, schools may have "peace circles" where students and school staff can discuss and resolve interpersonal conflicts (e.g., fights between students) rather than use detention, suspension, or expulsion.. )

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Copy and paste)

Was the alternative related to mental health programs or staff?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Mental health programs or staff refer to any program that or staff who address mental health-related issues of school students and staff.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Copy and paste)

Was the alternative related to something else not mentioned above?

☐ Yes

☐ No

(List alternative programs or initiatives that do not fit in the categories listed above.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Copy and paste)

### CHARACTERISTICS OF ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

Did the article describe the characteristics of the alternative?

☐ Yes

☐ No

(Characteristics include definitions or descriptions of the alternative program, including the roles and responsibilities of people involved in the alternative program (e.g., school safety coaches greet students at door)..)

Enter quote:

\_\_\_\_\_

### EVALUATION

Did the article describe any evaluation or plan to evaluate the alternative?

☐ Yes

☐ No

(Evaluations refer to any effort to gauge the effectiveness or impact of the alternative at the school/school district. Discussions of previous evidence that supports the alternative model (e.g., citing restorative justice literature to support restorative justice approaches is NOT an evaluation).)

Enter quote:

\_\_\_\_\_

### MOTIVATIONS FOR ALTERNATIVES

Did the article mention any motivations for the alternatives to SRO programs?

☐ Yes

☐ No

(Motivations are reasons for the alternative program.)

Was the motivation related to group disparities?

☐ Yes

☐ No

(Disparities are differences between groups. For example, disparities in school discipline may refer to one racial/ethnic group receiving more discipline than another racial/ethnic group.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

Was the motivation related to reporting youth to the police or arresting youth?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Reporting to police refers to any reference to contacting the police to address problems at the school. Arresting youth refers to the act of police arresting students.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

Was the motivation related to SRO intimidation?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Intimidation may include students' feeling nervous, anxious, scared, or uneasy around SROs.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

Was the motivation related to SROs using force against students?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Force against students includes using physical actions to subdue or incapacitate students.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

Was the motivation related to costs?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Costs include any mention of SRO or alternative program costs (e.g., Alternative program saves more money than SRO program).)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

Was the motivation related to COVID?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(COVID motivations include any changes due to the circumstances brought on by COVID.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

Was the motivation related to trends in reform?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Trends in reform are motivations related to national and local conversations about reforms.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

Was the motivation related to something else not mentioned?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
 (Trends in reform are motivations related to national and local conversations about reforms.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

### COST

Did the article mention any cost- or money-related issues?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
 (Costs may include the cost of the SRO programs, costs of the alternative programs, or costs of implementing certain policies.)

### KEEP/REMOVE/ADD/RETURN SROS

Did the article mention keeping, removing, adding, or returning school resource officers?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
 (Indicate whether the schools discussed or acted to KEEP, REMOVE, ADD, or RETURN school resource officer programs.)

Did it mentioning KEEPING SRO programs?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Did it mentioning REMOVING SRO programs?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Did it mentioning ADDING more SROs?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Did it mentioning RETURNING SRO programs?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

### SRO REFORMS

Did the article mention any reforms to existing SRO programs?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
 (Reforms may indicate that schools changed the roles, responsibilities, or focus of the SROs (e.g., additional training))

Were the reforms related to requiring new or additional training for the SROs?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
 (New or additional training refers to new training requirements for police to be an SRO.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

Were the reforms related to changing SRO hiring criteria or processes for SROs?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Changes to SRO hiring criteria may include any changes to HOW SROs are hired, WHO qualifies to be an SRO, or HOW SROs are selected..)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

Were the reforms related to implementing new or additional ways to hold SROs accountable?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Ways to hold SRO accountable include any actions that provide oversight over SRO programs operations and outcomes.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

Were the reforms related to new responsibilities and roles of the SRO?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(New responsibilities and roles refer to changes in expectations regarding how SROs do their job. For example, a new responsibility may include SROs teaching a class.)

Enter quote as example:

\_\_\_\_\_

#### OTHER CODES

Was there anything mentioned in the article that you feel is important to the research question but was not captured in the questions above?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Our research question is: What alternative approaches to school resource officer programs are presented in print media?)

Please label how we should code this information.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(e.g., altchar is a code for alternative program characteristics.)

Please provide explanation or definition of code.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Why should it be a code? What would be its definition?)

Please provide example quote

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Copy and paste.)

Was there anything else (#2) mentioned in the article that you feel is important to the research question but was not captured in the questions above?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

(Our research question is: What alternative approaches to school resource officer programs are presented in print media?)



Please label how we should code this information (e.g., alt means alternative).	<hr/>
Please provide explanation or definition of code.	<hr/>
Please provide example quote	<hr/>
	(Copy and paste.)
Was there anything else (#3) mentioned in the article that you feel is important to the research question but was not captured in the questions above?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No (Our research question is: What alternative approaches to school resource officer programs are presented in print media?)
Please label how we should code this information (e.g., alt means alternative).	<hr/>
Please provide explanation or definition of code.	<hr/>
Please provide example quote	<hr/>
	(Copy and paste.)
Was there anything else (#3) mentioned in the article that you feel is important to the research question but was not captured in the questions above?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No (Our research question is: What alternative approaches to school resource officer programs are presented in print media?)
Please label how we should code this information (e.g., alt means alternative).	<hr/>
Please provide explanation or definition of code.	<hr/>
Please provide example quote	<hr/>
	(Copy and paste.)
Any other comments may go here:	<hr/>

## Appendix C. Apple School District Listening Session Guide

### Introduction (< 1 min.)

Hello everyone! Thank you for taking your time to participate in today's listening session. My name is Keith Hullenaar and with me are Chelsea Hicks and Julian Takagi-Stewart. We are all from University of Washington's Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center.

### Purpose (< 1 min)

The purpose of today's session is to discuss School Resource Officer programs in Apple and share thoughts about potential alternatives to this program. This information will be used to help inform policy decisions regarding these issues.

### Guidelines (2-3 minutes)

Before we begin our discussion today, we would like to cover some brief guidelines.

We want this to be a space where you can share your opinion and thoughts related to School Resource Officer programs and potential alternatives, so there are no wrong answers. During the discussion, we may encounter different experiences and points of view—so we ask that you please respect what others share. We are interested in all comments, whether they are positive or negative.

Throughout our discussion, we will be taking some notes so that we can accurately capture your thoughts and opinions. Your identity will remain confidential and anonymous.

Participation in these discussions is completely voluntary. At any point during the conversation, if you no longer wish to participate, please feel free to leave the session.

Also, please do not feel pressured to respond to certain questions.

Are there any questions before we begin?

### Questions

To begin, we would like to know...

#### **1) How do you think the school resource officer program in Apple is working? (15 min.)**

- a. What have been your experiences?
  - i. What types of interactions have you had with school resource officers?
- b. What's working well and what's not working well?
- c. What are its challenges?
- d. What are its successes? \*must\*

#### **2) You mentioned liking certain things about the SRO program, what would you specifically like the SROs to keep doing at school? (5 min)**

- a. For example, what are specific things that SROs should continue doing at your school?
- b. From your experiences, what are things that you liked to see SROs doing?

- 3) **If anything needs to change about Apple's school resource officer program, what do you recommend changing? For example, changes could include altering the existing program or even removing the program and doing something completely different.** (15 min.)
- a. If the school resource officer program were changed or removed, what alternative approaches or programs should Apple consider using?
    - i. Could you tell us more about this...?
  - b. How do you think this may improve on or do better than the current school resource officer program in Apple?
  - c. What concerns might you have about removing or changing the school resource officer program?

## **Conclusion**

All right everyone, we are about out of time. Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and insights. This discussion was incredibly valuable.

If you have more interest in talking more about issues surrounding school resource officer programs and potential alternatives, we highly encourage you sign up to learn more about our focus groups where we will talk further about these issues. Additionally, if you end up participating in these groups, your time will be compensated with a \$30 gift card.

Before we wrap up, does anyone have any questions?

If anything comes up or you have any questions, comments, or concerns, I posted my e-mail in the chat box. Please feel free to e-mail me!