



**MEMORANDUM**

City Manager's Office

**DATE:** November 18, 2021

**TO:** Public Safety Advisory Board

**FROM:** Melvin E. Gaines, Principal Management Analyst  
Audrey Seymour Ramberg, Assistant City Manager/  
Chief Operating Officer

**SUBJECT: Public Safety Advisory Board Recommendations on School Resource Officers**

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**PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

Following the killing of George Floyd in May 2020 by a Minneapolis police officer, calls for racial equity and an examination of police practices were amplified around the world. In Mountain View, hundreds of people participated in peaceful protests, emailed Councilmembers and City staff, and spoke at City Council and other community meetings. The City Council Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Race, Equity, and Inclusion was formed to explore various matters related to racial equity and policing, and, ultimately, the City Council established the Public Safety Advisory Board (PSAB) in December 2020 to make recommendations on public safety matters.

Some Mountain View residents and individuals residing in other regional cities have made public comments related to the Mountain View Police Department (MVPD) School Resource Officer (SRO) program, including the request that the City stop assigning SROs to Mountain View schools, particularly to high schools. (The MVPD SRO program operates at Mountain View High School. Los Altos High School had previously been served by the Los Altos Police Department.)

On June 22, 2021, the City Council referred to the PSAB an item to review the MVPD SRO program, seek community input, and provide feedback to the City Council. This item was officially added to the Fiscal Year 2021-22 PSAB Work Plan when Council approved advisory body work plans on September 28, 2021.

At the June 24, 2021 PSAB meeting, staff provided the PSAB with an overview report (Attachment 1), and an MVPD Youth Services Unit (YSU) member provided a presentation on the purpose and activities of the MVPD SRO program. The PSAB formed

an SRO Subcommittee to create and implement an information-gathering strategy to better understand the MVPD SRO program and develop recommendations for the PSAB to consider. The purpose of SRO Subcommittee's assessment was not to explore a particular hypothesis, but to gather information and receive feedback specific to the MVPD SRO program.

Working with City staff, the SRO Subcommittee implemented a three-component information-gathering strategy, synthesized the information, and developed draft recommendations.

The PSAB should discuss the SRO Subcommittee's draft recommendations, suggest any modifications, and determine which recommendations to propose to the City Council.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Community Input Gathering**

The SRO Subcommittee's three-component information gathering strategy included:

1. *One-on-one and group meetings with students, parents, and school staff members who are served by the MVPD SRO program.*

One-on-one and group interviews were focused on students, parents, and school staff members who have experiences with the MVPD SRO program. Summaries of the input from these meetings were presented at the October 21, 2021 PSAB meeting. A copy of the presentation is included in Attachment 2 to this memorandum.

2. *Review of the SRO program through observation of program activities, discussions with SROs, and review of the latest Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for SROs between the City of Mountain View and the Mountain View Los Altos Union High School District (MVLA).*

The SRO Subcommittee and other PSAB members attended sessions of the YSU Dreams and Futures program to learn about and observe how the program operates and how students interact with SROs. The Subcommittee met with the YSU/SRO team and discussed what SROs regard as the program's strengths and opportunities for improvement. The Subcommittee also reviewed the latest MOU between the City and MVLA to assess areas where the MOU may be modified.

3. *A survey of students, parents, and school staff members served by the MVPD SRO program.*

The SRO Subcommittee worked with staff to develop a survey tool to learn about the experiences with and perceptions of the MVPD SRO program from current middle and high school students and recent former students (classes of 2018 to 2021), parents of such students, and school district staff members who are served by the MVPD SRO program. Survey responses from persons who did not fit within this target population were not considered by the SRO Subcommittee. The survey was conducted in English, Chinese, and Spanish (Attachment 3).

Both the Mountain View Whisman School District (MVWSD) and MVLA distributed the survey to their respective students, parents, and staff. SRO Subcommittee members also provided the survey to students, parents, and school staff members with whom they met. The City's Multicultural Engagement Program staff provided the survey to Spanish- and Chinese-speaking constituents who are MVWSD and/or MVLA families.

The survey sought input from students, parents, and school staff members of schools served by MVPD SROs regardless of the individual's direct involvement or experience with the MVPD SRO program. However, the survey included questions to determine the respondent's level of engagement with the SRO program. This allowed the Subcommittee to see the range of perceptions about the SRO program – and where there might be misperceptions – and to see how this differs depending on a person's first-hand experience with the program. Out of the surveys received, 462 surveys were completed in English, six were completed in Chinese, and 19 were completed in Spanish.

**Table 1: Completed Surveys**

	<b>Student</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Staff</b>
High School (MVLA)	103 (of which 29 reported having engaged with SROs)	241 (of which 36 reported their kids had engaged with SROs)	20
Middle School (MVWSD)	34 (of which 10 reported having engaged with SROs)	62 (of which 17 reported their kids had engaged with SROs)	26

**Table 2: Survey Respondent Student/Parent Racial Demographics**

Race	High School Student	High School Parent	Middle School Student	Middle School Parent
Hispanic/Latino	20	21	11	20
Asian/Asian American	30	88	9	13
Black/African American	6	1	1	3
Middle Eastern or North African	2	6	1	2
White/Caucasian	34	111	9	18
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1	2	0	1
Other	-	-	3	-
Skipped Question	10	12		5
Total	103	241	34	62

In addition to gathering the program-specific information listed above, the SRO Subcommittee also met with interested community groups, including members of Justice Vanguard (JV) and Mountain View Coalition for Police Reform and Accountability (MVCPR). Both JV and MVCPR members have spoken at City Council and other public meetings about SROs and other concerns they have about broader policing issues and police reform. The SRO Subcommittee met with representatives of these groups to better understand their concerns that are specific to the Mountain View SRO program and based on their members' experiences with the program.

### **Interpreting the Data**

The information that the SRO Subcommittee gathered through meetings and surveys is intended to help the PSAB better understand community perspectives and concerns about MVPD SROs. It is important to note that the Subcommittee sought to gather feedback from as many students, parents, and school staff members as possible through meetings and the survey. However, the participants were not selected as a representative sample, and the results of the outreach cannot be generalized to the entire population of students, parents, and school staff members served by MVPD SROs. Nonetheless, this input provides useful insight into community members' perceptions of the MVPD SRO

program and can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the program's strengths and opportunities for improvement.

### **Input from Interviews and Surveys**

The SRO Subcommittee worked with City staff to synthesize the input they received, identify key themes, and develop recommendations based on those themes.

Most feedback provided about SROs was positive. The general perspective about having MVPD SROs on campus according to student and parent survey responses are summarized in Tables 3 and 4 below.

**Table 3: Student Feelings about SROs on Their Campus**

<i>Based on your personal experiences, how do you feel about having SROs on your campus?</i>		
	<b>High School Students</b> (103 respondents to this question)	<b>Middle School Students</b> (34 respondents to this question)
Positive or Very Positive	30%	54%
Neutral	43%	37%
Negative or Very Negative	27%	9%

**Table 4: Parent Perception on Whether SROs Should Continue to Be Assigned to Mountain View Schools**

<i>Do you believe that SROs provide a valuable service and should continue to be assigned to Mountain View Schools?</i>		
	<b>High School Parents</b> (227 respondents to this question)	<b>Middle School Parents</b> (42 respondents to this question)
Yes	82%	83%
No	18%	17%

MVLA and MVWSD staff also provided feedback through the survey and discussions with the SRO Subcommittee. In addition, the MVLA board and superintendent provided a letter highlighting their support for the MVPD SRO program, providing examples of how the SRO program has been invaluable to them and how SROs have a unique familiarity with Mountain View adolescents both in and out of school (Attachment 4).

A number of student, parent, and staff respondents provided comments explaining their thoughts on SROs. Some of these comments are included in Attachment 5.

### **Key Themes and Proposed Recommendations**

The key themes and recommendations described below are focused on the opportunities to strengthen the program. Key themes are grouped below with the proposed recommendation they inform.

- **Key Theme 1:** The purpose and impact (programs, outcomes, etc.) of SROs is not widely known. There are many misinterpretations of the SRO program's purpose amongst students, parents, and school staff. School staff does not always know what services SROs provide or when it is appropriate to contact SROs. Many community members do not know how to access SRO programs and services.

A clear SRO program purpose that is widely communicated, with clear information about YSU programs and services as well as widely known program impacts, will enhance the program and decrease misperceptions of the program. Misperceptions of the MVPD SRO program include that the program leads to more student arrests (sometimes referred to as perpetuating the "school-to-prison pipeline") and that SROs are on campus to be security guards. This misperception stands in contrast to the purpose of the MVPD SRO program and the actual practices of SROs who work with students and school staff.

For example, in the survey, students who participate in SRO programs included the mentoring and education they receive as among the most important purposes of the program rather than focusing only on keeping schools safe and preventing illegal activities.

The number of arrests that SROs make and the offenses they make arrests for are not widely known, with some people assuming that arrests are widespread and are a primary focus of SROs. To the contrary, during the three-year period from 2017 through 2019, SROs made seven arrests of students at schools. The offenses that resulted in those arrests include sexual assault, weapon possession, domestic violence, gang-related witness intimidation, and burglary. Arrests for these offenses would be made regardless of whether the law enforcement officer was an SRO.

Students, parents, and school staff members provided comments stating that the SROs provide a better response to criminal offenses than other police officers because the SROs often have established relationships with students and are able to

work with students, parents, and school staff to modify behavior as an alternative to making an arrest or issuing a citation.

***Recommendation 1A: The purpose of the SRO program should be clear in the MOU between the City and MVLA. The purpose should specify what the SRO program is and outline when it is appropriate and how to involve an SRO in a matter concerning a student.***

For example, it should be clear that the SRO program is about relationship-building, mentorship, and law enforcement, when necessary, but not about providing a security presence at schools and school events unless there is a known security threat that merits a law enforcement presence.

While an MOU has been in place between the City and MVLA, an MOU with MVWSD has not been established. City staff will coordinate with MVWSD staff to explore developing an MOU for SRO services at the middle and elementary schools.

***Recommendation 1B: The City and the school districts should collaborate to develop communications and regularly provide information about the SRO program purpose and activities/programs to students and the school district communities. School district staff should regularly be trained on when it is appropriate and how to involve an SRO in a matter concerning a student.***

For example, the school districts and YSU could develop program brochures and other materials that can be distributed to students, parents, and staff. The SROs could provide presentations to school staff on what the SRO program is, what services they provide, and how to access them. These types of presentations could be provided at a frequency that accounts for staff turnover.

***Recommendation 1C: The MVPD should provide annual updates on the SRO program, including a summary of program activities and enforcement actions, to the PSAB.***

The annual update will provide an opportunity for the PSAB to discuss SRO program activities and actions as well as any feedback about the SRO program received through the process proposed in Recommendation 2A below.

- **Key Theme 2:** Some students, parents, and school staff members are uncomfortable with the presence armed police officers on school campuses. Some students of color feel racially profiled and harassed by SROs.

While such comments were raised by a small number of interviewees and survey respondents, the SRO Subcommittee believes these concerns are important. There are students who do not feel comfortable with SROs being on their campus. Some students and parents report that they have police-related trauma from outside of school settings that causes discomfort when seeing police officers at school. A few students of color, both in interviews and in survey responses, reported that they felt SROs racially profile them. A subset of those who reported discomfort with police officers on campuses stated they do not believe that officers should be armed if they are on campuses to build positive relationships.

Some respondents who reported being traumatized by police expressed a need for intentional and structured opportunities for police officers and students to have positive interactions in order to develop new and constructive relationships with law enforcement. They believed that school settings are appropriate for such interactions because students are already at schools, and school staff provide a trusted adult who can help facilitate these interactions. In survey responses and interviews, a number of Latino students and parents expressed support for the SRO program and mentioned ways that they have benefited from the program, such as receiving mentorship and having positive activities to participate in.

Considering interview and survey input, the SRO Subcommittee believes that the SRO program has been positive for many program participants but can improve by trying to address the concerns that community members have related to police-related trauma and establishing clear channels for students to express and resolve concerns about SROs.

***Recommendation 2A: The MOU should specify that the City and MVLA will ensure there are safe ways for students to raise any concerns or complaints they have about SROs and develop a process to address these concerns/complaints. The MOUs should also specify a designated point of contact at each school to facilitate resolution of complaints/concerns about SROs and work with SROs to ensure they are able to provide structured programs and activities on campuses.***

Feedback from this process regarding a perception of racial profiling or other concerns would be communicated to the MVPD so that it may be reflected upon and responded to through training, review of operating procedures, and increased dialogue with the school community, as noted in Recommendation 2B below. Police



Officers currently are required to compete and test to be assigned to the Youth Services Unit. SRO positions are highly sought after. They attract officers who have a passion for working with youth and often bring racial diversity that supports effective relationship building with Mountain View's diverse student body. The current SRO team is made up of three Officers and one Sergeant. Each of the Officers are men of color. SROs, like all Police Officers, receive training and supervision to ensure policing is not racially motivated. This training can be further informed by feedback from students, parents, and district staff through the process suggested in this recommendation. A summary of feedback received from this process can also be included in the annual SRO update to the PSAB proposed in Recommendation 1C.

***Recommendation 2B: Through intentional and structured programming, SROs and school staff should develop opportunities for dialogue and other activities that can help bridge divides between SROs (police in general) and students.***

For example, the schools and SROs could bring in outside facilitators to facilitate dialogue with students, staff, and SROs about local or national concerns related to policing. Topics for discussion could include a concern about racial profiling, which, as noted above, was raised by a small number of survey respondents. The MVPD could also gain insight and increase dialogue on this, and other topics, through the expansion of the successful MVPDx program, called MVPD-Y, which has been recently developed for youth.

- **Key Theme 3:** There is a perception that students of color are the primary students who face disciplinary actions from SROs. Students report that when a student has their belongings searched or is being interviewed by an SRO in sight of other students, it casts a negative light on the student being searched or interviewed.

The YSU reports that when there are no imminent safety concerns, they have an unofficial practice of only interviewing students or carrying out other law enforcement actions (such as searching a student's belongings) in a private setting outside the view of other students. Nevertheless, the YSU mentioned they have no procedural manual specifying this or other SRO procedures. To strengthen this practice as policy, the YSU should develop a procedural manual and add language related to on-campus disciplinary conduct. Development of a YSU procedural manual provides an opportunity to better document and maintain the culture and positive intentions of the MVPD SRO program and clarify best practices, including practices related to addressing concerns about potential racial bias.

***Recommendation 3: The City (Police Department) should develop a YSU procedural manual that sets operational standards for SROs. The manual should include clear policies on how SROs interact with students and conduct law enforcement activities on school campuses. The procedural manual should specify that, to the greatest extent possible, disciplinary actions of students should be conducted discretely, out of the sight of other students.***

- **Key Theme 4:** The relationship-building components of the existing on-campus high school program lacks structure. Currently, SROs primarily visit high schools when called or when they are available to walk around campus and speak with students during breaks and passing periods. SROs are available to make presentations to classes when requested; however, this does not occur regularly. The YSU reports that it is currently exploring ways to have more positive interactions with high school students, such as serving them lunch and attending sporting events. Some interviewees and survey respondents commented that the lack of structured SRO presence makes some students feel uncomfortable. Unstructured presence, along with lack of clearly defined and communicated purpose, also supports a perception that SROs are on campus to provide security.

To accomplish the YSU's goals of mentorship and relationship-building with students, SROs should develop a more structured high school program that includes planned opportunities for SROs to build relationships with students. Examples of potential programs include the development of an SRO student club, SROs providing classroom presentations that students may opt out of, and providing less formal relationship-building opportunities, such as SROs hosting lunch/treat events like pizza with an SRO or ice cream socials where students can opt in to participate.

The SRO Subcommittee acknowledges that increased programming may require increased funding.

***Recommendation 4: The YSU procedural manual should specify that SRO presence on the high school campus should be more structured with officers primarily being on campuses to either provide or participate in specific activities and programs or to respond to calls for service.***

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The PSAB should discuss the SRO Subcommittee's draft recommendations, propose any modifications, and vote to determine which recommendations to propose to the City Council.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Staff will present the PSAB's recommendations on SROs to the City Council on December 14, 2021.

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- Attachments:
1. Youth Services Unit/School Resource Officer Overview
  2. October 21, 2021 Community Input Presentation
  3. PSAB Survey on SROs
  4. November 8, 2021 MVLA Letter
  5. SRO Survey Quotes