

School Committee Update: School Climate & Safety



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Introduction

- Somerville Public Schools is committed to **safe, welcoming, and inclusive** schools
- As part of this commitment, SPS is reviewing how we respond to safety needs at Somerville High School and Next Wave/Full Circle
- This includes assessing the **existing investments**, revisiting **prior recommendations**, and responding to **current needs**

Goals for Today

- Today, our goal is to share why we are exploring an update to our partnership with SPD
- We share our thoughts with you recognizing the very real concerns people have shared regarding school police presence
- Our goal is to try and move forward with a model that provides safeguards against these concerns, while at the same time addressing the needs of our students and staff

Building on Prior Recommendations

- In 2023, after a thoughtful **two-year public process**, the School Committee voted to pause school police programs and formed the **Special Policing Subcommittee**
- The Special Policing Subcommittee called for a model that:
 - Incorporated ***school-based police*** support,
 - With ***clear limits***,
 - ***Specialized training***,
 - ***Relationship building***,
 - Regular review with ***stakeholder feedback***.
 - Importantly, ***not*** used for ***student discipline***.

Current Context

- We are the only high schools in the greater Boston area without an SRO
- Removing an SRO at the high school does not remove the need for student and staff interactions with SPD, mostly around issues of safety.
- We had over 300 interactions with SPD in 2025 and interact with a wide variety of responding officers
- While we have good relationships with the SPD staff who respond, there are areas that can be strengthened by stronger relationships with dedicated officers who know our students, staff, and school building

We Do Not Want SPD to Police or Discipline our Students

- Student behavior and school discipline is managed and supported by educational professionals and programming. These include:
 - Assistant Principals and Deans
 - 6 Community Engagement Specialists
 - Counseling
 - 10+ counselors at SHS; 3 at NW/FC
 - All educators at NW/FC are counselor-educators
 - Contracted partnerships with mental health supports
 - School-based social workers
- Restorative Justice Programming
- Mediation (Doubled staff/700 students served per yr.)
- Family & Community Liaisons



Big Picture

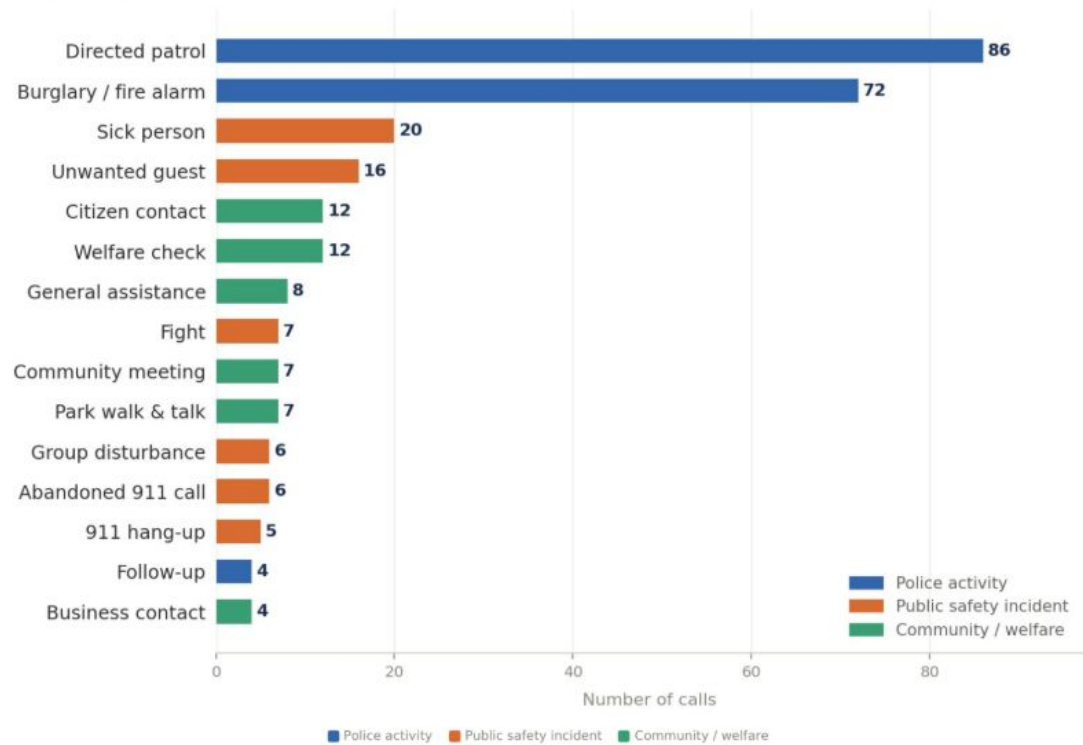
- We are not looking for SPD to police our students.
- We are looking for a dedicated partnership with specific police officers to keep students, staff, and families safe.
- We feel strongly that having a dedicated officer as a trusted member of the school community will increase safety and well-being.
- Serious situations where we need police arise, and a trusted officer who knows staff, the building and students will be able to respond more effectively. Not having a dedicated officer places unreasonable expectations on school professionals.
- We want to work with the SPD to make sure the right person is in the position, and safeguards are in place to try and mitigate potential issues.

We Already Rely on SPD to Keep Students and Staff Safe

- Locating and supporting missing students, or students in crisis
- Supporting victims of crime (students and staff), connecting them to appropriate resources, conducting investigations, getting restraining/no trespass orders
- Support with potential threats from individuals who are not part of our community
- Developmentally appropriate workshops
- Support with medical emergencies
- Managing conflicts that spill into library or neighboring areas
- Support at large events like football and basketball games, protests and marches, traffic, mitigating conflicts, dispersing crowds
- Response with direct threats to school - SWATting, social media posts
- Investigating reports of weapons
- Traffic safety

Even with Supports, in 2025 over 330 SPD Dispatches to SHS

TOP 15 CALL TYPES



- 334 interactions in 2025
- Many are support with events, alarms etc.
- 38 calls initiated by school administrators to SPD
- Majority of call locations to Somerville High School building, Somerville Public Library, and Leathers Park (behind SHS building)

A Dedicated Officer Will Provide Advantages Over the Current Model

- Students, staff, and families build a relationship with the officer and trust this person to help them with many issues that arise
- In crisis situation, knowing the staff, students and building can help provide quicker and more effective support, communication, and coordination
- Prevent staff from navigating situations beyond their role or training - even a five minute response time can result in students and staff getting hurt
- Coordinate school & community and events - get ahead of potential issues to provide support to students
- Preventative support vs reactive responses
- Greater understanding of protocols, procedures and personnel - for both SPD and SPS staff
- Offer preventative education for students

What is Our Community Saying?



What Is Our School Community Saying?

- There is strong opposition and strong support for police presence in our high schools from some members of the community
- Specifically, we've heard the following from both perspectives:
 - Build on previous recommendations
 - Do not involve police in discipline
 - Provide school administrators with the support they need to maintain safe schools
 - Assess SEL supports and determine whether more is needed
 - Be mindful of impact on black and brown communities, particularly in light of ICE activity
 - Focus on relationship-based models that have worked in the past and in neighboring districts

Preliminary Themes From Focus Groups

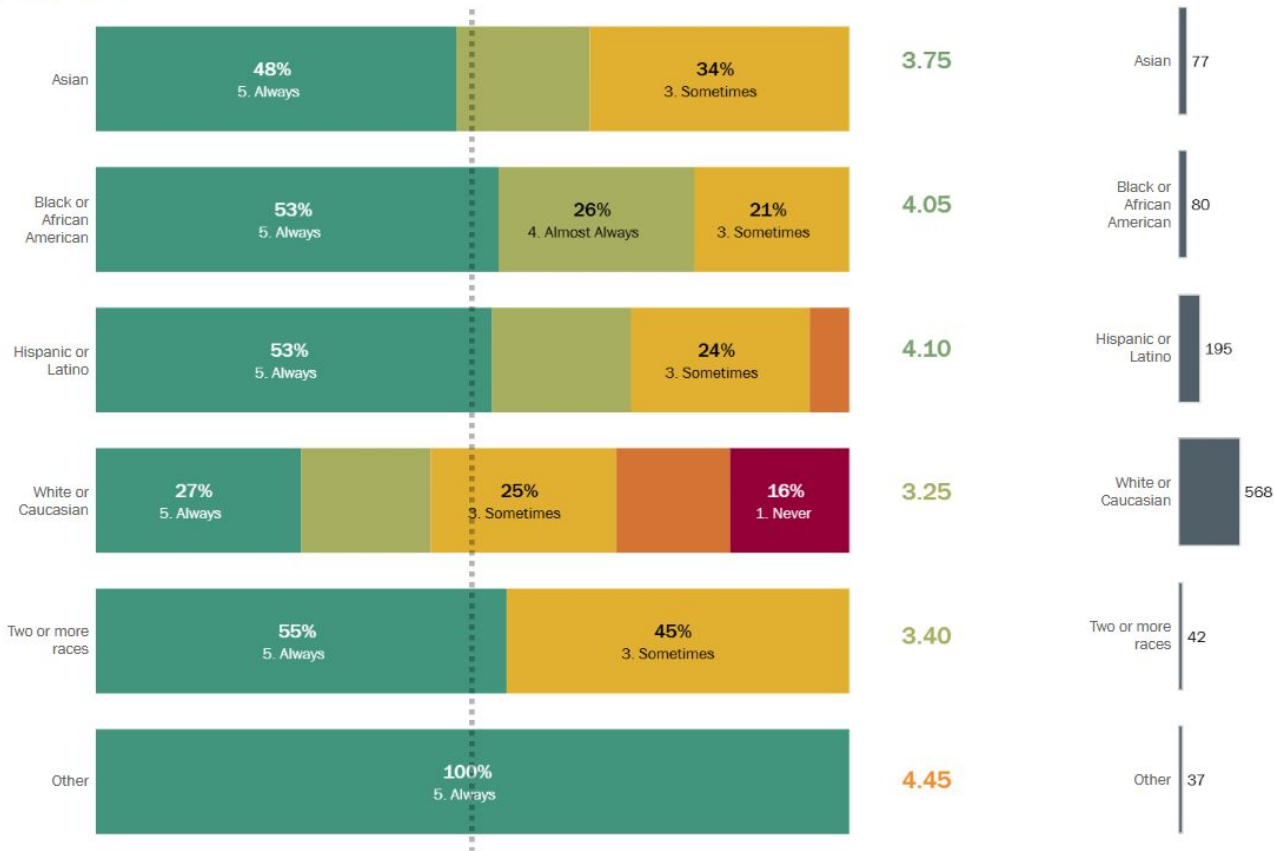
Student Feedback	Family Feedback
• Spoke to 8 students at NW/FC with representation from each grade level • Asked them to share their concerns and potential benefits of having a dedicated officer • <u>Points of feedback:</u> ○ Concern about an officer with a weapon in the school ○ Would want the officer to have de-escalation training and to build relationships with them and their peers ○ Would want the officer to have ties to the community/school and someone that is personable and that students can go to with questions	• Spoke with families at the NW/FC parent teacher conference and the SHS School Improvement Council • Asked families to share concerns they have about having a dedicated officer and qualities they would want to see • <u>Points of feedback:</u> ○ Would want a dedicated officer that has experience with youth, is multicultural/multilingual, is trauma informed, aware of unconscious bias, trained to understand youth mental health, crisis management ○ Concern about whether SDP collaborates with ICE in any way ○ Feelings of discomfort or intimidation when it comes to police ○ Would want someone that is part of the Somerville community and able to build strong relationships with students and families and the broader SHS community ○ Want everyone's voice in the community to be heard, not just the loudest voices

What Our Neighbors Are Saying?

Do the Somerville Police Department officers in your neighborhood make you feel safe?

Average
out of 5

Count
Number of Respondents



Takeaways:

- The majority of respondents said SPD made them feel safer always, almost always, or sometimes
- Notably, a subset of White respondents said they never feel safe with SPD in their neighborhood

Source: Somerville Dept. of Racial and Social Justice "Public Safety for All" survey, January 2024

What Are Neighboring Districts Doing and Saying?

- DESE data shows no school-based arrests in surrounding school districts with SROs for the past three years
- Team-based approach with SPD highlighted as a strong model
- Cultivating strong relationships with students referenced repeatedly as a key ingredient to strong program
 - Chelsea Public Schools, offer out-of -school time programming coordinated by SRO and highlighted as model
- School Staff and Administrators should focus on school-based needs and discipline while SROs support external threats and safety matters

Questions asked in focus groups

1. What qualities are we looking for in the person?
 - a. What experience? (professional and personal)
 - b. What training? (previous and ongoing)
 - c. What attributes and characteristics?
2. What are some effective ways to introduce the SRO to the community?
3. What types of workshops/training would you like the SRO to offer? (e.g. sexting, healthy romantic relationships, bullying)
4. What are your concerns about having an SRO?

Thank You!

- Please be on the lookout for engagement opportunities for students, staff and families in the Fall
- We look forward to your collaboration & patience as we gather feedback from diverse perspectives in our community