

# SLEP Advisory Group Recommendations - Addendum to the School Board Presentation - January 2023

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## I. Executive Summary

The SLEP Advisory Group, in partnership with external facilitators and research partners, and with the support of the ACPS leadership, have spent the last several months studying every aspect of student and staff safety across ACPS, and beyond. For this purpose, the team has reviewed documents, researched best practices, analyzed safety data, interviewed ACPS staff and SROs, executed surveys, facilitated focus groups, written internal white papers, and developed recommendations in an attempt to incorporate the voices, experiences and needs of students, families, staff and the broader community at ACPS.

However, The committee has determined that insufficient data currently exists to make a definitive conclusion on the direct impact of the SRO program on safety. Current data has only been captured for 1 year - and the committee wants to consider a more holistic definition of safety shared across the community that includes both criminal and disciplinary situations.

Recommendations are therefore centered on increasing the fidelity of implementation of the MOU. This includes setting standard expectations for ACPS and APD staff on participating campuses, as well as expanding data collection and reporting measures to allow for deeper analysis on effectiveness and impact of the SRO program.

In addition to direct MOU recommendations, the committee affirmed that ACPS should continue to engage directly with the community on safety related topics. ACPS has prioritized safety and has taken dramatic steps to significantly improve transparency in SY 2022-2023, often sharing information with the School Board above and beyond State reporting requirements.

Ultimately, the Committee views this report as merely the first step in reimagining the school and law enforcement partnership. Approving the recommendations crafted by the SLEP Subcommittees demonstrates a commitment to Alexandria citizens that collaborating across entities is a priority for City + Division leaders.

## II. Overview of SLEP Committee + Process

Since the wrongful death of Trayvon Martin in 2012 - and continuing through the police killing of George Floyd in 2020, a national discussion has been occurring on systematic racism and policing. Across the US, public agencies - in particular education agencies - are actively seeking to understand and assess their relationship with local law enforcement.

### Recent ACPS/APD Partnership Timeline

The relationship between the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) and the Alexandria Police Department (APD), which has provided School Resource Officers on ACPS campuses since 1997, is currently documented through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Below is an overview of the recent timeline since Fall 2020:

#### **October 2020**

A revised MOU was finalized by the ACPS School Board to take effect on November 2, 2020, continuing the program while further outlining student rights and data reporting requirements to increase accountability and transparency of the program.

#### **May 2021**

About six months later, the Alexandria City Council voted to stop funding the SRO program, effectively ending the SRO program in ACPS for the school year 2021-2022. City Council requested that the allocated funds (~\$800,000) should be redirected to other initiatives related to student mental health across the city.

#### **August 2021**

A "Calls for Service" MOU was then created as a modification to the standard partnership MOU given that SROs were no longer funded. This new agreement explained the parameters of when ACPS would request APD support on school grounds (in lieu of having SROs in the buildings).

#### **October 2021**

After a series of safety incidents at ACHS that involved the police in Fall 2021, ACPS requested for SROs to return to campuses. The Alexandria City Council voted to reinstate the SRO program to be funded through June 2022. Both parties resumed adherence to the November 2020 MOU.

#### **March 2022**

As part of reporting responsibilities, ACPS Administration presented detailed data on safety incidents from school year 2021-2022 to the School Board, as well as an initial proposal for a task force to reimagine ACPS' relationship with APD.

#### **May 2022**

ACPS Administration presented an updated School Law Enforcement Partnership (SLEP) Advisory Group Proposal to the School Board to increase stakeholder involvement in the design and implementation of the

ACPS/APD partnership. Once finalized, this effort was launched with the appointment/selection of committee members and external facilitators.

## Advisory Group Direction

### Mission

The mission of the SLEP advisory group is to assist ACPS leadership, the Superintendent and the School Board in reimagining the school law enforcement partnership with the Alexandria Police Department in order to ensure a positive, safe and equitable school experience for all students.

### Purpose

The purpose of the SLEP Advisory Group is to provide additional guidance and insight into the school law enforcement partnership, to include the school resource officer (SRO) work program. The advisory group will support reimagining the ACPS/APD partnership in the following ways:

- Supports ACPS's commitment to the safety and security of students and staff through the review of the partnership between ACPS and APD
- Provides recommendations to the School Board (via Superintendent) on innovative approaches, areas for policy changes, or enhancements to reimagine the partnership
- Promotes communication between parents, students, ACPS staff and administration, safety professionals, members of the School Board and City Council, and the community on the partnership with APD

## Stakeholders Involved

### SLEP Membership

- ACPS Staff Members were selected to provide expertise related to their direct involvement with ACPS security operations, experience operationalizing the SLEP program on school campuses, and understanding of student social, emotional and academic learning (SEAL) needs.
- Alexandria Community Members (Non-ACPS Staff Members) applied to represent themselves as parents and/or experts related to law enforcement, criminal justice reform, black male achievement, and/or school-community engagement and relations.
- APD and City Representatives were recommended by the Chief of Police and Mayor, respectively.
- ACPS Students were selected from ACHS to provide the student experience and promote optimal student interactions with law enforcement.

Application for SLEP Advisory group members was through an online application process which was open from April 22, 2023 through May 02, 2023. Applicants were asked a series of questions as it related to their stakeholder classification (student, parent, etc.) and their area of expertise as it related to the subject matter. Selection of applications was made by the FACE team

Organization: Core Advisory Group Members (16) and Participatory Subcommittee Members (6).

After selection, the SLEP Committee was further grouped into 3 subcommittees, as follows:

- **Memorandum of Understanding Subcommittee:** Assist ACPS in completing a comprehensive review of the current Memorandum of Understanding between ACPS and APD to then make recommendations that will serve to promote an equitable, welcoming and safe learning environment for ACPS students.
- **Research Subcommittee:** Complete research of other nationwide school law enforcement partnerships in an effort to determine best practices and innovation as they relate to SLEP partnerships.
- **Communication and Community Outreach Subcommittee:** Develop a line of communication with students, staff and community that will promote awareness and education of the ACPS/APD partnership.

#### Representation Across Stakeholder Groups

- ACPS Students and Families
- ACPS Secondary School Leaders and Teachers
- ACPS Facilities and Operations
- ACPS Student Support
- Alexandria Police Department
- Alexandria City
- Community Leaders

#### Areas of Expertise

- Safety and Security
- Equity Work
- Alternative Programs
- Psychology, Social and Emotional Wellness
- Teaching and Learning
- School Building Operations
- Law Enforcement
- Black Male Achievement
- Criminal Justice Reform
- Community Engagement and Relations

#### Research Partner

The proposal identified the need for a research partner to provide high-quality, custom research and analytics on the topic of student safety at ACPS to help the SLEP Advisory Group make informed decisions. The research partner prepared a best practices report, conducted surveys and facilitated focus groups, and developed an analysis report for the SLEP Advisory Group.

#### External Facilitator

The proposal identified the need for an external facilitator as the advisory group guide to “create an environment of neutrality within the process.” The external facilitator scheduled the meeting calendar and prepared the agendas with coordinated activities to review data, determine best practice, and facilitate

conversations across stakeholders. The external facilitator captured discussions and approved recommendations to produce associated post-meeting minutes and the development of this report.

### ACPS Administration

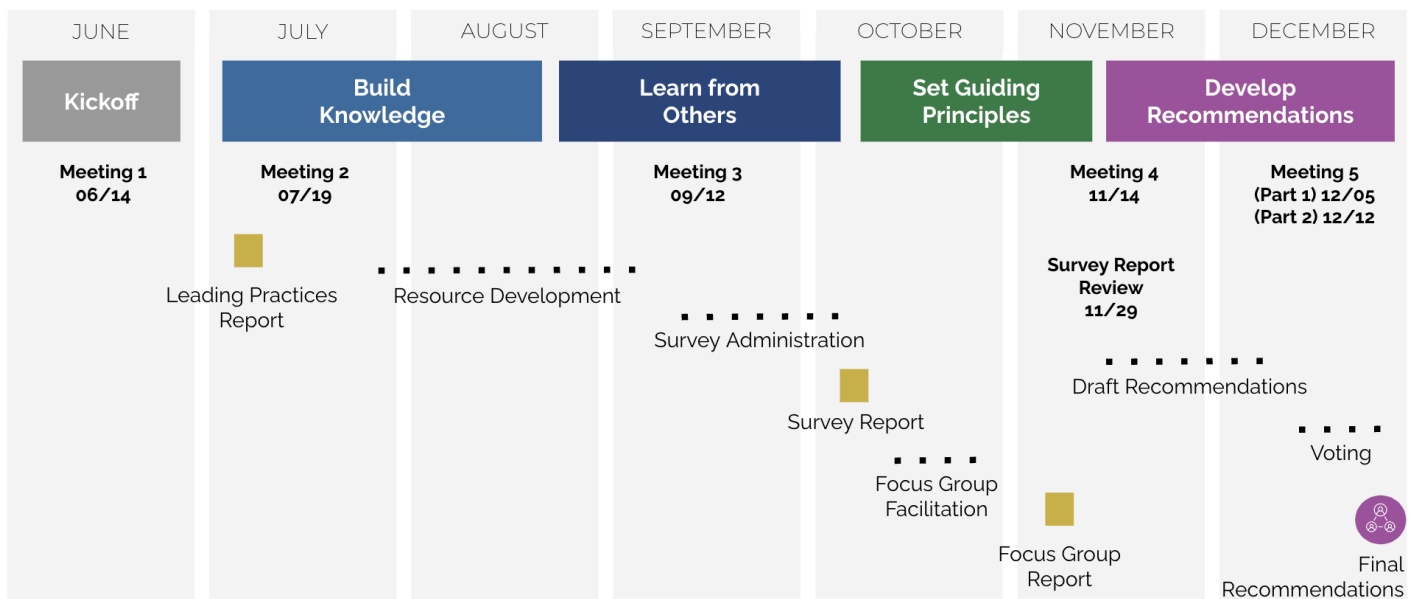
ACPS provided administrative support to ensure that the meetings are a time for collaboration and learning, facilitated at ACHS to increase awareness and understanding of the current student and staff experience.

### SLEP Advisory Group Meetings - Timeline, Frequency and Key Deliverables

The SLEP Advisory Group met 6 times (about once a month) from June through December. The objectives of each meeting were as follows:

- Meeting 1: Kick off meeting - Build a shared understanding of the work we are taking on as a group and how we will accomplish the charge together.
- Meeting 2: Build Knowledge - Create a shared learning experience for committee members to deepen their understanding of Police and School Division Relationships.
- Meeting 3: Learn from Others - Provide an opportunity for committee members to gain a first-hand experience of how school leaders and law enforcement currently work together to build safety and security within a school building.
- Meeting 4: Set Guiding Principles - Explore the safety-related experiences and perceptions voiced by our students, staff and community, translating needs into committee recommendations.
- Meeting 5 (Part 1 + Part 2): Develop Recommendations - To prepare recommendation proposals for whole committee consideration and voting.

Some of the key deliverables developed during this process are: meeting resources (workshop resources, MOU visualizations, research overview), meeting Minutes, research reports, survey/focus group analyses, board updates and final recommendations.



### III. Introduction to the SLEP Advisory Group **Recommendations**

#### **SLEP Guiding Principles**

The SLEP Advisory Group developed the following five guiding principles to help direct the recommendations for the ACPS-APD SRO program:

1. Aligned to ACPS 2025 Strategic Plan Equity For All, supporting the ACPS learning community living out these core values

Welcoming, Equity-Focused, Empowering, Results-Driven, Innovative

2. Centered on student needs
3. Increases transparency
4. Represents a first step towards a community wide effort
5. Supported by evidence / data from ACPS students, staff and community

#### **Final Recommendation Categories**

Using the guiding principles above, the SLEP Advisory Group developed and voted on 20 recommendations, which can be organized into the following four categories:

1. ACPS-APD MOU
2. Understanding the Perceptions and Reality of Safety at ACPS
3. Student Support and Preventive Measures in Schools
4. Communications and Community Engagement

### IV. Overarching **Recommendation for the ACPS-APD SRO Program**

The below detailed recommendations prepared by the committee are intended to improve the MOU between APD and ACPS, as well as the SRO program as a whole.

#### **SLEP Committee Recommendation**

1. Work with the City Council to Continue SRO Funding. ([LINK](#))
  - o SROs are part of a holistic program, and will not independently solve safety concerns - but they belong in the mix, and will require continued funding at either current or elevated levels. Removing SROs, on the other hand, would send a message to many families and community members that ACPS does not take seriously the violence that has occurred at regular intervals in the last year.

## V. Recommendations Specific to the **ACPS-APD MOU**

The below detailed recommendations prepared by the committee are intended to improve the MOU between APD and ACPS, as well as the SRO program as a whole.

### **SLEP Committee Recommendations**

2. Review Responsibilities and Governance of School Security Officers (SSOs). (related to Section 4.e. of the current MOU) ([LINK](#))
  - ACPS should also examine the ratio of city employees to contractors and consider how they are employed day-to-day, given the different authorities they bring to the job. Any change in SSO duties should be reflected in a future MOU.
3. SRO roles should add order maintenance and emergency preparedness, with procedural justice elements as the foundation as noted in Section 5.a., paragraph 3 of the current MOU (this also builds upon Section 6.c., paragraph 2.) ([LINK](#))
  - The current general SRO responsibilities described (in Appendix 1 of current MOU) do not reflect the range and nuances of the roles of the SRO and do not acknowledge the foundation from which these roles should be practiced.
4. The quantifiable responsibilities of each role should be specific enough to be measured and added to the quarterly assessment reviews of the SROs (related to Section 3.d. of the current MOU) ([LINK](#))
  - A robust assessment of the program would include the roles of the other components of the school system in their relation to the SRO, including how well the SRO communicates with stakeholders.
5. Annual professional development training should include pedagogical methods (for Teacher role), mentoring and leadership, Fourth and Fifth Amendments, relationship building, risk assessment (for Emergency Preparedness role), and other training related to SRO roles. (related to Section 4 of the current MOU). ([LINK](#))
6. Review FERPA and other applicable laws or regulations governing release of data. Legal analysis should be made public. (related to Section 5.b. of the current MOU).([LINK](#))
  - This has two goals: (i) Identify any misperceptions or assumptions about what is or is not permitted, (ii) Set realistic expectations with the public
  - The end goal would be to release as much information as possible for both trend analysis and incident reporting.
7. De-escalation should be part of SROs' yearly professional development training as part of the Order Maintenance role and recommended by the COPS Office. ([LINK](#))
8. SROs should report when de-escalation has been used and whether its use during a contact successfully resulted in an alternative to arrest or reduction in a student's emotional state. (related to Section 5.f. of the current MOU) ([LINK](#))



**Additional Recommendations Prepared by Subcommittees NOT Approved**

- Update MOU to Comply with Code of Virginia for Crime Reporting. ([LINK](#))
  - MOU Section 6.a. (Crime Reporting) must be updated to reflect passage of HB4/SB36. “Certain enumerated acts” – in a nutshell, violence or weapons violations – must be reported to law enforcement even if they are misdemeanors.

VI. Recommendations related to the understanding of **Perceptions and Reality of Safety at ACPS**

**SLEP Committee Recommendations**

9. Engage an independent consultant well-versed in data collection and analysis to analyze the criminal and non-criminal incidents with a final report of policy recommendations to ensure a safe learning environment. ([LINK](#))
  - This data should be used by ACPS to help create policy, training, and inform the community to ensure safety and transparency, and assess whether the SRO program is working.
10. Conduct an independent study based on sound methodology and expert consultation with a new committee comprised of professionals not from ACPS or APD to explore why minority students are arrested at higher rates. ([LINK](#))
11. Set a policy for ‘Prompt Incident Reporting’ to parents, or reiterate its existing one via a strategic communications campaign. ([LINK](#))
  - Be clear about potential delays or legal constraints on what can be revealed, but commit to being as forthright as possible.
12. Outcomes, criminal or disciplinary, should be reported for criminal incidents. This data, if compiled for Virginia’s Department of Education as part of the Student Behavior and Administrative Response Collection, should also be shared with the Alexandria School Board. ([LINK](#))
13. Any and all data analysis on race and ethnicity should be based on sound principles and consistent across quarters and years. ([LINK](#))

**Additional Recommendations Prepared by Subcommittees NOT Approved**

- The School Safety Data Review report should report only on cases that are founded or separate founded from unfounded cases. Any further analysis, such as arrest rates or demographics, should only be based on founded cases. ([LINK](#))

## VII. Recommendations for **Student Support and Preventive Measures in Schools**

### SLEP Committee Recommendations

14. Expand and implement effective restorative practices (RP) within ACPS, and develop mechanisms for observation, feedback, and encouragement. ([LINK](#))
15. Research needs and options for alternative education programs and assess how similar programs could be developed in Alexandria. ([LINK](#))
  - An expanded alternative pathways model would be intended to provide several alternative academic settings for students who need specialized support for behavioral health or who need a short-term solution while awaiting hearings or restorative actions, while keeping them on track for graduation.

### *Additional Recommendations Prepared by Subcommittees NOT Approved*

- Creation of internal prevention/wellness teams, including the hiring of a trained prevention coordinator with staff to address mental health and safety comprehensively at every school and every level. ([LINK](#))

## VIII. Recommendations for **Communications and Community Engagement**

### SLEP Committee Recommendations

16. Create an ongoing internal and external communications plan to deliver greater transparency on data and process to the community and key stakeholders. ([LINK](#))
17. Develop an ongoing community engagement plan with an external group and school board oversight, including key stakeholders (staff, underserved student groups, SSOs, local subject matter experts, etc.) and citywide initiatives (equity task force, LGBTQ+ task force, etc.), to integrate key voices and stakeholders and community initiatives with comprehensive ACPS programs addressing safety, school policing and equity. ([LINK](#))