# Evaluating the Role and Impact of School Liaison Officers in British Columbia
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## Introduction

In January 2025, activists, teachers, and community members in Victoria protested the potential reinstatement of the School Liaison Officer (SLO) program (Seymour, 2025). Supporters argue that SLOs enhance school safety and foster positive police-community relations (Seymour, 2025). However, critics highlight the program's unintended consequences, such as racial discrimination, which previously led to its discontinuation in Vancouver and Victoria (Seymour, 2025). Despite these concerns, policymakers are now advocating for the program's return, which amplifies stakeholder conflicts and disagreements. Although the SLO program remains a contentious issue, there is limited research on its impact. As a result, this study explores the perspectives of students, educators, and community members to evaluate its effectiveness on school safety and well-being. By analyzing both supporting and opposing perspectives, this study aims to address the question: What concerns do public members have about the SLO program in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island?
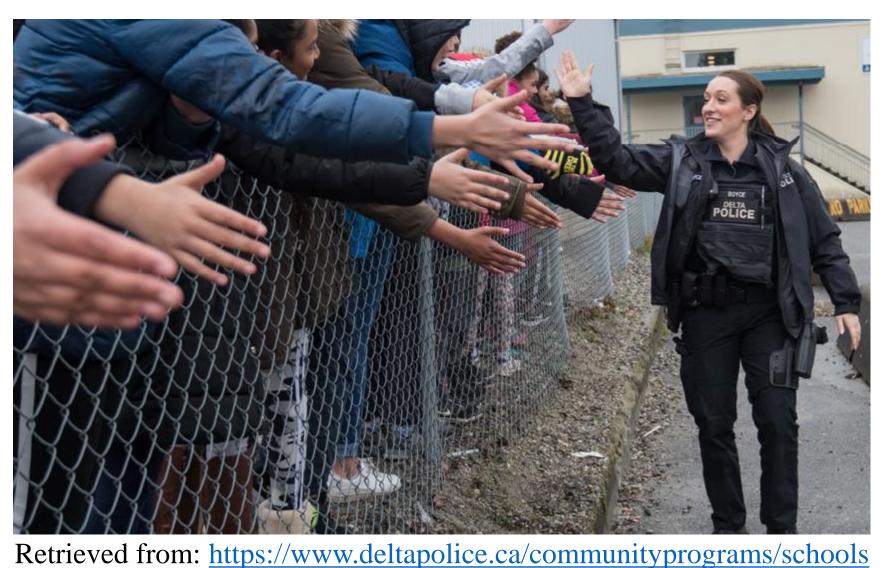
## Background

The presence of police in schools has been a long-debated issue in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. SLOs were introduced to build relationships between law enforcement and students, improve community policing, and prevent crime (see Figure 1). However, concerns arose regarding the program's disproportionate impact on Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) students (Teachers' Federation, 2022). Research indicates that police presence minimally affects school safety while negatively impacting students' mental health, leading to the program's removal in major school districts (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021). Despite limited evidence, the B.C. government supports reinstating SLOs, citing that they prevent youth violence (Seymour, 2025). The ongoing divide among key stakeholders has resulted in a lack of consensus on the program's future. Since the program may be reimplemented, assessing its impact through research-driven analysis is crucial. Understanding its benefits and unintended consequences will help inform policy decisions and ensure that school safety initiatives are effective.

## Methods

This study uses comparative content analysis to examine qualitative data from news articles and academic literature. The data collection process involved sourcing news articles from Google and CBC's websites using the keyword "SLO program." Articles were selected based on publication dates from 2020-2025 and their discussion on public reactions, policy changes, and law enforcement perspectives. Data from news articles were analyzed using open coding, where information was labelled based on emerging themes and patterns. During focused coding, labels were refined into codes according to their relevance to the research question. Through thematic coding, individual codes were grouped into four themes that highlight central patterns and perspectives in the data: *Stakeholder Concerns*, *Safety and Security Arguments*, *Disproportionate Impact*, and *Alternative Safety Models*. The data analysis examined the frequency and significance of established codes in existing literature to determine how public discourse aligns with scholarly perspectives and research.

**Figure 1**
*The Role of School Liaison Officers in Community Engagement*



Retrieved from: https://www.deltapolice.ca/communityprograms/schools

## Results

Findings reveal a persistent divide among stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the SLO program. While the media frames the issue as a binary conflict, academic literature presents an informative discussion with diverse perspectives. A primary concern in the educational sector is the reported negative impacts of SLOs on student well-being (Seymour, 2025). Research by the Teachers' Federation (2022) shows that BIPOC educators view police presence as intimidating rather than protective. Meanwhile, law enforcement supports reinstating SLOs, linking their removal to increased criminality among youth. The Minister of Education argues that the program helps prevent gang involvement (Seymour, 2025). However, research challenges these claims, suggesting SLOs contribute to over-policing rather than safety. Studies indicate that police presence increases student arrests, suspensions, and racial disparities in discipline (Javdani, 2019). Media and empirical research further highlight that BIPOC students disproportionately experience fear, intimidation, and systemic discrimination (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021). Evidence suggests that SLOs do not significantly reduce violence or gang activity (Javdani, 2019). Critics argue that the push for SLOs is politically motivated rather than evidence-based. Therefore, many advocate for alternative safety models, such as civilian personnel trained in mental health and trauma-informed approaches (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021).

## Discussion

A strength of this study is that it uses a comprehensive data collection approach, integrating qualitative and secondary data. This allows media and academic literature to reinforce or contradict public concerns, enhancing reliability. Analyzing both sources captures diverse stakeholder perspectives, such as educators, law enforcement, and policymakers, providing valuable insights. The combination of data helps cross-reference information, which can eliminate biases and increase the validity of the available data. However, a key limitation is the reliance on news articles, which may frame issues in a manner that reflects political or corporate interests. Media sources can often oversimplify or misrepresent information, weakening the study's findings. Additionally, the 15-week study duration limits the ability to conduct long-term analysis. Since the SLO debate is ongoing, findings may quickly become outdated.

## Conclusions

This study finds that public concerns raised in the media are supported by academic literature, highlighting the need for a reevaluation of the SLO program's effectiveness. The ongoing debate over the program's impact underlines its disproportionate effects on BIPOC students. The results reveal that the lack of empirical evidence on SLOs emphasizes the need for Canadian-based research to assess their impact on student safety, gang involvement, and disciplinary actions. Future studies should prioritize student perspectives by incorporating surveys and interviews to capture first-hand experiences. Addressing these research gaps will provide evidence-based insights that accurately reflect the realities of Canadian schools, informing more balanced policy discussions and decisions.

## References

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