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OCDSB says no to uniformed police at Grade 1 career day

BY JEFF MORRIS

The Ottawa Carleton District School Board has drawn yet another line in the sand between its trustees and the Ottawa Police Service.

The latest incident happened at Stittsville Public School, but its ripple effect has reached the entire board and every community throughout the city. The Grade 1 class at the school were looking for parents who were deemed to be community helpers to come into the school to talk to the students. One of the students has a mother who is a police officer with the Ottawa Police Service.

The decision did not sit well with the Ottawa Police Association. The association's president, Matthew Cox, sent a letter to the board, its trustees and local politicians. The letter was also sent to the Bar-

rhaven Independent. The letter asks why members of the Ottawa Police Service were not allowed to be in uniform when talking to Grade 1 students.

"Could someone please explain why? If we are trying to build relationships in the communities and educate students who may wish to pursue a future career in Emergency Services how is this decision the appropriate course of action? Opportunities like this to educate the next generation youth and provide a positive interaction with police should be something you strive to achieve."

Cox went on to say that the actions of the board were disrespectful to the police.

"The brave men and women who wear the uniform deserve better. Police officers should receive the same support and respect

as any other profession that has been invited to speak to your students.

"Minister of Education Lecce has come out publicly to support the police stating, 'I find it entirely unacceptable for a school board to prevent a parent of a child in that school from attending take your parent to work day'."

Premier Doug Ford also weighed in on the situation. He posted on social media and called it a "disturbing trend that needs to stop."

"Police officers are the people we call when we need help," the premier also said via social media. "They deserve so much better than this. I'm calling on the (OCDSB) to immediately reverse this policy and show our heroes on the front lines the respect they deserve."

OCDSB continues on page 4



Ottawa Carleton District School Board Chair Lyra Evans led the charge to eliminate the Ottawa Police Service Student Resource Officer program in 2021. The ban on uniformed police officers at schools is now preventing an Ottawa police officer from driving a police car and wearing her uniform to her daughter's school for a community helpers career day for Grade 1 students. (PHOTO LYRAEVANS.CA)

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OCDSB continues from page 1

The OCDSB is the second school board in the province where officers have been told they cannot attend school events while wearing a uniform or if driving a police car. Last week, the Toronto Sun reported that the Grand Erie District School Board has apologized after a parent, who is also a police officer, was initially barred from career day if wearing a uniform.

Cox is also a parent, and speaks from experience as he has gone to schools as a visitor and speaker in the past.

“As a parent who has attended and spoken to a kindergarten class in the past, I can assure you that every child in that room loved seeing the police uniform and having an opportunity to sit in the police car and turn the lights and siren on and off.”

Board Chair Lyra Evans responded to Cox, writing that the decision was made because of what she called disproportionate police violence against some communities that has called a level of fear associated with the profession.

Before she became the board’s chair, Evans, as a trustee, rallied support to have the Ottawa Police Service’s Student Resource Officer Program cancelled. She

garnered support from within the board, and then worked with a group called Asilu Collective, who made a presentation of testimonials they had collected from students. The report made accusations that the SRO program made students of colour and who are gender-oppressed feel scared and anxious.

Evans has used her personal social media accounts to call for the defunding of police.

On Thursday of last week, the OCDSB issued a statement on the board’s stand to the media and also sent a letter to Cox. Both were sent to the Barrhaven Independent. The OCDSB said that to align with Board Policy regarding police involvement in schools, the parent had been asked not to wear her uniform or arrive at the school in a police vehicle.

“I appreciate the many perspectives and concerns that have been raised on this matter,” said the Board’s Director of Education, Michele Giroux. “Our priority is to work collaboratively with the Ottawa Police to develop protocols that support student learning and school safety and are responsive to the community concerns.”

Giroux’s letter to Cox

on behalf of the board had a more diplomatic tone than the correspondence sent by Evans. She called the OPS an important community partner to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

“We share a common commitment to serving the diverse needs of our community and a recognition of the importance of building relationships of trust. With that in mind, I would like to arrange a meeting with you to discuss police services to schools and better understand the perspective of your members. This will be an important first step in mapping out a path forward. I will also be reaching out to Chief Stubbs to arrange a meeting with him about the relationship between the OCDSB and OPS and the need for us to build a new partnership protocol.”

Giroux stated that after ODCSB trustees voted to end the SRO program, the board moved toward an emergency response-based relationship with police and away from having uniformed officers in schools providing direct learning to students.

Giroux added that the parent was “warmly invited to attend and to share her work experience with the class”, but asked to do so without



Ontario Premier Doug Ford called on the Ottawa Carleton District School Board to “immediately reverse this policy and show our heroes on the front lines the respect they deserve.”

the uniform and the police car. She said it was an effort to find a balance between the direction of the board, student learning, parent engagement, and safety.

“There will be some who say that the easy path forward is to allow the parent to attend in uniform; others will maintain that uniforms and police cars are not essential to classroom learning about policing,” Giroux wrote.

“The Board decision remains in place until ‘further evaluation is complete’. After careful consideration, I do not believe that any decision on this single incident will bring clarity to practice. That will only come as a result of more fulsome discussions about how the OPS and OCDSB can work together to support student learning, well-being, and safety. These discussions will need to reflect on

the concerns that the community raised during our police involvement in schools review, with an intentional commitment on the part of both parties to building new practices.”

Giroux and Cox have agreed a sit-down conversation that is being scheduled for this week.

OCDSB continues on page 5

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New bill intended to make school boards put education first

The Ontario government wants school boards to make education their top priority.

Last week, the Ontario government introduced The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, which would, if passed, ensure the province's public education system focuses on what matters most: important life-long skills, like reading, writing and math. The act would also ensure accountability and transparency for parents and families.

"We are taking action to refocus Ontario's education system on what really matters: strengthening reading, writing and math skills," said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. "Our proposed legislation would centre the education system on preparing students to succeed in life and work, putting more highly qualified educators in the classroom while ensuring parents have the information they need at their fingertips to support their kids. These reforms would ensure students graduate with a competitive advantage while learning modern lessons in modern

schools, preparing them for the jobs of the future."

If passed, The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act would help students and families by:

- Improving accountability and transparency by allowing the Minister of Education to set priorities in important areas on student achievement, like reading and math, and requiring school boards to update parents on progress

- Requiring school boards to publicly post a multi-year Board Improvement Plan that reflects the minister's priorities for student achievement, creating authority to deploy personnel to support school boards when needed, along with greater oversight over provincially funded tax dollars

- Ensuring new teachers and educators have the skills they need to teach students effectively in math, reading and literacy

- Directing school boards to increase engagement and reporting to parents on student achievement and ensuring parents have easy access to the information they need

to meaningfully engage with their children's education and success

- Building schools faster and implementing measures to utilize current school spaces, ensuring Ontario is getting more classrooms into communities who need them

- Strengthening the requirement for school boards to have a code of conduct for boards of trustees, creating a neutral dispute resolution process and authority to standardize and mandate training requirements for school board leadership

- Building on our progress to establish a leading system of student safety and educator oversight, furthering measures to expedite disciplinary decisions for educators convicted of a criminal offense

- Expanding eligibility for therapy counselling for student victims of sexual abuse through the Ontario College of Teachers

- Providing for more consistent approaches to student learning and well-being, including on student mental health

- Improving processes at the Ontario College of Teachers and College of Early Childhood Educators to enable them to operate more efficiently, including more consistent disciplinary processes.

Currently, school boards set their own education priorities, resulting in differences across the education system. For example, there are some schools consistently underperforming in EQAO data, including declining reading, writing and math scores. Moreover, it takes on average five to 10 years to build a standard school in Ontario and it can take more than 100 days to certify internationally educated teachers.

The province will work with the Ontario College of Teachers and Ontario's faculties of education to modernize teacher training and certification processes to meet the needs of students in the classrooms, including decreasing times to process applications to certify teachers.

Nearly 2,000 front-line educators will be hired, sup-

ported by overall education funding at the highest levels in Ontario history. This includes \$693 million more in base Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding compared to the year prior, or a 2.7 per cent increase. With a focus on supporting students across the province, and building off the approximately 8,000 additional staff hired since 2018, the government will fund:

- Nearly 1,000 specialized math and literacy educators to boost skills

- Over 940 educators to support students from grades 7 to 10 with a seamless transition into high school and in de-streamed courses.

In addition, Ontario's students are supported with the highest level of per-student base funding in provincial history at \$13,125. This record-setting investment will support school boards and educators as they prepare Ontario's students with the skills they need to succeed in life. To prepare and support students in the de-streaming of Grade 9, Ontario is investing in nearly 1,000 educators.

"Our mission is simple: drive continuous improvement to Ontario's education system so that we graduate the brightest, most ambitious, skilled and entrepreneurial students in the country," said Minister Lecce. "We are sending a signal across the province: we must – and we will – do better to ensure your children get a quality education that leads them to a good-paying job, home ownership and a life of opportunity."

Recently, Ontario introduced a \$180-million reading and math strategy to help students build the skills they need to succeed. For the 2023-24 school year, the province is providing school boards with \$1.4 billion in funding to revitalize and renew aged building systems and components.

Ontario is launching a new student transportation funding formula in 2023-24, with an additional investment of \$111 million. The new formula is designed to be more transparent and help school boards provide more effective student transportation.

OCDSB continues from page 4

Blackburn opposed ending SRO program

Less than a year ago, Barrhaven-Knoxdale-Merivale Trustee Donna Blackburn, the only one who was in favour of keeping the SRO program intact, said the issue needed to be re-addressed. Blackburn's motion aimed to engage the public board in discussions with Ottawa police, in order to create a better standard of practice for when calls need to be dealt with.

"Despite what people have said tonight about various things, I've heard the concerns of the community; I've heard them loud and clear," Blackburn told her trustee colleagues. "The way things stand right now as a result of the decision this board made, we have basically put our administrators in a position where all they can do is call 911."

When the school resource officer program was in effect, the primary job of the officers was to speak with students, work with administrators, assess any possible threatening situations, and link families and students to services in the community. They would also respond to any criminal or emergency matters when they arose.

"What the principals are telling me is all they can do is call 911," Blackburn said. "I spoke to an administrator, they were on hold on the police line for three hours because they had a non-emergency situation, a situation that had to be dealt with. It wasn't a minor situation, it could have ended up in a 911 call, and had there been an SRO it would have been dealt with."

Asilu Collective, a group that was started to end the SRO program in Ottawa,

urged people to speak as delegates at the 2022 meeting. The organization was represented at the board meeting by Hailey Dash, who took issue to wording in the motion regarding the safety of students and staff by police.

"What Trustee Blackburn means is that this is an illusion of safety for students who aren't being targeted and criminalized by cops in your schools," she said. "School safety cannot be enhanced by policing. This is a racist lie that cannot be perpetuated."

"Black folks, Indigenous folks, 2SLGBTQ plus, people with disabilities, continue to be severely impacted by police presence in educational settings," Dash added.

Trustees voted to defer Blackburn's motion indefinitely.



Barrhaven-Knoxdale-Merivale Trustee Donna Blackburn has been the lone trustee who has been in favour of restoring the Student Resource Officer program.

OCDSB backpedals, will allow police in uniforms to attend career days

By JEFF MORRIS

The Ottawa Carleton District School Board will allow police officers in uniform who are parents to speak to the boards children and classes.

The announcement was made last week after the board issued a memo to the Ottawa Police Service saying that officers in uniform would be welcome to attend schools in the board while in uniform to speak to students at events such as community career days.

The OCDSB became the second school board in Ontario to not allow a uniformed police officer to participate in a career day. Last month, a female police officer was told she could not participate in uniform or bring her police car to the school for her child's Grade 1 career day where parents who have jobs that help in the community were coming into the class to speak to the children.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford, Ontario Minister of Education Stephen Lecce, and Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe expressed their disapproval with the decision made by the board.

The premier posted on social media and called it a "disturbing trend that needs to stop."

"Police officers are the people we call when we need help," the premier also said via social media. "They deserve so much better than this. I'm calling on the (OCDSB) to immediately reverse this policy and show our heroes on the front lines the respect they deserve."

Lecce issued a memo to all public school boards in Ontario stating the expectation that parents would be allowed to wear their uniforms when appearing at schools as guest speakers.

"Those school boards who are not allowing parents in their service uniforms are enabling division instead of bringing all segments of civil society together as we work to counter very real threats to communities across the province," Lecce wrote in the memo.

The OCDSB softened its stance on the issue, stating in a memo that police officers who are parents would be allowed to wear their uniforms when giving presentations in schools. According to CTV Ottawa, the memo from Lecce wrote,

"my expectation that these parents, and others who proudly wear uniforms as part of their occupation, are to be welcomed," adding "any parent of a student within a publicly funded school has the right to participate in their child's education and school experience."

The board would not share the memo with the Barrhaven Independent when asked for a copy of it, but they did issue a statement.

"We appreciate the direction provided by the Ministry," the OCDSB statement read. "The OCDSB values the engagement of parents and our partnership with police. Where there are requests for uniformed officers to provide direct learning to students, we review each request to assess the learning opportunity and consider it in the context of alignment with the Board direction to have an emergency response based relationship with police."

The statement also references the meeting that took place between Ottawa Police Association President Matt Cox and the OCDSB Director of Education Mi-

chele Giroux.

"Following up from what we shared previously, last week, the Director met with the President of the Ottawa Police Association to discuss this issue. A meeting with the Ottawa Chief of Police has also been scheduled. These conversations are an opportunity to work together to establish new protocols for police involvement in schools which focus on students, safety, and relationships of trust, respecting the community concerns raised during our police involvement in schools review. The guidance from the Ministry will form part of those discussions."

End of SRO Program

In 2021, Trustee Lyra Evans, who is now the OCDSB Chair, lobbied her fellow trustees and rallied the community to put an end to the Ottawa Police Service Student Resource Officer (SRO) program at the schools. She garnered support from within the board, and then worked with a group called Asilu Collective, who made a presentation of testimonials they had collected from students.

The report made accusations that the SRO program made students of colour and who are gender-oppressed feel scared and anxious.

Evans, a former provincial NDP candidate, has used her personal social media accounts to call for the defunding of police. The Ontario NDP has a plan in place for defunding the police in Ontario should they win the next provincial election.

Barrhaven-Knoxdale-Merivale Trustee Donna Blackburn voted against eliminating the SRO program.

"If you read the motion where we cancelled the officer resource program, it doesn't speak to a parent coming in for a career day," said Blackburn in an interview with CTV. "So I think it was a bit of a stretch and, in my opinion, a very embarrassing stretch which lost us a lot of public confidence."

Blackburn will be putting forth a motion on June 13 to the OCDSB's Committee of the Whole calling for a return to a positive and proactive relationship between the board and the Ottawa Police Service.

OPA Gets Involved

The issue with the Stittsville parent/officer escalated earlier this month when Cox was contacted by the officer. The OCDSB's decision not to allow the parent to participate in the Grade 1 career day while in uniform did not sit well with the Ottawa Police Association. Cox, sent a letter to the board, its trustees and local politicians. The letter was also sent to the Barrhaven Independent. The letter asks why members of the Ottawa Police Service were not allowed to be in uniform when talking to Grade 1 students.

"Could someone please explain why? If we are trying to build relationships in the communities and educate students who may wish to pursue a future career in Emergency Services how is this decision the appropriate course of action? Opportunities like this to educate the next generation youth and provide a positive interaction with police should be something you strive to achieve."

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Cox went on to say that the actions of the board were disrespectful to the police.

“The brave men and women who wear the uniform deserve better. Police officers should receive the same support and respect as any other profession that has been invited to speak to your students. “Minister of Education Lecce has come out publicly to support the police stating, ‘I find it entirely unacceptable for a school board to prevent a parent of a child in that school from attending take your parent to work day.’”

On May 4, the OCDSB issued a statement on the board’s stand to the media and also sent a letter to Cox. Both were sent to the Barrhaven Independent. The OCDSB said that to align with Board Policy regarding police involve-

ment in schools, the parent had been asked not to wear her uniform or arrive at the school in a police vehicle.

“I appreciate the many perspectives and concerns that have been raised on this matter,” said the Board’s Director of Education, Michele Giroux. “Our priority is to work collaboratively with the Ottawa Police to develop protocols that support student learning and school safety and are responsive to the community concerns.”

Giroux’s letter to Cox called the OPS an important community partner to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

“We share a common commitment to serving the diverse needs of our community and a recognition of the importance of building relationships of trust. With that in mind, I would

like to arrange a meeting with you to discuss police services to schools and better understand the perspective of your members. This will be an important first step in mapping out a path forward. I will also be reaching out to Chief Stubbs to arrange a meeting with him about the relationship between the OCDSB and OPS and the need for us to build a new partnership protocol.”

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Giroux added that the parent was “warmly invited to attend and to share her work experience with

the class”, but asked to do so without the uniform and the police car. She said it was an effort to find a balance between the direction of the board, student learning, parent engagement, and safety.

“There will be some who say that the easy path forward is to allow the parent to attend in uniform; others will maintain that

uniforms and police cars are not essential to classroom learning about policing,” Giroux wrote. “The Board decision remains in place until ‘further evaluation is complete’. After careful consideration, I do not believe that any decision on this single incident will bring clarity to practice. That will only come as a result of more fulsome

discussions about how the OPS and OCDSB can work together to support student learning, well-being, and safety. These discussions will need to reflect on the concerns that the community raised during our police involvement in schools review, with an intentional commitment on the part of both parties to building new practices.”

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Blackburn motion to start repairing relationship between OCDSB, police

Ottawa Carleton District School Board Barrhaven Trustee Donna Blackburn will be introducing a motion to the Committee of the Whole next week that she hopes will start to rebuild a severed relationship with the Ottawa Police Service.

Blackburn tried to introduce a similar motion last summer. Trustee Christine Boothby moved to defer Blackburn's motion indefinitely, saying the motion would cause hurt to the community. Trustee Lyra Evans, who is now the board chair and who has been an active anti-police advocate and provincial NDP candidate over the years, commented at the meeting that she was "of the opinion we punt this into space and never look back."

Evans and other trustees lobbied for the cancellation of the Ottawa Police Service Student Resource Officer (SRO) program. Their reasoning was that having

a uniformed police officer with access to the schools caused fear and anxiety to racialized (non-white) students and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

"I was surprised that last year's motion did not even go to a vote before it was shut down," Blackburn said.

This year, the playing field has changed on the board. Although there is still a core of trustees from the extreme left that wield a lot of power – Evans is now the Board Chair – there are several new members on the board. The recent media and public attention following the board's refusal to allow a uniformed police officer to go to her daughter's first grade class for a career day for parents with jobs that help the community triggered national attention. Evans did not back down from not allowing police officers in schools.

BLACKBURN
continues on page 4



Ottawa Carleton District School Board Barrhaven Trustee Donna Blackburn wants the board to start rebuilding the fractured relationship it has with the Ottawa Police Service.

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BLACKBURN continues from page 1

Mayor Mark Sutcliffe and Premier Doug Ford publicly asked the OCDSB to back down on their policy. Eventually, Education Minister Steven Lecce ordered the board to allow the police officer to take part in the career day, wearing a uniform.

“In my opinion, that was extremely embarrassing for the board. We lost a lot of public confidence,” Blackburn said.

Blackburn has updated the motion that will be presented to the Committee of the Whole June 13.

“WHEREAS the health and safety of our students and staff is a top priority without which student achievement and well-being cannot be realized; and

“WHEREAS school safety can be enhanced by a partnership with the police service which supports the safety and security of school communities and proactively assists students who may benefit from positive police involvement;

“THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: THAT the Director of Education engage in discussions with the Ottawa Police Service to establish standards of practice that allow for police support to schools respecting the safety

and security of students and staff.”

“This has nothing to do with politics,” Blackburn said. “This has everything to do with the safety of the students, and with creating a safe learning environment.”

Blackburn said there was a lot of public misunderstanding about the SRO program and how it operated.

“First of all, I want to be very clear that this is not a motion to re-instate the SRO program,” she said. “However, in my opinion, it is important that we have a relationship at some level with the police. When the officers were in the schools for the program, they developed relationships. They were able to work with the principals and administration. They were also able to develop relationships with the students, particularly the students who were at risk. Sure, not every police officer was perfect, but if you take a cross-section of any group in society and you are going to find people who are not perfect.”

While officers familiar with the schools, the students and their school culture were a mere text away with the SRO program, staff now has no other option but to call 9-1-1 when there is

an issue at their school. One retired police officer who only agreed to speak to the Independent if he could be unnamed, said that the problems at the schools increased after the cancellation of the program.

“Violence at the schools was up the first year after the cancellation of the program,” he said. “There was an increase in bullying and fights, there were more drug deals taking place out in the open. The students who are problematic have become more brazen. It’s not just at the high schools. It’s at the elementary schools as well. There was a highly publicized incident at Longfields Davidson Heights Secondary School where a student was stabbed. What people don’t realize is that there were several situations like that around the city. Those incidents never made it to the media, so nobody knows about them.”

The officer also referenced Vimy Ridge Public School in Findlay Creek, which has had to have public meetings and forums about the bullying problem at the school and how children are being beaten up in unsupervised areas between portable classrooms during recess



OCDSB Barrhaven Trustee Donna Blackburn is pictured with her daughter, and with her cousin who is a police officer.

and lunch hour breaks.

Blackburn said that what she wants out of her motion is for a dialogue to begin between the Board and its Director of Education, and the Ottawa Police Service.

“Whether we have the SRO program or not, the

police are still coming to the schools,” she said. “But the difference is, when there is a problem, do you want someone who is known at the school and has a relationship with the students responding, or do you want to call 9-1-1 and have to wait,

and then whatever officer happens to be in the area on a beat shows up at the school and may never have been in the building in their lives?”

The board’s meeting will be streamed live at ocdsb.ca and then posted to the OCDSB YouTube channel.

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OCDSB shoots down motion, uniformed police still not welcome at schools

Police officers in uniform remain banned from Ottawa's English-speaking public schools except for the case of an emergency.

A motion to open communications between the Ottawa Carleton District School Board and the Ottawa Police Service was shot down by the board's Vice-Chair Justine Bell and did not even make it to vote.

Barrhaven Trustee Donna Blackburn introduced the motion at the board's Committee of the Whole meeting Tues., June 13. Blackburn had said before the meeting that she wanted to reopen communication lines with the police beyond 911 calls, citing concerns about increasing violence in OCDSB schools and the benefits of having a positive relationship with the police.

Blackburn tried to introduce a similar motion last summer. Trustee Christine Boothby moved to defer Blackburn's motion indefinitely, saying the motion would cause hurt to the community. Trustee Lyra



A motion to open discussions with the Ottawa Police Service did not make it to vote at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's Committee of the Whole Meeting June 14. As a result, uniformed police officers may only enter schools under emergency situations.

Evans, who is now the board chair and who has been an active anti-police advocate and provincial NDP candidate over the years, commented at the meeting that she was "of the opinion we punt this into space and never look back."

Evans and other trustees lobbied for the cancellation of the Ottawa Police Service Student Resource Officer (SRO) program. Their reasoning was that having a uniformed police officer with access to the schools caused fear and anx-

ety to racialized (non-white) students and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Blackburn updated the motion that was presented to the Committee of the Whole June 13. It read:

"WHEREAS the health and

safety of our students and staff is a top priority without which student achievement and well-being cannot be realized; and

"WHEREAS school safety can be enhanced by a partnership with the police service which supports the safety and

security of school communities and proactively assists students who may benefit from positive police involvement;

OCDSB
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OCDSB continues from page 1

“THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: THAT the Director of Education engage in discussions with the Ottawa Police Service to establish standards of practice that allow for police support to schools respecting the safety and security of students and staff.”

College/Knoxdale-Merivale Trustee Amanda Presley called the motion harmful.

“I fear this motion will cause harm to our community partners and our community at large, as well as the perception and integrity of the board,” Presley said. “The voices who have trusted us to advocate for them should be centered in determining the expectations of the Ottawa Police Service community partner standards service and what they will look like inside of our institutions prior to any actions on the part of the board. I believe it will cause harm based on those things, and I believe that the communities we represent should be offered the opportunity to provide further consultation and consideration prior to moving forward.”

Bell, who was chairing the meeting, declared that Blackburn’s motion was out of order.

“On my determination, I

think you have clearly outlined the harm – reputational harm and harm to the community – so that will be my ruling that this is upheld and will not be considered.”

Blackburn spoke next on a point of order, but was almost immediately cut off by Bell. Blackburn challenged Bell’s decision.

“On a point of order, I would respectfully submit that it’s inappropriate to suggest that a trustee has put forward a motion that is going to cause harm,” Blackburn replied. “I’m actually trying to stop harm,” she said before being cut off by Bell a second time.

Bell’s decision to call Blackburn’s motion out of order and went to a vote. The trustees voted 8-4 in favour of Bell. The only trustees who supported Blackburn were West Carleton-March/Stittsville-Rideau Jock Trustee Lynn Scott, Osgoode/Riverside South-Findlay Creek Trustee Jennifer Jennekens, and Orleans Trustee Donna Dickson.

Blackburn was clear leading up to the meeting that her motion had nothing to do with revisiting the SRO program. It was about opening communications with the Ottawa Police Service to help build a relationship with the



The Ottawa Police Service was in full force at Pierre-Savard High School last Monday. The local French Catholic board school hosted the OPS basketball team, which is part of the OPS community outreach program.

(TWITTER PHOTOS/SGT. MARIA KEEN)

schools, as the police are frequently called to the schools in cases of emergencies, including violence and potential threats.

She believed that the motion was not out of order, as it was carefully reviewed by staff and the Director of Education before it was presented.

“I was very disappointed the Board chose not to discuss a very important topic,

one that effects the safety of our staff and students,” Blackburn said. “At the end of the day, police will be in our schools and I thank the Ottawa Police Service for working with us.”

There were four speakers registered to speak at the meeting, all of whom asked that the matter of police in schools not be re-opened. Among the speakers was Mae Mason from the Asilu Collective, a group that worked with Evans and Bell to lobby for the elimination of the Ottawa Police Student Resource Officer program in 2021.

The day before the meeting, uniformed Ottawa Police Service officers were welcomed with open arms at Pierre-Savard High School in Barrhaven. That school is in the city’s French Catholic School Board. The police basketball team played a game against students from Pierre-Savard, drawing a large crowd in the gym. The reaction from the staff and students was overwhelmingly positive on social media. Former Barrhaven Community Police officer Sgt. Maria Keen posted photos on Twitter. She also tweeted about a police visit to a Grade 10 class.

“Today WE were INVITED to speak to a Grade 10

class about policing and racism,” wrote Keen, the first Filipino police officer in Ottawa. “Tough questions. We were honest and transparent. Clearly they didn’t have an issue of us coming to the school. These boys came up to US and engaged in a convo. In the end, they wanted a pic with us!”

The decision came just days after a report released from a survey done by the OCDSB.

The 2023 Educator School Climate Survey by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board concluded that 77 per cent of teachers received reports of bullying at schools during a four-week window in April. It also showed that nearly one third of students (32 per cent) reported sexual harassment, and 35 per cent of students reported discrimination.

The board’s unwillingness to even discuss the matter of opening a dialogue with the police did not sit well with everyone. One parent told the Barrhaven Independent that was he saw at the meeting was an ideological way of thinking.

“They were not even open to engage with people who do not have the same viewpoints as they do,” said Wesner Estime, a parent with children at John McCrae Secondary

School and Barrhaven Public School.

“We are bound to our beliefs and values, but we must be open to what others have to say,” he said. “That meeting did not follow those basic principles. We did not get to hear what the other trustees had to say.”

Estime said that the review released by the board was a cause of concern in the community.

“There is a problem,” he said. “Two years ago there was a vote to stop the SRO program, and that is fine. But after two years, there is clearly concern. But the board is not open to see what can be done. It’s unfortunate the board did not try to be responsible. The board is telling us there is a problem, but then they have to come up with a solution.

“No decision will make everyone happy, but the board has to find a solution. The only way that can happen is if we have to meet each other halfway. The board is not willing to do that.”

Blackburn will continue to push for repairing the board’s fractured relationship with the police.

“I am confident our staff will address the issues that have resulted in the elimination of the School Resource Officer Program,” she said.



Students engaged in conversations with the Ottawa Police after a visit to a Grade 10 class about policing and racism.