Safer Schools Without Policing Indigenous and Black Lives in Winnipeg

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Executive Summary

SCHOOL SAFETY IS important for all students and families. Feeling safe in schools can provide an optimal learning space where students feel a sense of belonging and are able to thrive, academically and socially. Yet, for many Indigenous and Black students, this is not the case; schools are spaces where racism permeates their relations, making them targets for dehumanization, policing, and punishment. In fact, one of the main reasons schools are unsafe for Indigenous and Black students is because of racism.

Researcher Fadi Ennab partnered with Police-Free Schools Winnipeg, a grassroots advocacy group of parents, students, and teachers organizing for equitable schools without police involvement, and wrote the report *Safer Schools Without Policing Indigenous and Black Lives in Winnipeg*. The goal of the research project was to examine the experiences of Indigenous and Black families related to safety and policing in Winnipeg schools. The report is based on interviews with 24 youth, 13 parents or legal guardians, and two key informants. Most participants were Indigenous and/or Black and went to schools in the North End or Downtown areas of Winnipeg.

Racism (individual and systemic) was a common experience for many participants with their peers and school staff, and most participants felt there was little to no accountability or consequences for the racism they experienced. Several participants gave stories of racially targeted assaults by peers. Instead of receiving help from school staff, students and parents felt they were complicit in the racism happening in schools. Lack of action by school staff creates an unsafe environment where racialized students

can be repeatedly subjected to racism with little to no accountability. Many participants also described experiences of racism perpetrated by staff. These experiences included racial stereotypes, racist attitudes, and racism in curriculum choices.

The involvement of police in schools generated feelings of intimidation and fear for Indigenous and Black families. These feelings were associated with an awareness of systemic racism and/or experiences of harm with policing in schools and communities. For many racialized families, individual school police officers cannot be detached from the broader system of policing, which many of them experience negatively. Many participants considered any police involvement in schools as unsafe and harmful. In discussing their feelings toward school police officers, participants used words such as "distressed," "intimidated," "scared," and "paranoid."

Several participants shared stories of experiencing or witnessing racial targeting by school police officers. Combined with their experiences of having staff unjustly surveil and punish Black and Indigenous youth, the presence of school police officers compounded discrimination. When involving a school police officer, consequences were heightened: youth were criminalized, including arrest, criminal charges, and/or detention. One student described how the involvement of a school police officer turned a common misdemeanour into a situation that was humiliating, imposing excessive consequences that impacted their school experience.

Several participants noted that racism in schools can be very damaging on students' sense of belonging and self-esteem. This can disrupt students' academic progress and push them out of schools, either temporarily or permanently. The presence of school police officers also made some students feel scared, causing them to miss school days to avoid an encounter or being questioned by them, negatively impacting their school attendance and grades. Experiences like this show that racism by school staff can be damaging and disruptive for the lives of students and their parents, which compounds the academic and psychosocial challenges they are already facing.

Recommendations

Many participants in this research study felt that having anti-racist and diverse staff is important in schools to address racism. Having diverse and trained staff was seen as important to educate students on anti-racism and to advocate for families experiencing racism in schools without judging

or stereotyping them. Some participants also wanted to emphasize that addressing racism in the education system will require systemic change and various other equity initiatives beyond staffing and training in schools.

Given the disproportionate targeting of racialized youth by police and the negative impact of policing on schools and families, most participants felt that police involvement in schools must end. Most participants felt that a safe and effective educational setting must promote the potential of all students to do and feel well in schools without the use of police. Taking this recommendation seriously implies that schools must end the use of police and deprioritize relations with them. If police are not devolved from schools, accountability and equity measures must be put in place, such as collecting equity-based data on police-involved events with students, and explicit anti-racist guidelines and policies for staff to limit or avoid police involvement.

Many participants wanted educational and social alternatives that are safe and that promote a positive learning environment for all students. This means that ending the school police officers programs must also deprioritize relations with police and find less harmful alternatives to policing. Instead of pushing police as a 'resource' on racialized families in schools, participants recommended supporting families by investing in community Elders or workers like counselors, teachers, educational assistants, or social workers.

For many Indigenous and Black families in Winnipeg, schools are unsafe spaces that promote systemic racism and carceral punishment. Experiences shared in this study show that police involvement in schools unjustly targets racialized youth, criminalizes their behaviours, and breaches their rights for privacy and safety, seriously disrupting their academic and social lives. Future research exploring policing and racism in the education system should also explore lived experiences and how students are shaped by discrimination, power relations, and punitive discipline. This requires examining how school boards and staff continue to rely on police and perpetuate carceral tactics against students, while simultaneously committing to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Addressing racism will require promoting solidarity in racialized communities to help mobilize for police-free and racism-free schools and futures.

Introduction

IN MANY INDIGENOUS and Black lives, schools are spaces where racism permeates their relations, making them targets for dehumanization, policing, and punishment. This report shows how Indigenous and Black families often experience harassment and discrimination from students, school staff, and police with little to no accountability. It also shows how school police officers unjustly target racialized students by criminalizing and funnelling them out of schools and into the criminal justice system. These experiences can have damaging and disruptive impact on the lives of Indigenous and Black students; reproducing anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism and a carceral culture in schools. By exploring the experiences and desires of Indigenous and Black families in the North End and Downtown areas of the city of Winnipeg, this report offers anti-racist recommendations that promote safer and more just schools. These practices include defunding policing, reinvesting in social safety networks and implementing measures to enhance accountability and equity in schools. These changes are essential to allowing racialized families to have a sense of belonging and empowerment in schools, including the attainment of better academic and social outcomes.

School safety is important for all students and families. Feeling safe at school can provide an optimal place of learning where students feel a sense of belonging and are able to thrive academically and socially. Yet, for many Indigenous and Black students, this is not the case; schools are spaces where racism permeates their relations, making them targets for dehumanization,

policing, and punishment. One of the main reasons that schools are unsafe for Indigenous and Black students is because of racism.

Anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism are structured into the education system. Public schools continue as sites of racialized violence and carceral discipline for many Indigenous and Black students (Maynard, 2017). Black and Indigenous students are regularly constrained and deprived of their cultures, freedom, and right to resist (Wun, 2018; see also Diallo, 2021). Not surprisingly, racism is often cited as a major barrier in choosing schools for racialized families, especially those who are Indigenous and living with the intergenerational trauma of residential schooling and other colonial experiences (Yoon & Daniels, 2019). In many Manitoba high schools, racism is a common experience for Indigenous students, whose "lives are rarely given spatial expression... within an educational system that fails to affirm their intellectual and cultural identities or expect their academic success" (Van Ingen & Halas, 2006, pp. 379, 383; see also Kuly, 2021). Black students also experience "perceived, or real, attitudes of prejudice, marginalization, and racism from fellow-students, teachers, and administrators" (Kanu, 2008, p. 935). These findings show that racism continues to make schools unwelcoming and even dangerous environments for racialized families.

A significant factor impacting the safety of Indigenous and Black youth in schools is the involvement of police. Throughout Canada, police involvement in schools is often promoted by police, with the open acceptance of school administrations, and without community involvement (Bindi, 2022; Cole, 2020). Yet, an overwhelming amount of research in Canada (Card et al., 2021; Zahreddine, 2019; Madan, 2019; Maynard, 2017) and the United States (Gottfredson et al., 2020; Javdani, 2019; Ryan et al., 2018; Monahan & Torres, 2010) demonstrates that school police officers disproportionately target structurally disadvantaged students, including Indigenous and Black students. After conducting a comprehensive review of research on police in schools in both Canada and the U.S., the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) in Ontario (2021, p. 17) concluded that, "The research points out the fatal flaw in the [school police officers] program - it puts police in the lives of at-risk youth and equips them with one strategy to address behaviour: the criminal justice system." Thus, the involvement of police in schools results in targeting, feelings and experiences of coercion and unsafety, and criminalization.

Due to concerns with police involvement in schools, various school boards across Canada have ended or have suspended their school police officer programs (Bindi, 2022). These reviews demonstrate that for racialized

and marginalized students, having police in schools makes them feel intimidated and criminalized. As a review for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board argued:

> Participants related experiences that were unequivocally rooted in systemic racism, specifically anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism. These experiences involved psychological harm, physical and verbal violence, and surveillance... It is clear from the information that came forward during the review process, that the current practice of involving police in schools is creating barriers for some Indigenous, Black and marginalized students that prevent them from fully enjoying their right to education without discrimination. (OHREA, 2021, pp. 10, 80)

Following this trend, the Winnipeg School Division (WSD) — the largest school division in Manitoba — and the Louis Riel School Division (LRSD) have ended their school police officers programs or School Resource Officer (SRO) program. However, these school divisions have muted discussions on the topic: the WSD cited only budget cuts as cause for ending their school police officer program. Similarly, I was hired by the LRSD as an independent researcher to conduct an equity review of their school police officers program but the division chose not to release it to the public. The silencing of discussions on policing has allowed these school divisions to continue prioritizing relations with police (Bindi, 2022).

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of Indigenous and Black families in the North End and Downtown areas of Winnipeg regarding safety and policing in schools. By centering the experiences of Indigenous and Black families, this study takes an approach that is largely missing in Manitoba. This study can inform discussions on school safety from an equity approach and offers recommendations that promote anti-racist practices to make schools safer and more just for all.

Methods

Research Approach

An equity-based approach was used for this research project. This approach centres the experiences of racialized communities to push for social justice and freedom against discrimination and oppression (Shaheen-Hussain, 2020). This perspective acknowledges the damaging effects related to systems like policing. It recognizes that social control of marginalized populations, often enforced through violence, is the purpose of such systems (Bailey et al., 2021). Several school boards across Canada have used an equity-based approach to evaluate police involvement in schools (HWDSB, 2021; OHREA, 2021; TDSB, 2017; UGDSB, 2021). In Winnipeg, the author has applied this approach in reviewing the school police officer program in the Louis Riel School Division. However, the Winnipeg School Division did not rely on an equity approach in reviewing police involvement in schools; instead, the school division relied on a biased survey in favour of police (Bindi, 2022). It is important to note that while the notion of equity can include various intersecting identities and power dynamics, the focus of this project is on Indigenous and Black families because they are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system (Maynard, 2017).

Research Procedures

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the University of Winnipeg's Research Ethics Board. This project was done in partnership with Police-

Free Schools Winnipeg, a grassroots advocacy group of parents, students, and teachers organizing for equitable schools without police involvement. While some may consider this partnership to cause bias, critical scholars and activists have argued that since the police is not neutral in its role, it is important and ethical for research and writing to advocate against the harms of policing and systemic racism in the community (Cole, 2020; Mink, 2019). This view is aligned with the equity-based approach guiding this report.

A research proposal was developed to examine the experiences of Indigenous and Black families related to safety and policing in Winnipeg schools. Three research questions guided the study:

1. What are the feelings and experiences of Indigenous and Black families related to safety in schools?

2. What are the feelings and experiences of Indigenous and Black families related to policing in schools?

3. How can we make schools safer for Indigenous and Black families?

The method of data collection was in-depth, qualitative, one-on-one interviews with parents, youth, and key informants. Parents and youth were selected using a criterion sampling strategy central to the framework of the research project: youth had to identify as either Indigenous and/or Black and currently or recently attend a school in the North End or Downtown areas of Winnipeg, Manitoba; parents had to have a child who identified as either Indigenous and/or Black and who currently or recently attended a school in the North End or Downtown areas of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Key informants were identified as individuals associated with a community organization in the North End or Downtown areas with an understanding of the history of police involvement in Winnipeg schools.

To recruit interviewees, research posters were shared with participants of two community organizations located in Winnipeg's North End and Downtown. These organizations are the Community Education Development Association's (CEDA) Pathways to Education program and the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM). Any participant who was Black and/or Indigenous and was willing to talk about safety in schools was invited to participate. Most youth were interviewed in-person, whereas parents and key informants were interviewed through phone or online via Zoom. Written or verbal consent was obtained from participants prior to the interview. Interviews were 20 to 60 minutes in length, and each participant was given a $25 gift card as an honorarium for their participation

(key informants were not given honorariums). All interviews were conducted in English. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. To analyze the findings, an inductive approach was used in which study findings emerged from the information and through the researcher's interactions with the information. This approach avoids pre-set theoretical assumptions about the data.

Participants

Participants included twenty-four youth: ten Indigenous, nine Black, four multiracial (Indigenous and Black or South Asian) and one person of colour. Seventeen of the youth were female and seven were male, and their ages ranged from 16 to 22 years old. Interviews were also conducted with thirteen parents or legal guardians: twelve Indigenous and one white (no Black parents were interviewed due to challenges in recruitment), of which eleven were female and two were male. In addition, two key informants were interviewed.

Findings and Discussion

Anti-Indigenous and Anti-Black Racism in Schools

A major theme that emerged through talking to Indigenous and Black families about safety in schools was racism. Racism was a common experience for many families, and most participants felt there was little to no accountability or consequences for the racism happening in schools.

Before discussing these experiences, it is important to understand that there are different forms of racism to reduce misunderstanding or avoid recreating oppression. This report distinguishes between two main forms of racism: individual and systemic. Individual racism consists of "ideas, beliefs or practices that establish, maintain or perpetuate the superiority or dominance of one racial group over another" (Government of Ontario, 2022). Systemic racism occurs "when institutions or systems create or maintain racial inequity often as a result of hidden institutional biases in policies, practices, and procedures that privilege some groups and disadvantage others" (Government of Ontario, 2022). The interplay between individual and systemic racism is what recreates systems and relations of colonization and oppression (Shaheen-Hussain, 2020).

Racism has long been a part of the education system. Several parents, some who were also grandparents, noted that they anticipate racism for their children and grandchildren because they themselves experienced racism in school as youth. For Indigenous parents, racism was part of the schooling experience because of the colonial legacy of the residential schools that the

education system continues to promote today (Yoon & Daniels, 2019), even though schools today mark "Orange Shirt Day" and have some discussion among educators of the harms of the residential school system. As such, racism in schools was described as a normalized daily experience for their children and grandchildren. This led to feelings of anxiety and made some participants hypervigilant; their anticipation of being the target of racism was expressed through phrases such as "always on their toes" and "depends on the day." Thus, due to repeated experiences of racism, participants felt they needed to be vigilant all the time.

In what follows, participants share experiences of racial discrimination by their peers and school staff. A couple of participants gave stories of racially targeted assaults by peers. In both cases, the assaults were on female students. Gendered and racialized violence impact girls by dehumanizing their bodies and subjecting them to verbal and physical assault. One parent of an Indigenous girl shared that on the first day of school, her daughter was violated when her hair was cut as she was moving through a crowded stairwell: "When she was switching classrooms and going downstairs, she heard a noise [of scissors], and turned around [and her hair was cut]" (Indigenous parent).

The targeting of Indigenous girls and women for their appearance is a common colonial experience that is rooted in the history of their interactions with the education system and policing (Palmater et al., 2019; see also Ennab, 2010). Occurrences of similar assaults on Indigenous and Black children have been reported through mainstream media across Canada and the United States in recent years (Croteau, 2018; Salcedo, 2021).

Similarly, Muslim girls can be the target of racism and violence because of their dress. One student shared how she altered her choices because of multiple racial assaults:

> I used to wear a Hijab before [in school], and my Hijab has been ripped off a couple of times by students.... I feel the only reason I took the Hijab off was my mom. I couldn't handle my mom being sad all the time. I was getting sick of it. Obviously, I love the Hijab. I always wear it at home when I am praying.... But my mom is sad when I am sad for getting bullied. (Racialized student)

It is important to note that while concerns around racism were often related to white students, anti-Indigenous racism was also perpetrated by racialized and/or newcomer students. One Black student described how racialized students could both receive and carry out racism:

> [Racism] is not only [directed at] Black people, but also [at] Indigenous people. Everyone would treat [Indigenous students] different than the rest. For example, when I was in junior high school, we had some Indigenous kids, and nobody wanted to sit near them.... They will be like, "We do not want to be close to them. Oh, they smell. Oh, they do this and this." And that breaks my heart.... [The Indigenous students] will go to office, and they will be crying. (Black Student)

An Indigenous parent shared her observation of an increase of newcomer families in the North End and the racism expressed towards Indigenous youth: "I have foster kids, and people, African I guess, noticing they are Aboriginal and that they are in care, I find them bullying the Aboriginal kids now because the number of immigrants coming here are more" (Indigenous parent).

Even though many Indigenous and newcomer children go to schools together and share similar experiences with racism and of living within proximity to each other in the inner city, research shows that racial tensions and segregation between them is a common experience in Manitoba (Gyepi-Garbrah, Walker, & Garcea 2014).

A prominent theme that emerged from participant feedback was that school staff were perceived to be complicit in the racism happening in schools. Several participants noted how school staff observed overt expressions of racism and harassment, but chose to stand by and watch without intervening. As one student said, "They were kind of enabling that behaviour to happen without any repercussions toward people who are racist." One parent described how they themselves experienced racism by students when they were at the school to advocate on behalf of their own child who was experiencing racial harassment from their peers:

> I went to school and there were a bunch of kids in the hallway who made "woo-woo" sounds when they saw me [stereotypical hand-over-mouth sound used in children's cartoons to imitate an Indigenous war chant]. There were other teachers around and nobody stopped the students. [The school administrator] just made a lot of excuses for it. (Indigenous parent)

The lack of action by school staff creates an unsafe environment where racialized students can be repeatedly subjected to racism with little to no accountability.

Given the complicity of school staff in incidents of racism, it is no surprise that many participants also described experiences of racism perpetrated by

school staff. These experiences included racial stereotypes, racist attitudes, and racism in curriculum choices. It was very clear that students felt a lack of safety and belonging in schools because of these experiences.

Several students noted that their teachers used the N-word in their teachings; it seemed as though the teachers felt they had a free pass to say the word in an educational context. This was very upsetting to the students. These experiences are not isolated incidents: over the span of a few months between October 2021 and February 2022, three teachers from different Manitoba schools used the N-word in their classrooms (Brohman, 2022). Due to underreporting, it is likely that these incidents are even more prevalent.

Some students felt "othered" by teachers who displayed racist stereotypes, such as assuming all Muslim women wear headscarves and that they belong to "backward" countries where people get bombed. These attitudes can certainly impact a student's sense of belonging in school, including the impact on their academic outcomes. As one student said: "The teacher is racist. Right now, in my school there is a teacher who is a Trump supporter, and so my classmates are not feeling that great or safe about it. They are probably thinking that teacher will fail them" (Black student).

Moreover, some students described the impact of racism on curriculum choices. As one student shared:

> I asked a teacher, why don't they teach Black history month?.... I was asking because I never got to learn any Black history at my school since I had been there. I was curious.... And the teacher was like, "Because Black people do not play a big role in Canadian history." (Black student)

This teacher's view is not new or isolated. Education in settler colonies like Canada was a tool for the advancement of white supremacy (Maynard, 2017). The dehumanization of racialized students in educational settings recreates the white supremacy that led to state policies of forced assimilation, enslavement, and genocide of racialized peoples, but that is often left out of history lessons. Currently, curriculum on Black history and anti-racism is available but the teaching material is not mandatory.

Another student added that their teacher chose to show only negative images of Black people in Africa instead of highlighting positive achievements or situating their lives in the context of colonialism or slavery. This "damaged-centred" approach is a common way of referring to Indigenous and Black communities (Tuck, 2009). As Maynard (2017) explains:

A generalized erasure of the Black experience in Canada from the public realm, including primary, secondary and post-secondary education, combined with a Canadian proclivity for ignoring racial disparities, continues to affect mainstream perceptions of Black realities throughout the nation (p. 3)

Some incidents described by participants showed that the racial biases of school staff led to treating racialized students as suspects or blameworthy:

When I go to the library, most of the people I hang out with are Black.... The librarian would come and yell at us, telling us that we are "being loud," can we get out or "I would have to page you to the office. I have banned you from the library for this entire month." Plus, there are other [white] students inside the library that are talking. In those cases, she comes and attacks us only. That makes it feel that there is an issue with race. (Black student)

First Nations kids are looked at more as if they are dangerous kids. My daughter, not only because of her race, but also her size, she was always targeted and looked at as if she will start a fight and be judged based on her look[s], for no reason at all. She is one of the gentlest people you will meet, but they were intimidated based on how she looked. If there was a fight ... she would be blamed. Yet, it was self-defence.... My grandson [also] feels targeted sometimes by the teachers.... Last year was a horrible year. Someone brought a weapon and they accused him, from the entire class, even though he didn't do it. (Indigenous parent)

In some incidents, racialized students were targeted by school staff for retaliating against racism from other students. As one student shared:

For me in my school, there definitely is a lot of staff that are racist.... The students used to call me Osama [Bin Laden].... [They] didn't get in trouble ... but I got in trouble for like talking back to the students. I felt that was pretty racist of the teachers. (Multiracial student)

The punishment of racialized students for speaking out about racism carried from teachers through to higher levels of administration. As one parent shared:

[My son was] subjected to these racial stereotypes and blatant racism from his group member and the teacher wanted *him* to apologize! ... And then you have the vice-principal and the principal with the teacher having a meeting about it at the table. You have white, whiter, and whitest, you know, looking at each other and saying, "This is okay" and agreeing with themselves. (Indigenous parent)

Racialized girls are often deemed defiant and then punished, especially when they resist racism or act out in defiance of it. For example, research shows that Black girls often receive consequences such as referrals, arrests, and suspensions for "talking back" or "not listening to the teacher" when they are trying to resist and survive oppression (Morris, 2016; Wun, 2018).

Other parents also described how they experienced racism from school administrators when advocating for their children. One Indigenous parent shared that a school administrator threatened to call Child and Family Services (CFS) on their children. The parent felt that this was done by the school administrator to avoid listening to a complaint they were making against school staff. Another Indigenous parent shared that her daughter was told she was stupid by a teacher from whom she was seeking help. They met with the principal of the school, but never heard back about any action taken towards the teacher.

Experiences of racism by school staff and peers are not isolated incidents, but a common occurrence in Canada (Diallo, 2021; Maynard, 2017) and the U.S. (Morris, 2016). In Winnipeg, it has been shown that students often experience racism by school staff in the form of lowered expectations and by other students in the form of racial stereotypes and slurs (Silver, 2013; see also Kuly, 2021). Recently in Toronto, a Black mother sued a school board for failing to protect her 13-year-old daughter from rape threats and racial slurs directed at her from peers. These threats continued even after the student changed schools (Wong, 2021). Racism remains a systemic problem throughout education systems.

It is noteworthy that a few participants did not have the same level of concern about safety or racism in schools. The reasons for this had to do with social demographics and a sense of cultural inclusion. For example, several students and parents noted that they were not concerned about safety in specific schools in the North End because most of the students are Indigenous and there is a sense of community, "where everybody know each other." This contrasted with other "whiter schools" that have a few, if any, Indigenous families. In other cases, feeling safe in schools was related to being perceived as white. As one Indigenous parent explained, "I am sure part of our feelings of safety is completely tied up with our perceptions of whiteness based on our appearance." The ability of some Indigenous participants to pass for white can shield them from racism.

Perceptions of School Police Officers: Intimidation and Control

In addition to racism, another concern shared by most participants in this research study was related to the involvement of police in schools, which generated feelings of intimidation and fear for Indigenous and Black families. These feelings were associated with an awareness of systemic racism and/or experiences of harm with policing in schools and communities. Hence, for many racialized families the individual school police officer, regardless of their intentions or actions, cannot be detached from the negative impact of policing on society. For these reasons, many participants considered any police involvement in schools as unsafe and harmful.

These feelings are understandable and stem from the systemic racism inherent to policing, of which there has been ample evidence (Palmater et al., 2019). Indigenous parents were particularly aware of this issue, as demonstrated by these quotes:

> I grew up not to trust cops ever and that is how my kids are going to be raised.... All cops are bast***s and you can't trust them. I never have and never will because [policing] is racism. This is what [police officers] are taught and trained to do.... A lot of people I know, they all had bad experiences [with police]. (Indigenous parent)

> Stop beating the s**t out of our dads and brothers. How about we start there? Stop coming to be the enforcers when CFS [Child and Family Services] come to take our kids away. Maybe stop re-victimizing women who are victims of domestic violence.... Let us be honest, the police are not in schools for the white kids. (Indigenous parent)

As these quotes exemplify, police involvement in schools is harmful because it recreates the same problems families face with police in the community. Several other participants had similar concerns about school police officers because they had witnessed family members or peers being harmed by police. As one student shared:

> It would be really scary and intimidating to have a cop in your school because maybe their dad was just arrested by the cops last night ... and it scared them. A lot of families do not have good experiences with the cops. My family, my older brother was beaten half to death by the cops.... When cops come to my door, it is scary because I am Indigenous. (Indigenous parent)

> A bunch of girls got beaten up by a cop outside of school because a cab driver sexually assaulted one of them. They started smashing the windows [of the cab] because of that. They told the cops, who didn't believe them and started beating them up! (Indigenous student)

Many participants expressed their concerns about involvement of police officers in schools because police often target youth in Winnipeg's North End and Downtown neighbourhoods. One student indicated their awareness of over-policing in their neighbourhood and how it relates to school police officers:

> There are some things that made me uncomfortable. Like, why is there police in school all the time when I know people from suburban areas never had police officers in schools? When I talk to white friends from those areas, they never experience what I would see all the time. (Indigenous student)

Several parents discussed how police repeatedly targeted racialized youth for doing everyday activities, such as riding a bicycle. The reason often given by police is that the youth fit the description of a suspected criminal. As one parent explained:

> My son has four close friends.... They talked about how many times they got stopped by the police riding their bikes. My son said, "So many times I can't count anymore." His friends also said that every time they ride their bikes, police stopped them and ask them: "Is this your bike?" So, it got to the point where my son quit riding his bike to school.... If he is walking home, the police would slowly drive by him. (Indigenous parent)

Police targeting of Indigenous youth on bicycles in Winnipeg's inner city is a common occurrence that it is difficult for youth to avoid. As Kuly's (2021, p. 137) research on Indigenous youth in Winnipeg found, "If you are on a bike in the inner city, you face a tough choice. If you bike on the street, you risk being hit, injured, or killed. If you bike on the sidewalk, you risk being detained, accused, searched, and fined. Especially if you are Indigenous ... [unlike] white people [who] were biking freely all over the same sidewalks."

Given previous experiences of violence with police, some participants were more concerned about police involvement than crime or gangs in the community. As a multiracial family explained, "[The North End] is a rough area, but ... nobody bothers or messes around with kids. Even all the gang members and everything, they keep an eye out too." However, "if a cop came ... it can escalate so quickly. I just think, to live with that fear all the time is

exhausting. If we had no cops, we wouldn't be scared." Thus, having school police officers has the effect of making some Black and Indigenous students feel unsafe and targeted because they associate policing with violence.

In discussing their feelings toward school police officers, participants used words such as "distressed," "intimidated," "scared," and "paranoid." The mere presence of police in schools was perceived to be a cause of harm and injustice. As some participants explained:

> When I see police [in school], it is like a switch that goes off in my head. I have to act right, ... my hands have to be out of my pockets, and I have to look like I am not carrying anything on me because there have been cases where people have been misunderstood and gotten shot at ... [and] got killed. (Black student)

> You never know when the police may turn on you. We don't know what is going on or what they are thinking when they are walking around in the [school] hallways or when they see you. (Black student)

Black and Indigenous participants felt that police presence would be escalating and triggering for students, especially for those who had bad experiences with them. Several Black participants also mentioned how the increasing media attention on Black Lives Matter movements made them worry and fearful about being racially profiled or harmed by police inside and outside schools.

Consistent with research evidence, many Indigenous and Black families have feelings of distrust and animosity towards police. Experiences of violence and discrimination with police have caused many Indigenous and racialized communities to "lose trust and confidence in the Canadian justice system... and police services in general" (Canada, 2019, p. 717). Manitoba has the lowest rates of trust in police among its residents in comparison to other provinces in Canada (Ibrahim, 2020). Therefore, it is not surprising that participants in this study were not comfortable with the presence of police in their community or in their schools .

The feelings and experiences of the participants in this study are common and well-documented by research on school police officer programs. As recently demonstrated in Ontario schools, the "underlying concerns of safety, stigma, surveillance, over-policing and criminalization" are often connected to "concerns about systemic racism, discrimination and bias" (OHREA, 2021, p. 55; see also Walcott, 2021). The racism of policing is also reflected in the unfortunate context in which those who are intimidated by police are those

who have experienced the most damaging effects from police involvement (Card et al., 2021). As a result of these experiences, many Indigenous and Black families find it difficult, if not impossible, to separate violence from policing.

Targeting and Criminalizing Indigenous and Black Students

While many participants were concerned about school safety because police involvement in schools was associated with a perception or fear of violence, several other participants shared stories of experiencing or witnessing racial targeting by school police officers. Combined with school staff racism towards Black and Indigenous youth, the presence of school police officers compounded the discriminatory treatment. When involving a school police officer, the targeting typically resulted in youth being criminalized, which involved arrest, criminal charges, and/or detention.

One student described how the involvement of a school police officer turned a common misdemeanour into a situation that was humiliating with excessive consequences:

> A police officer from the school escorted me out of classroom, which felt shitty because the whole class saw me. I went to the office. The police officer and the principal were there. They told me that they needed to search me for drugs. I took off my sweater. I wasn't wearing a t-shirt that day and it felt really uncomfortable. It felt like a punitive approach … [and] I got suspended…. They kind of kept saying, "We can search you," uttering verbal threats. I was just smoking weed in high school and they were trying to pressure me to say that I was selling higher grade narcotics…. After that it was kind of tough. [The school police officer] would walk with me to class and I would have to come to principal's office every morning for almost a year. (Multiracial student)

In this case, the actions of the school police officer and school administrator transgressed the student's autonomy and safety. This happened in two ways: being searched, and then also being escorted for a year afterward.

Other participants shared stories of witnessing students being arrested at school. One participant's comment suggests that arrests at schools in Winnipeg's North End and downtown neighbourhoods are not rare occurrences:

> There were quite a few incidents where my daughter witnessed other children detained or intimidated…. Her friends were affected. She lost a friend because they had to transfer out or dropped out [after being detained]…. That was

the last time she saw them, when they were being put in the police car. (Indigenous parent)

One student shared that after a friend was roughed up by police, the school staff turned their attention to the racialized friends of the arrested student, treating them as though they were guilty of something:

> The other day the police beat up my friend.... This happened outside of school, but [the school staff] kind of punished us in school about it. The school heard about it, and they started watching out for us as if we are dangerous and asking us questions a lot about what happened. (Multiracial student)

These experiences show that police involvement in schools can result in the use of harsh discipline and make the school space more like a prison for some students. Research shows that the presence of police in schools contributed to an ethic of punishment or a carceral environment where students are monitored and controlled like criminals (Villegas & Brady, 2019; Wun, 2018). Furthermore, school police officers disproportionately target students who are racialized (Maynard, 2017). This coincides with and reflects the existing data on incarceration rates by race. Police are frequently called into schools and will often arrest Black youth for relatively minor misbehaviours (Maynard, 2017).

Another danger of having police in schools is that it can potentially result in unfair searches and seizures and "unlawful distribution of personal and confidential information" (Zahreddine, 2019, p. 8). School police officers gather information on students that becomes part of police records, as noted in a review for the Winnipeg Police Service (Griffiths & Pollard, 2013). This can allow for collaboration with other branches of law enforcement, such as Child and Family Services and the Canadian Border Services Agency, which can cause families, especially those who are racialized or without legal immigration status, to be criminalized and experience significant harm (Maynard, 2017). In these terms, school police officers are not acting as community builders, but rather as surveillance officers.

The involvement of police in schools can also have damaging long term consequences. Police targeting of racialized youth can have "criminogenic" and psychological effects, which means interactions with police "may predict engagement in delinquent behavior... because police intervention triggers exclusionary processes that adversely affects engagement in prosocial opportunities" (Del Toro et al., 2019, pp. 8261–8262). Police involvement in schools causes students to be arrested, rather than being supported informally

by school staff who would talk or give them advice and emotional supports. Thus, a "school-to-prison pipeline" is created (Zahreddine, 2019). As such, police involvement in schools can result in significant harm to racialized students and reinforce existing inequities.

Stories from participants demonstrated that racism can be perpetrated by both school staff and school police officers; however, the combination of school staff and school police officers amplified the racism. It is apparent that the involvement of school police officers turned situations of common misconduct into a criminal matter, causing harm to racialized students. Moreover, participants felt that at times, school staff enacted their racial biases by utilizing police to scare and punish racialized students. In this sense, school police officers were weaponized by school staff against racialized students. As one parent explained:

> I know there were a few times where [the school] admin would call in the SRO [School Resource Officer] and kind of try to get my son to calm down if he did have a behavioural issue or stuff. But for him, it escalated him. I feel [the school administrator] used the SRO almost as a fear tactic against him.... The SRO was there, and the school admin leaned on them to take my son to a room and talk to him. (Indigenous parent)

It is important to note that from the participants' perspectives, the issues experienced by their children could be dealt with by school staff and support workers. Instead, the involvement of police led to children being treated as criminals deserving punishment instead of support. One student described the intimidation caused by the schools' use of school police officers:

> A lot of students do not show up to school and police would go up to their homes to pick them up. It happened when I was in grade 9. A kid, my classmate, won't show up and police would go to their home to pick them up and bring them to school.... The police were used to keep them a little bit scared and not to skip. (Black student)

In schools across Canada, the threat of calling police is regularly used to intimidate and exercise privilege over racialized students, including in managing the behaviour of children in elementary schools (James et al., 2017). Several school boards have shown that police are being used to intimidate children in the progressive discipline process, and that school administrators are "using their discretion to disproportionately involve police in responding to the behaviour of Indigenous, Black and marginalized children" (OHREA, 2021, p. 28). In Winnipeg, Police-Free Schools Winnipeg (n.d.) highlights the

criminalization of students by school police officers. Alongside many stories of police harm from students, their website also shares numerous stories by teachers who were encouraged by administrators to bring in school police officers to deal with minor student behaviours. This evidence demonstrates that the experiences of the participants in this project are not unique.

The weaponization of police against Indigeneity and Blackness does not only happen in schools; it is an ongoing issue throughout settler colonial societies such as Canada (Maynard 2017). Recently in Ontario, numerous cases documented white persons, including a school board trustee, harassing racialized youth and adults and threatening to call the police on them for everyday activities such as walking or biking. Incidents like this led to a petition in 2021 that was signed by nearly 25,000 people demanding to end the "weaponization of 911 calls" against racialized communities because "filing a false police report against an innocent racialized person, not only violates their civil liberties, but it is humiliating, triggering, and in the recent case of George Floyd, it is life-threatening" (Brown, 2021). Unfortunately, the responses from participants in this study show that this problem is pervasive and that the weaponization of police against racialized people happening in schools in the North End and downtown areas is a widespread occurrence.

Pushing Indigenous and Black Students Out of Schools

Research shows that experiences of criminalization in schools have devastating effects on racialized families (James, 2019). These experiences can destroy students' sense of belonging and self-esteem and make them mistrustful of school staff (Oluo, 2018; Diallo, 2021). Instead of considering this as a problem in individual students "dropping out," it is important to view it as a concerted effort of "pushing out" created by school structures and policies (Maynard, 2017, p. 222; Morris, 2016; Oluo, 2018; and Wun, 2018). This "systemic abandonment" of racialized youth, as Maynard (2017, p. 228) explains, means that they will "continue to be pushed out of schools and streamed into poverty, low-waged work and youth correctional facilities." Being associated with criminality dehumanizes families, and the dehumanization allows the push out from schools to persist, with enduring consequences.

Similarly, participants in this study felt that racism does not just compromise safety for racialized families but can also push them out of the education system. Several participants noted that racism in schools can be very damaging on students' sense of belonging and self-esteem. This can

disrupt students' academic progress and push them out of schools, either temporarily or permanently. As one Indigenous parent explained, "A teacher would call me every day about a concern with [my son]. She was young and white. And he had her for a couple of years. It just felt she had a target for him.... He left that school, and he was very grateful when he was finished there."

Experiences like this show that racism by school staff can be damaging and disruptive for the lives of students and their parents. It can compound the academic and psychosocial challenges they are already facing. Consistent with participants' stories, research from Manitoba shows that racism in schools can have a deep impact on students and families, possibly leading to the student dropping out. As Kanu (2008, p. 935) argued in the case of African refugee students, "Students' confidence and self-concept are severely challenged and the stage is set for feelings of rejection, inadequacy, frustration, and dropping out." Similarly, Kuly (2021, p. 39) argued that anti-Indigenous racism in schools can prevent "the development of effective educational relationships" which can have significant bearing on student success.

In addition to racism from school staff having a negative impact on Black and Indigenous students' participation in school, participants also noted that having police in schools created barriers and compromised trust. As one parent shared:

> It already sets up a dynamic with young people that they are not to be trusted ... especially in school.... To have a [school] police officer that has that negative stereotype, it just creates more barriers for students. (Indigenous parent)

Several participants described how the targeting and criminalization that they or their child experienced from the school police officer led to the student changing schools:

> I ended up pulling [my son] out of there.... The [school police officer] was in the building and being used as a threat against him. I pulled him [out of school] because of how school staff dealt with him, not appropriately. (Indigenous parent)

> I switched schools.... The effects of how [school staff and the school police officer] treated me didn't show up until years later after high school, where I felt a very big lack of confidence and very little self-esteem. I felt like I was [always] doing something wrong. (Multiracial student)

The presence of school police officers also made some students feel scared and miss some school days to avoid an encounter or being questioned by them, which had an impact on their school attendance and grades. The feelings of rejection and abandonment from schools that were expressed by the participants were summed up well by one parent who said, referring to racialized youth, "They are in a system where nobody cares about them."

The experiences shared by parents and students were also supported by the key informants interviewed in this study, as one noted:

> I think every time you involve a police officer, you are putting that youth and their family at risk and more and more alienating them from being wanted in schools. If you feel you are going to go to school and you are going to get the police called on you, why would you show up to school? (Key informant)

Students in Winnipeg's downtown and North End neighbourhoods are forced to miss classes and leave schools because of the racism and criminalization they experience in schools.

Recently released data from the Winnipeg School Division (2022) showed that in 2018/19, students who identified as Indigenous comprised 27 percent of the student population but 55 percent of school suspensions. These data provide evidence of the targeting of Indigenous students for punitive discipline in the core neighbourhoods of Winnipeg.

The Safety Narrative

Contrary to the many interview participants who felt that school police officers are harmful for students, some participants felt that school police officers can protect students and build relationships with them. These participants believe that school police officers keep an eye out for kids, protecting them from crime, weapons, and situations that would require lockdowns. School police officers were seen as more convenient than calling 911 or the police non-emergency line, which is perceived to result in longer response times. As one parent explained:

> If anybody walks into the schools, and this has happened if there is beef between somebody in school and somebody outside, it happened where a person walked into school and bear mace everyone or attacked one kid with a machete. There are a lot of stories like that. It feels better when there is a school [police] officer in the school. (Indigenous parent)

For some participants, the safety fears extended beyond the school to the community. For example, some parents were concerned about their children being attacked by gangs or going missing. This made some parents over-protective with their children. As one parent explained, "I don't let them go out. If they want to go anywhere, I drive them." Given the concern about safety in the community, some participants felt that having police in schools has the potential to improve individual safety.

The safety narrative is often used by police and their supporters to obstruct the material reality of the violence of policing and allows them to normalize and push for more policing options (Madan, 2019). Interviews with key informants revealed that over the past few decades, the Winnipeg Police Service has used concerns about safety related to crime, sex work, and drugs, for example, to push for more police in schools. As one key informant explained, "At that time, people were trying to grapple with how you make police as something working with community and not blazing into the community…. The School Resource Officer program came out of this context. Looking back, it was kind of naive." For another key informant, the funding of SRO programs was "controversial" and "frustrating" because it took money away from community initiatives "without community consultations" and "without it [SRO program] being vetted by community or being aligned with community plans," except for "promoting whatever the police were doing in schools." This tactic of pushing police in schools is common across Canada (Bindi, 2022).

It is important to note, even in the cases where participants felt that school police officers had the potential to play a positive role in the school community, they often had conditions for their feelings. In particular, school police officers were considered beneficial only when the individual officer was perceived to be friendly and to have anti-racist training, allowing them to understand the structural disadvantages that racialized communities face, including colonization and intergenerational trauma. These were considered essential components to a school police officer's capability of building relationships and helping youth to stay out of trouble. Nevertheless, these participants also noted that a prior negative experience with police would impede the development of positive relationship with that individual or family. Thus, the participants who felt there were possible benefits to police involvement in schools also recognized the potential for harm.

Several participants were aware that the policing safety narrative is a long-standing myth (Ennab, 2010). As one parent said, "School police officers talk about keeping everyone safe, when a lot of the safety is compromised

by police officers in my neighbourhood.... It is not fair for my kids to try to convince them of something that is simply not true based on experience." Similarly, some participants felt that it was not possible for school police officers to promote safety in schools when they are armed with weapons and intimidating or threatening students.

Some participants felt that school police officers were ineffective at addressing racism or building relationships with students. Police in schools were seen as ineffective in addressing racism because the bullying did not stop or that school police officers arrived late, after an incident had already transpired. Interviews with participants also show that school police officers were ineffective in building relationships with families. As one key informant explained, School Police Officers "were never available to the community.... They said they were too busy to deal with the 'bad kids'.... It seemed more beneficial for the police force and the school [administration] I guess."

Similar to other research, these experiences show that most, if not all, of the relationships involving school police officers are with school staff and not with students (Broll & Howells, 2019). Even when police do respond to instances of violence or harm, which is a small part of their law enforcement activities, "they often arrive too late to be able to interrupt harm in progress" (Kaba, 2020, p. 15).

Despite overwhelming evidence that policing is racist and violent, Manitoba has seen dramatic increases in police budgets and a push for "community policing." This form of policing is framed as "softer" and a "progressive alternative" to more violent and punitive forms of policing. The increasing push for community policing assumes, based on racist logic, that Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized communities need to be "saved" by police involvement, while at the same time ignoring "the context of ongoing structural violence in the form of the interrelated processes of criminalization and settler colonial dispossession" (Dobchuk-Land, 2017, p. 405; see also Toews, 2018). Police rely on these discourses "as mechanisms to flaunt social capital and to boost perceptions of legitimacy and benevolence" (Walby & Gumieny, 2020, p. 755). In addition, the safety narrative and focus on community policing allows police to challenge or prevent community and research efforts from addressing the racism of policing (Samuels-Wortley, in press). For these reasons, it is important to challenge the safety narrative by centring the discussion around the experiences of racialized families and systemic racism in policing.

Recommendations

PARTICIPANTS IN THIS study had various suggestions to make schools safer for Indigenous and Black students. All suggestions focused on addressing racism in schools and on promoting safety with social support and care without the use of policing and carceral discipline.

Address Racism in Schools: Anti-Racism Training and More Racialized School Staff

Many participants in this research study felt that having anti-racist and diverse staff is important in schools to address racism and make them feel safer in schools. Having diverse and trained staff was seen as important to educate students on anti-racism, and to advocate for families experiencing racism in schools without judging or stereotyping them. After all, students spend more time at school than at home and having supportive students and peers is important for them to feel like they belong. As one student recommended:

> I wish the mentality of my school was [centred around harm reduction or prevention], even if I was high, it was better that I was there than outside.... I wish they just tried to talk to me and figure out who I was and where I come from. Not just see the anger on the outside, but the gentleness on the inside.... I would love to see ... more applicable learning about emotional and mental health. For school to cater to people's strength! (Multiracial student)

Participants wanted school staff to be more understanding of their experiences and emphasized on the need for better communication without discrimination. One way of addressing this is with providing adequate training and skills. However, training staff cannot be implemented in isolation, without enhancing the recruitment and retention of racialized staff. As one key informant said, "We have mainly white middle class teachers working in Indigenous and racialized schools and we see no change in the profile of that system." Many participants felt that representation is crucial to empower students and to stop recreating racial stereotypes. As these two parents explained:

> You go to a school, even though white kids are the minority and Black and Indigenous children are the majority there are no teachers of colour, except for the gym teacher. So, these kids are going to school and [saying to themselves], "Oh, all I can be is an EA [Educational Assistant] or a custodian." Educational institutions need to stop perpetuating racial stereotypes. (Indigenous parent)

> Having people of colour in teaching roles makes a huge difference. What I noticed with my daughter... [is that] if she sees teachers like her, it would be really powerful for her. She can be a teacher if she wanted. I try to teach her that she can be what she wants, but it is important to see it too! (parent of a Black student)

The lack of Indigenous and Black school staff coupled with the lack of anti-racist training in schools is an ongoing issue in Manitoba (Kanu, 2008; Ennab, 2017). Community organizations and advocates continue to ask school divisions to increase racialized representation in classrooms, administration, and school boards (NEC, 2021). This is important because the lack of racialized representation "at decision-making tables impacts the racialized community through decisions involving the distribution of rights, resources, opportunities, and the prioritization of issues" (NEC, 2021, p. 13).

Experiences of racialized families in schools show that having staff from similar backgrounds as them and who are trained in anti-racism, de-escalation or restorative justice practices can improve their sense of safety and belonging in schools. This will also decrease reliance on police involvement and other forms of harsher discipline (Chadha, Herbert, & Richard, 2020). For training to be effective, however, the focus needs to be on helping school staff "understand and repudiate the ways in which through racial profiling, educational and justice institutions undermine the educational achievement, law-abiding living, and well-being of Black [and Indigenous] suburban youth" (James, 2018, p. 21). Training also needs to "be reinforced

by checks and balances as well as transparent accountability mechanisms to hold employees accountable" (OHREA, 2021, p. 60). Thus, enhancing the racial diversity in staffing and offering anti-racist trainings can help reduce anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism in schools.

Some participants also wanted to emphasize that addressing racism in the education system will require systemic change and various other equity initiatives beyond staffing and training. These participants felt that anti-racism needs to be structured in the education system as a formal, mandatory curriculum topic. Other participants felt that it is important to involve more racialized parents in school processes. Some also indicated that there needs to be zero-tolerance policies on bullying and racism, which can help give staff more powers to intervene. As recently demanded by Parents Against Racism, an advocacy group in Manitoba founded after multiple incidents of racism by teachers, schools need "an anti-racism policy to be created, for children and staff to have a safe place to go to report discrimination and for parents to be involved in addressing racism" (CBC News, 2021).

Ultimately, as a few participants expressed, addressing racism will require transformation and systemic change. As one parent said, "It would mean decolonizing the system," which requires "a major overhaul of how police material is presented and how school is structured so that it is inclusive and affirming of all students who attend." Thus, school safety strategies must focus on racism and how it creates an unsafe environment for Indigenous, Black, and structurally disadvantaged students (Zimmerman & Astor, 2021).

Schools Without Policing

Another important recommendation that emerged from this study is the need to end the involvement of police in schools, including the use of school police officers. Given the disproportionate targeting of racialized youth by police and the negative impact of policing on schools and families, most participants felt that police involvement in schools must end. As an Indigenous parent said, "I don't want them [police] in the school and I don't want them talking to my kids and pretending they are good people." Like most participants, this parent felt that a safe and effective educational setting must promote the potential of all students to do and feel well in schools without the use of police to pressure or intimidate them. Thus, taking this recommendation seriously implies that schools must end the use of police and deprioritize relations with them.

Defunding from Policing and Reinvesting in Social Safety Networks

Besides the need to end police involvement in schools, many participants in this study wanted educational and social alternatives that are safe and that promote a positive learning environment for all students. This means that ending the school police officers programs must also deprioritize relations with police and find less harmful alternatives to policing.

Instead of pushing police as a 'resource' on racialized families in schools, participants recommended supporting families by investing in community elders or workers, such as counsellors, teachers, educational assistants, or social workers who are considered a more appropriate source of support and advocacy than police. As one participant explained:

> Police should not be in school at all. I think they should pay for more school psychologist, more training for guidance counsellor, provide teachers with de-escalation technique…. That is better than putting money into a cop walking the hall…. Or have mobile crisis workers who can do stuff with students and teach them about mental health and how to save face. (Indigenous parent)

Several participants noted that providing supports, including Elders, is more useful than police in schools, especially in normalizing and uplifting Black and Indigenous experiences. These participants felt that safer forms of supports are needed for youth, especially for those involved in the criminal justice system or those who are living in poverty and/or with mental health issues. This would make schools feel safer and, as a parent noted, it would make schools feel less institutionalized, especially with all these "gray long narrow hallways." However, some parents also wanted to caution about a need for background checks and performance reviews for support workers, including Elders. As one parent noted, "Anyone can be an Elder today…. [School administration] are paying them and they are going to say what the hell you want them to say because they are getting paid." For these reasons, it is important to implement equity initiatives with regular evaluation and accountability processes.

In addition to providing support workers, participants also wanted to reinvest in "social safety network type of policies" that support social services, community organizations, and neighbourhood watch groups, such as Mama Bear Clan or Bear Clan Patrols. As one parent explained:

> The funds that are currently being given to the police service, it will be better if they are used with neighbourhood watch groups, funding for women

resource centres… [and] raising minimum wage. Basically, more social safety network type of policies for everyone, especially for people who are affected by low-income and poor educational outcomes. (Indigenous parent)

Several participants also noted that investing in a "walking school bus" is important to keep children and youth safe when they are walking to and from school. Other students also mentioned that it is important to offer youth more programming and scholarships. As two students explained:

Give students more opportunities and more things to look after to. Because in the North End there is barely school teams…. Obviously, this pushes youth to find other forms of entertainment and that can be harmful to others, like joining a gang instead of a sports team. (Multiracial student)

More opportunities for Black kids. Scholarships, not just say this person is Black they are getting a scholarship for sports. That is usually the one thing that most of them get. A lot of kids should be acknowledged for their smarts not just for how physically active they are. (Black student)

Many participants understood that enhancing safety in schools and the community requires preventative and pro-active community-based solutions. These approaches were preferred over the use of police, which is either a counterproductive or a reactive approach that drained the community from much needed funds and resources. This will be helpful for all students, but especially for those who are racialized and facing structural disadvantages.

To address racism in schools it is important to focus on investing in a system that is supportive, instead of penalizing youth with carceral measures that associate safety with the necessity of requiring a police response (Bailey et al., 2021). This will require more than police reform because these measures are "morally untenable" since they do not address the systemic racism experienced by racialized communities (Maynard, 2020, p. 74). Racialized students need resources, not police, so government, school and community leaders must "remove police from schools and invest in supports and services proven to contribute to safety" (King & Schindler, 2021 p. 39; Choi et al., 2021). The implementation of policing alternatives that promote "real safety" for racialized groups, such as drug legalization, regulation, and harm reduction instead of the policing of drugs, has led to declines in crime, police spending, and inequality (Harm Reduction TO, n.d.). For these reasons, a coalition of over 250 organizations and 3,000 individuals from across Canada signed "A Historic Declaration to Divest from Policing and Prisons and Build Safer Communities for All" (Choosing Real Safety, n.d.).

In Winnipeg, the advocacy group Justice 4 Black Lives Winnipeg (2020) received over 120,000 signatures on its petition that demanded to make Winnipeg safer for racialized peoples by defunding the Winnipeg Police Service and reinvesting instead in "food, housing, transportation, healthcare, mental health support, harm reduction services, spiritual supports, addictions supports, free extensive community activities, etc." In addition, advocacy groups such as Winnipeg Police Cause Harm, Police-Free Schools, and the Police Accountability Coalition (2020), which consists of over 100 organizations, continue to demand the defunding and removal of police from schools in Winnipeg (Bindi, 2022). These demands occurred at a time when the Winnipeg Police Service received an increase in its budget, while government reduced funding for social supports and services (D'Alimonte, 2020).

Implement Accountability and Equity Measures for Police Involvement in Schools

If police are going to be involved in schools, several participants noted that they wanted more accountability. In line with this view, research and several reviews of school police officer programs have recommended that school boards must establish accountability and equity processes in cases of police involvement in schools. As one recent program review of school police officers in Ontario argues, it is important for school boards to:

> Revise and harmonize all relevant contractual commitments, policies and procedures to limit police involvement at schools to necessary involvement, introduce accountability and transparency mechanisms for all police involvement and embed Indigenous rights, human rights and children's rights and survivor-centred practices. (OHREA 2021: 11)

Accountability is a long-term reform that aims to "break the school-to-prison pipeline" (King & Schindler 2021: 39). As most participants in this study noted, the best practice is not to involve police at all and to not view them as a first option. In addition to racial bias by school police officers, school staff can also be biased toward racialized students and can influence police involvement in discriminatory and inflammatory ways. For this reason, implementing accountability measures such as collecting data on police involvement and equity-related information (e.g., on race), would allow schools to monitor and evaluate the impact of systemic racism. As one participant noted:

It isn't just about values and how to shape the mission, it is also behavioural. There needs to be accountability, how are people interacting around things like systemic racism. If existing staff and culture of school system is alienating and not connecting with students, then that is going to be an unsafe space. (Key informant)

Enhancing accountability for police involvement in schools would also require explicit anti-racist guidelines and policies for staff to limit or avoid police involvement.

Conclusion

FOR MANY INDIGENOUS and Black families in the North End and Downtown areas of Winnipeg, schools are unsafe spaces that promote systemic racism and carceral punishment. Experiences shared in this study show that police involvement in schools unjustly targets racialized youth, criminalizes their behaviours, and breaches their rights for privacy and safety. This seriously disrupts their academic and social lives and pushes them into unsafe futures. Thus, police in schools can compound the racism that Indigenous and Black families are already facing from school staff and students in schools. In doing this, the systemic inequities that Indigenous and Black families experience in and out of schools continue to be reproduced.

It is essential for education and school safety strategies to act against racism and oppression by centring the experiences of Indigenous, Black, and other structurally disadvantaged families. The goal is to restructure the education system to break the nexus with policing and punitive discipline. The continued use of policing in schools causes harm and disruption to Indigenous and Black lives. Moreover, while school police officers programs have ended in some schools, police involvement may continue through other programs and spaces. It is important to note that policing does not and cannot prevent crime but can indeed lead to more violence (Walcott, 2021; see also Vitale, 2017).

Future research exploring policing and racism in the education system must not simply include Indigenous and Black identities, but also their lived experiences and how they are actively shaped by discrimination,

power relations, and punitive discipline. This requires examining how school boards and staff continue to rely on police and deploy policing logic against students, while apparently committing to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Addressing this 'new' racism will require ways to promote solidarity in racialized communities to help mobilize for police-free and racism-free schools and futures.

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