



Policing in Schools Project

Report to the Executive Committee
December 2022

Acknowledgement of Traditional Territory

BC Teachers' Federation members and staff live, teach, and carry out union work on the traditional and unceded territories of the many First Nations peoples of British Columbia. We specifically acknowledge the unceded joint territory of the x^wməθk^wəy^əm (Musqueam), səliłwətał (Tsleil Waututh), and S_kw_x wú7mesh (Squamish) Nations on whose land the BCTF building is located.



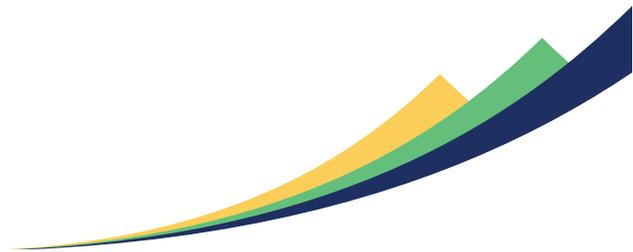
Anti-oppression guiding principles

The following anti-oppression principles guided the work of the Policing in Schools Project Team. Before engaging with the report, they ask readers to reflect on the principles below, as a way to ground the conversation that is hoped will follow the report.

As a starting point, this research is grounded in a critical interrogation of the ongoing project of settler colonialism, and the ways in which various institutions have and continue to uphold settler colonialism, including (but not limited to) those of policing and education. Further, it's a project grounded in an intersectional lens (understanding that people experience simultaneous, interlocking forms of oppression) and is oriented towards making schools places that embody anti-oppression and decolonization. Thirdly, the research process design is one that meaningfully engages Indigenous perspectives, worldviews, and ways of sharing knowledge into all aspects of this project.

More specifically, the above guiding principles mean that:

- anti-racism must be grounded in Indigenous sovereignty
- anti-racism must be about redistribution of power
- equity must be grounded in reparations to historically marginalized groups and a recognition of the social location of each one of us within a settler colonial context
- class (socio-economic status) is a reality in all communities and explains differentiated experiences and responses to policing
- public education is a public good. Any person should be able to access education free from harm, violence, and trauma.





Contents

Executive summary	1
The Policing in Schools Project	3
Indigenous-led Talking Circles.....	4
Participant experiences and perspectives on policing in schools.....	5
History matters and continues to be lived.....	5
Student needs within a chronically underfunded public education system cannot be met by funding School Liaison Officers (SLOs)	8
Schools that embody care and meet student needs are grounded in the community and connected to families.....	12
Continuing the conversation: Providing the space and support	14
Appendix A: Project journey	15
The opportunities and limits of a virtual format.....	17
Meaningful engagement with First Nations on whose land the BCTF building is located	17
References	19



Executive summary

Policing in Schools Project

From February to April 2022, 39 BCTF members who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) participated in the Policing in Schools Project. They discussed their experiences and perspectives on police in schools and shared their visions for creating and sustaining safe, healthy, and equitable schools for all students. The BCTF engaged an external facilitator, Vanessa Tait, a two-spirit Cree woman from O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation, to lead Talking Circles with participants. BCTF members hold multiple views on this topic. Discussing police in schools within Talking Circles elicited a range of perspectives, experiences, stories, and emotions from participants. In this report, we have endeavored to honour participants' perspectives, treat their words with care and meaningfully represent the broad themes of their stories.

The goal of the Policing in Schools Project report is to support continued conversations within schools, locals, the BCTF and broader community about how to create and sustain conditions for safe, healthy, and equitable public schools. There are three key themes to prompt future dialogue:

- **History matters and continues to be lived**
Understanding the historical role of policing in Canada and how the past impacts the present is a necessary starting point for a conversation around police in schools. Many participants feel uncomfortable, intimidated, fearful and unsafe with police presence in schools.
- **Student needs within a chronically underfunded public education system cannot be met by funding School Liaison Officers (SLOs)**
BC teachers and school counsellors are working in a chronically underfunded system marked by insufficient staffing, inadequate resources, and an expectation to do more with less. In this underfunded system, policing has been used to fill gaps and police have taken on a variety of roles, including supporting the work of school counsellors. Many participants made clear that SLO presence not only harms



many BIPOC students, but also doesn't solve the broader systemic issues caused by underfunding and austerity. These require going beyond plugging the holes, expanding what's considered 'possible' to envision what schools can be—places that truly support all without harming any.

- **Schools that embody care and meet student needs are grounded in the community and connected to families**
Safe, healthy, and equitable schools are fully funded schools, grounded in community, that embody a holistic approach to students' academic, emotional, social, and physical well-being. They are places where students' families and the community at large are part of school culture and influence day-to-day activity. They serve as a welcoming and inviting space for families and Elders. For many participants, particularly those most negatively impacted by policing, achieving the schools described above is not possible, and cannot be fully realized, if police are present.

BCTF Research would like to thank all members who participated in the Talking Circles and underscore the labour of BIPOC members who shared their stories, perspectives, and trauma to produce this research. A special thank you to Vanessa Tait for so graciously leading the Circles. BCTF Research would also like to acknowledge the tremendous contributions of the Project Team comprised of eight BIPOC identifying members who worked closely with BCTF staff and navigated a complex project methodology with thoughtfulness, curiosity, and courage.

What is the Policing in Schools Project?

The *Policing in Schools Project* brought together BIPOC-identifying BCTF members to discuss their perspectives and experiences related to police in schools, as well as their visions for creating and sustaining safe, healthy, and equitable schools for all students.

In the context of a growing awareness around police violence and systemic racism in policing as an institution, police presence in schools has come under increasing scrutiny. Various jurisdictions across Canada and the US have been re-examining school police programs, with specific attention to their impact on BIPOC youth. In some cases, the programs have been suspended or cancelled. The conversation around police in schools has been a source of intense debate within school districts and communities across Canada and the United States.

This project sought to contribute to the conversation around police in schools by centering the voices and experiences of BIPOC-identifying teachers on this topic. This research project engaged BCTF members in two ways. First, in spring 2021, BCTF Research created a Project Team comprised of BIPOC-identifying members to work alongside Research staff as co-researchers. Together, the Project Team and union staff identified research questions, chose the method of engagement, and collaboratively analyzed project data.¹ Then, from February to April 2022, members from three locals were invited to participate in virtual Talking Circles. In total, 39 BIPOC-identifying members participated.²

The practice and protocols of participating in the Circle created an opportunity to engage in a type of dialogue not possible in settler-dominated spaces. Talking Circle participants were asked how they see police present in their school communities, their experience with police in their school sites and how that relates to their teaching and working conditions, and how they see BIPOC students impacted by police presence in schools. The final question in each Circle asked participants to share their visions for safe, healthy, and equitable schools.

¹ A more detailed description of how the project team and staff worked together can be found in Appendix A.

² Each Circle varied in size (4 to 11 participants), and length (between 1 and 2.5 hours), depending on the size of the group.



Indigenous-led Talking Circles

BCTF engaged Vanessa Tait, a two-spirit Cree woman from O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation, to lead the Talking Circles. Below are Vanessa's reflection and explanation of the Talking Circles in her own words:

"Tansi (Hello), it was an honour to sit and facilitate the talking circle with each and every one of the participants that had the courage to sit in these sessions. The spirit and intent of the talking circle is what guided this process. I learned a lot from these circles, and I am very humbled by the experience. Kínánáskomitinan (Thank you) to each and everyone for their gifts, truths, and knowledge they shared during this time."

"We began this journey in ceremony to honour the ancestors of the territory, where the facilitator provided a spirit dish, a prayer, and a drum song. This was to start in a good way, and to bring those good thoughts and energy into the virtual space and for this portion of the research project. The first Talking Circle was completed with the Project Team and this was done to ensure that the Talking Circle approach would be conducted in a way that was respectful to the entirety of the research project and there was a debriefing before continuing with the rest of the Talking Circles. Thereafter, each Talking Circle was started with an opening prayer and ended with a drum song, and the participants were encouraged to go for a walk or do some self care after."

"The Talking Circle is a traditional way of communicating and sharing, which has been practiced by Indigenous people here on Turtle Island and is a part of our traditional ceremonies and customs. The Talking Circle honours what the participants have to say in a sacred and safe space. An eagle feather was held throughout the Talking Circle, a sacred item that was gifted to the facilitator from a two-spirit relative. The eagle feather is to honour the Circle, the gifts, the sharing and the love and kindness the Circle represented. A smudge was lit and continued for the entirety of the circle. Each person's participation in the circle is a gift of value and is appreciated. In turn, everyone in the Circle receives each other's gifts with respect, neither judging nor belittling the gift each person makes. No person and the gift they share is more important than another, and each person's gift is necessary to complete the Circle. The Circle is a sacred space made up of sacred relationships."

Participant experiences and perspectives on policing in schools

Discussing police in schools elicited a range of perspectives, experiences, stories, and emotions from participants. BCTF members hold multiple views on this topic. BCTF Research staff and Project Team members analyzed the transcripts of the Talking Circles together and identified the following key themes.

History matters and continues to be lived

History informs the present. The conversation around police in schools must be put within a broader discussion of the role policing has served within a settler colonial context, with specific attention to the history (and ongoing reality) of militarized invasions of Indigenous land, forced removal and apprehension through residential schools and the Sixties Scoop, and the ongoing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). The historical role policing has played—and continues to have—within our settler colonial context has caused irreparable harm and created a deep mistrust that persists and impacts participants in multiple ways in their day-to-day teaching. **Understanding this context is a necessary starting point for a conversation around police in schools.** As one Indigenous participant shared,

“When I was invited to be part of this session, all I could think of was [Kent] Monkman’s very large mural of RCMP, mothers and children, and them being snatched away—because the laws of our country allowed it. The laws of our country allowed our nations’ leaders—our future children and our leaders to be taken away...I know that we call them [the police] and as a society believe we are safer with them around, but when you have history and historic information about laws and who carried out the laws and the people who are still carrying out the laws on our territories, because they are guided to—so when we talk of trust, the trust is not there...”

Participants noted how both the law and policing land differently on groups of people, depending on their race, class, or legal status. Policing, as it currently exists, (and was created) benefits some and marginalizes others in society.

“You have to reach in the past before you move forward”

“the police are not there to support everybody”

“we have to share this [history] so that people don’t forget why the police were created. They weren’t created to protect me. They were never created for that....”



"I just feel a lot of discomfort and I just don't feel safe. I have a lot of anxiety. I feel like I just kind of shut down, like I just- I don't feel safe in the presence of police. I don't want to interact with police. I feel really fearful of like other students of color interacting with police, or just like just like what their presence means and the implications of their presence..."

"I just try to stay under the radar—not talk to them, not engage. I would not feel comfortable having them in my classroom or around my students or in the hallways with me ... when I see them, I feel small."

"[my students] have experiences on the weekends with the police and then they come to school and...it's almost like what they have to deal with outside of the school now comes inside of the school which is supposed to be a place of learning and supposed to be like a safer space for all students."

Ongoing police violence experienced within BIPOC communities makes its way into the daily lives of teachers and students, negatively impacting their teaching and learning conditions as well as their overall well-being. Many participants described feeling uncomfortable, intimidated, fearful and unsafe with police presence in schools. These fears were most strongly articulated by Indigenous participants. Some participants described how they try to go unnoticed and avoid encounters with police at school. Others shared that being in schools with police means they cannot fully be themselves in their workplace. Some shared their own traumatic experiences with policing in the past, disclosing how those negative experiences have stayed with them into adulthood.

"When I had the police come into my teaching space, I was terrified, but I couldn't tell the kids. I could not tell the kids. I was so terrified when the schools had set up having police come in and do all of this. I was thinking, why do we need to have this?"

Several participants asked, "why do we have police in schools?", noting they weren't ever given a rationale for why police in school programs were created. Some shared that they sense police are placed in schools to help build relationships with youth, which they find concerning given the historical and ongoing reality of systemic racism and violence within policing in Canada. In some cases, SLOs had a dedicated school space or office, leaving some participants wondering why police were invited into school spaces more easily than other community members, such as Elders.

Several participants shared stories of how BIPOC students have been impacted. One participant told a story of a student being profiled and carded by police on their way to school, causing them to arrive late for class. Another shared of students experiencing mental health crises and witnessing overly aggressive responses by police which lacked compassion and sensitivity to students' trauma. Several participants expressed their desire to have a counsellor on site to help students work through their emotions as opposed to a police response which they fear could criminalize students for struggling with their mental health.

As the participant quoted earlier explains, “as a society we believe we are safer around them, but when you have history...” there’s a discrepancy between how police are often portrayed in society and the lived experiences of fear, trauma, and lack of safety that participants shared. The Circles demonstrated how ‘safety’ and ‘equity’ are not universally understood or experienced. For example, in the context of some school districts cancelling SLO programs, some participants shared that no longer having access to police at their school site is a lack of safety and a form of inequity, as the pathways to getting students support are more arduous and cumbersome. For several school counsellors, the situation has felt like a removal of support and their inability to help students in a timely manner is an additional barrier. Other participants explained how they consider lack of safety and inequity as when people are not able to access a service or space due to fear for their safety. One participant provided an analogy of how schools address student peanut allergies by proactively removing peanuts from classroom snacks, and explained their vision of safe, healthy, equitable schools would mean proactively removing the potential harm of policing from students so that no student has to experience “an anaphylactic reaction to the presence of cops in schools.”

Relatedly, several participants discussed safety and equity as creating a support system that truly helps all without harming anyone, pointing out that a “majority rules” perspective on what is safe or equitable can simply reinforce inequity and cause harm. Rather than go by what works for most (numerically), an equity lens should be taken whereby if one student is not feeling safe, then a space should be considered unsafe, and work must be done to create a solution that ensures safety for all.

As these examples illustrate, ‘safety’ and ‘equity’ carry different meanings informed by identity, history, lived experience and perspective. Attention to these differences is important for ongoing conversations and the work of building collective understanding.

“We talk about equity, also in terms of accessibility... not having a school liaison officer has created a barrier to those students who would have had access to a school liaison officer...hearing a student cry and talk and tell about their experiences, but then not have an avenue to go to other than the 911 or non-emergency line, that is that in itself is a barrier.”

“If you’re thinking about student experiences I think in terms of access, I think the most inequitable thing is that there’s going to be groups of students, that will never ever be able to access police in a safe way... The feeling of some students feeling unsafe in their communities is not the same as someone who thinks they are going to die or be killed by the interactions with police.”

“You just have to listen to one kid talk about what—how police treat them and, for me, as a teacher, if not one of my kids is safe, then it’s not a safe space for any of them. So even if one kid is harmed, we need to make it a safe space for all of them, because we can come up with different ways to help our kids.”



Student needs within a chronically underfunded public education system cannot be met by funding School Liaison Officers (SLOs)

BC teachers and school counsellors want the best for their students. Unfortunately, they are working in an underfunded system marked by insufficient staffing, inadequate resources, and an expectation to do more with less. Throughout the Talking Circles, participants shared how working in this underfunded system continually prevents them from being able to meet student needs. This was particularly clear in school counsellor perspectives. Many felt their efforts are “just a band-aid solution at best” as there is so much need but insufficient time, personnel, and support.

“Even though, I’m a registered clinical counsellor it doesn’t seem to matter in terms of how many hours... we have to service all the needs of students which can’t possibly be met...if we were properly staffed and funded, then we could make more of an impact.”

“There’s so much stuff that you know, in an ideal world, they wouldn’t have to do these jobs but there’s so much that they do that fills gaps in the system for our students, you know... with mental health crises...providing a sense of safety, providing the school with really valuable safety information that we wouldn’t otherwise be able to get...”

“We can’t do our job because we’re not staffed well enough.”

Participants described how police in schools have been used to fill gaps in this under-resourced system. Police have taken on a variety of roles such as providing presentations on bike safety, digital literacy, internet safety, and substance abuse awareness, mentoring and coaching student clubs, responding to emergency calls, and helping students file reports of assaults, to name some of the most prominent examples discussed. Participants pointed out how police are positioned as a resource for teachers, often the only ‘community-based’ resource they can draw on to teach about internet safety, digital media literacy or substance use in their classes. In the absence of resources, a few participants described finding themselves having to access the police even though it made them feel uncomfortable or at times guilty for not teaching through their anti-oppressive values.

“one of the things I realized as a teacher was that it was pretty hard to find resources that were not tied to the police in my school community...trying to bring in a counsellor, trying to bring in a community activist, all of those things were not something readily available, but what always was available was police...And kind of building resources that were not police specific fell on my shoulders.”

Many school counsellors shared how their school-based SLO was an indispensable resource to them, and a vital form of support many relied on. They described how SLOs provided leadership skills and mentorship to students, along with support in times of distress. Several described feeling worried about their ability to help students without having access to an SLO. A few participants expressed torn feelings about the role of police in schools and the gaps they fill. They've witnessed students benefit from having access to an SLO and observed that some students do feel a sense of safety with them in school, but they also expressed understanding the traumatic experiences other BIPOC colleagues in the Circle had at the hands of police. These participants expressed a desire to find ways to support all students meaningfully and wondered how to hold or balance the positive experiences they've witnessed with the reality of the traumatic ones that other participants had shared with them.

Many participants shared the view that police should not be tasked with filling gaps in public education, as has become their role. The path towards meeting students needs requires abundant funding that goes beyond filling the gaps. Schools require more counsellors, teachers, coaches, and other school support staff and a long-term view of meaningfully investing in supports and services. Participants made clear that meaningful change requires shifting from a scarcity mindset to one of funding public services like education more abundantly. As one participant explained,

"[When I think about] how stressed we are and how we can't support our children, you know this comes out of a world of austerity, about lack of people not having enough to get by to flourish, to grow, to heal, you know. We need abundance in school sites. So, yes, the police, provided a lot of services, but you know those cuts were made over the years. We need a fully-funded school system where we have enough counsellors, where we have enough safe and caring liaisons in the school. Where we have enough principals, we have enough teachers and teachers' aides and coaches and funded activities."

As the participant quote explains, austerity has consequences. Within the Circles, it was also pointed out that the horizon of what is considered possible for creating schools that embody systems of support and care has been limited by decades of underfunding.

"If I need to call 911, I'm going to wind up on hold for hours and I'm not going to get the results that I need for that student who is asking me for help."

"...the other things that are supposed to come in to replace or to help or to fill the void are just not there... nothing has come close to the timeliness to act ...as having an SLO officer that you can reach out to directly."



Often resources or supports are provided piecemeal and lack the systemic coordination and infrastructure needed to really make a difference. **Many participants pointed out that having SLOs not only harms many BIPOC students, but also doesn't offer a solution to the systemic issues caused by underfunding and austerity.** Creating safer schools requires going beyond plugging the holes towards expanding what's possible to envision what schools can be—places that truly support all without harming any.

The stories participants shared about living the daily consequences of underfunding add important context to the conversation around the inadequacies of BC's education funding. Education funding in BC is approximately \$1,600 per pupil less than the national Canadian average.³ In the 2019–20 school year, BC's school districts received only 65% of what they ended up spending province-wide on special education from supplemental special education grants received from the province.⁴ Music and arts programs consistently face cuts and international student tuition has become a way for school districts to offset the insufficient funding they receive, reinforcing systemic inequities as not all school districts are able to attract students from abroad.⁵ In addition, the current school counsellor to student ratios are too high to meaningfully address student needs, as participants made clear. School counsellor associations across Canada and the United States advocate for a ratio of 250 students per counsellor.⁶ As of the 2018–19 school year (the most recent year for which we have data), provincial school counsellor to student ratios were 536.5 students to 1, illustrating that school counsellor ratios in BC are considerably higher than that target ratio.⁷

Placing the education funding conversation in BC within a broader context, the continual defunding of public education has been a trend in Canada (and globally) driven by a dominant political ideology of 'reigning in spending' and enforcing austerity on vital public services. As global protests ignited in summer 2020 (both as a response to the police killing of George Floyd in the US and to

³ BCTF calculations based on Statistics Canada Number of Student Tables (37-10-0007-01) and Education Spending Tables (37-10-0066-01).

⁴ Ministry of Education. Operating Grants Tables (2019-2020); Ministry of Education. BC School District Revenue and Expenditure Tables (2019-2020).

⁵ While increases to funding have been made in recent years, these are driven by inflation, collective agreements, and enrollment growth. Very little new money is being provided to meet ongoing challenges caused by chronic underfunding.

⁶ The American School Counselor Association <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/About-School-Counseling/School-Counselor-Roles-Ratios>

⁷ It is challenging to get an accurate school counsellor to student ratio for each school district due to lack of data transparency in the BC Ministry of Education. In November 2022, BCTF Research submitted FOI requests to obtain current school counsellor to student ratios in Burnaby, Surrey and Vancouver and is waiting a response.

highlight police violence as a global issue),⁸ many activists pointed out that while programs and public services providing housing, education, mental health support, economic opportunity, and community-based violence prevention continually face austerity measures, police funding and resources have continually increased and taken up a greater share of local and municipal budgets.

In addition to documenting BCTF members' experiences and perspectives, the Policing in School Project examined general trends in police and education funding in BC over time. While education budgets and policing budgets are challenging to compare⁹, a clear trend can be observed: over the past decade and a half, police funding has not been subject to the same austerity measures as education funding. For example, between 2006 and 2020, police resource costs in BC grew by 48.4%. These increases outstrip both population and inflationary increases. Meanwhile, the provincial public education operating grant grew by only 9% over that same period.^{10 11} Furthermore, the significant power difference between the police board and local school boards is worth noting. Police boards have the ability to ensure their funding requests are met as they have the power to override municipal councils. This was recently seen in Vancouver, where the city council voted against an increase to the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) budget, but the police board overrode the decision, resulting in VPD receiving a \$5.7 million increase in funding in 2022.¹² School boards do not have similar power to override funding decisions. For more information about the budget analysis, see the Research Note examining police and education funding trends for more details.

⁸ Across Canada, protests also demanded justice for those killed by Canadian police forces, including uplifting the names of Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Ejaz Choudry, and many others.

⁹ This is due, in part, to educational funding being allotted across calendar years while police funding occurs within the calendar year. Further, per capita police resource costs are based on the population at large, whereas education funding is based primarily on full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrolment in a district.

¹⁰ An important note for interpretation: The public education operating grant is the largest and most predictable source of funding for the BC school system, but it is often accompanied by other grants (targeted funding for specific student populations, one-time grants for certain initiatives). Further, some school districts are able to attract international students and thus receive additional revenue from international student tuition. In contrast, the police resource costs are expected to be fairly complete.

¹¹ Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General Policing and Security Branch. Police resources in British Columbia (2006-2019); Ministry of Education. Operating Grants Tables (2019-2020); Ministry of Education.

¹² Fenton, C. (2022 April 12). Vancouver to draw \$5.7M from reserve funds to offset police budget decision. CityNews. <https://vancouver.citynews.ca/2022/04/12/vancouver-tax-police-budget/>



“For me, safe, healthy and equitable schools can only happen if our community is involved, and by that, I mean families need to be part of our school community... Our schools have to be very, very safe places, for every child in the building and one of the ways, I feel that can happen is by having a very close interaction with families and communities.”

Schools that embody care and meet student needs are grounded in the community and connected to families

Participants described safe, healthy, and equitable schools as fully-funded schools, grounded in community, that embody a holistic approach to students’ academic, emotional, social, and physical well-being. They are places where students’ families and the community at large are part of school culture and influence day-to-day activity. They are not cut off from the broader community in which they are situated and serve as a welcoming and inviting space for families and Elders. Such schools are designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in their community. They nourish students, providing them ways to be and learn “in all the ways that learning can happen,” as one participant shared.

Safe, healthy, equitable schools are equipped with smaller class sizes to work with students where “we can actually have conversations and decolonize,” as one participant explained. Several mentioned a need for increased staffing, particularly more BIPOC-identifying teachers and counsellors to work with students. Others described schools that nurture learning holistically, feeding the hearts of students. Relatedly, others envisioned places grounded in restorative and transformative approaches to conflict resolution and problem solving, breaking away from carceral mindsets and punishment-oriented approaches that some noted still exist in their schools. For many participants, particularly those most negatively impacted by policing, achieving the schools described above is not possible, and cannot be fully realized, if police are present.

Transformation involves creating and sustaining conditions for members to not only envision but enact their visions for safe, healthy, and equitable schools. Some participants shared that they unfortunately still experience barriers in school policies that prevent them from welcoming Elders into their schools or incorporating ceremony in school functions or activities. This example highlights the discrepancy that still exists between rhetoric and the reality of genuinely incorporating Indigenous ways of being and learning into BC’s public education system.



“Where I feel good and really safe is in schools that are kind of known as community schools... So, like the families can come in and you’ll see grandparents sitting there on the couches, you know, and talking and they always have food available there. They sometimes have days where certain members of the community will cook like they have, you know, special food days and then also they always have bread and things for the kids and it just feels like more down to earth.”

“...the way that we are sort of there in that space is really guided by anti-oppressive values and beliefs and people are trying to create an environment that’s not like this carceral sort of like culture about like punishment and punishing students...so creating a culture where it’s like restorative and transformative. How do we actually address what the root causes of harm [are] rather than like sticking a band-aid on it or, you know, just like barely scratching the surface or actually doing things that like further harm?”

“I wish we could just flip our model and design our schools to support the folks that don’t have those resources because if you provide schooling that works for folks with the least or marginalized people, you don’t lose anything as a privileged person—I mean you probably gain way more because, you know, your access is not the thing that’s in focus and I think there’s a lot... we can learn from in terms of humility.”

“I believe that schools are supposed to be sites of care and only care, we are not, as teachers, there to punish students to mete out some weird form of justice. We’re not carceral but why are we inviting in police who are carceral, who legalize violence within our society into our schools, these are supposed to be caring safe places, you know, I only see schools as a site of abolition.”



Continuing the conversation: Providing the space and support

“...especially in BC with curriculum that it’s supposed to talk about decolonization and talk and teach with Indigenous perspectives, like from Indigenous perspectives. It’s—I can’t do it honestly without talking about the police or anti-racism and all that...”

“...how I feel in this situation is that there isn’t enough education for us educators to address the issue of policing in school”

“there doesn’t seem to be a professional climate to have open conversations [about policing]”

“there’s a lot of *harm* in schools... it’s just really disheartening and it’s so sad and frustrating that we can’t even be having these conversations at a whole school level, that someone can’t just say, “Hey, this is something that’s bothering me—the way that the police showed up at my school. It made me feel really uncomfortable. Like, can we do something about this?” I don’t even think we have an environment where people can really even feel safe to say that and if people can’t feel safe enough to speak up then we can’t take action on these things either.”

“and I often feel like—I don’t know if others share those same feelings, especially if you’re in a school with like just other white like colleagues or white teachers, like, I often don’t voice my opinion because I don’t know how that’s going to be received or if it will further kind of isolate me. “

Participants of varying perspectives acknowledged the contentious nature of this topic and discussed how it has and continues to be polarizing amongst colleagues. Several discussed the need to create a more supportive atmosphere where members can talk openly within schools and union spaces about police violence. For some participants, having more professional and collegial support to discuss policing in society at large as well as in schools would help them feel better equipped to engage in the topic within their schools and classes.

Several participants shared how this issue has impacted their collegial relationships. For example, some participants working as school counsellors expressed that they did not feel adequately heard or consulted on this issue in their district. Other participants shared experiences of feeling discomfort around police at school but not having a safe avenue for honestly discussing their feelings amongst colleagues. Some disclosed that they self-censor on the topic of policing for fear of how other colleagues—in particular, White colleagues—are going to respond. Within this context, important questions to consider include: How has the struggle for resources and the experience of working in an underfunded system affected collegial relationships amongst K–12 education staff? How can union and school spaces be created to foster dialogue and build understanding and solidarity on this issue?

The Project Team and Research staff have endeavored to honour participants’ perspectives, treat their words with care and meaningfully represent the broad themes of their stories. The Policing in Schools Project report is not meant to serve as a “final analysis” on this topic. Rather, an intention of this project is to support continued conversations within schools, locals, the BCTF and broader community about how to create and sustain conditions for safe, healthy, and equitable public schools.

Appendix A: Project journey

In this Appendix, we (Michelle and Joni) write about our project journey and describe how we as a team worked together with members and attempted to build critical reflection into the project by continuously asking: who is given space and how, and whose voices are centered? Michelle, senior researcher, identifies as a White settler and Joni, research assistant, identifies as a settler Person of Colour.

The *Policing in Schools* project took place over two years and engaged multiple governance structures, members and staff within the BCTF. The project was initiated by a motion put forward and passed at the December 12–14, 2019, BCTF Executive Committee (EC) meeting: “That the BCTF study the impact of policing on school communities.” Over subsequent months, BCTF Research staff conducted a literature review of the topic and presented key findings and avenues for further study to the September 18–19, 2020, EC meeting. At that meeting, the Executive Committee passed the following motions: “That the Federation do an analysis of police and education budgets across BC” and “That the Federation undertake a research project that explores the experiences of British Columbia Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour educators and students in relation to school liaison/school resource officers.”

An integral component of BCTF Research is engaging members as researchers to investigate issues that matter to them at their schools, in their union, or within the broader community. When this project came to our office, we knew we wanted to take a participatory approach, involving members in the research process in multiple ways. With the above EC motions as the guide, we provided the initial project scope. While policing in education is a topic that spans the province, through discussion with other Research staff, we chose to focus the project analysis on three school districts, which either currently have or have had police programming in their schools. Next, Michelle reached out to locals to discuss the project with local leadership.

To ensure this project was guided by members, we created a project structure consisting of a Project Team of BIPOC-identifying members to be co-researchers alongside us as Research staff. We then shared a “Call for Participants” with the participating locals (through consultation with and support from local union leadership) and relevant BCTF committees.



After an application review process, the Project Team was assembled, and we began the next planning steps.

Between April 2021 and May 2022, we brought the Project Team together on six occasions for full-day work sessions to collaboratively develop the project focus and framework for engagement. One key principle guiding the project work was to create a research process design that meaningfully engaged Indigenous perspectives, worldviews, and ways of sharing knowledge into all aspects of the project (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). The Project Team proposed using Talking Circles as the form of research engagement (Barkaskas & Gladwin, 2021; Kovach, 2010; Tachine, Yellow Bird & Cabrera, 2016).

Once the research engagement approach was decided, the Project Team determined the best approach would be to engage an outside Indigenous-identifying community-based facilitator to lead the Talking Circles. Throughout summer and fall 2021, Michelle held multiple meetings with Vanessa (the facilitator) to plan the Circles and ensure all the necessary preparations were in place. Michelle and Joni also created and shared informational posters with the locals to recruit participants for the upcoming Circles.

Attention to our identity and positionality as staff was integral to this project. To ensure the Circle dialogue process unfolded in a BIPOC-only space, Michelle was not present during the sharing in the Circles. Her role consisted of welcoming participants to the Zoom session, providing project context, introducing the facilitator, and answering any questions. Joni attended each session entirely and managed the audio recording and provided tech support when needed. Further, to ensure the analysis of the transcripts centered the voices of those most impacted by colonization and systemic racism, Michelle and Joni brought the Project Team together for a two-day meeting in May 2022 to analyze the data collectively. Michelle and Joni prepared anonymized transcripts of the Circles and facilitated a range of activities and discussion questions to help guide the co-analysis of the transcripts with Project Team members. Then, once the key themes were distilled from our May meeting, Michelle utilized the materials from the two-day session to inform and write the current report.

Further, building critical reflection into this project encompassed thinking deeply about how we are engaging with members as well as the broader community. Two specific examples around process of engagement emerged.

The opportunities and limits of a virtual format

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Circles took place virtually. While necessary given the circumstance, participant experience was impacted by the platform. In a post-Circle debrief, participants from the Project Team expressed how the online environment made it challenging to feel a sense of connection to other participants sharing their stories.¹³ In every Circle, participants shared their vulnerability, disclosing traumatic life and work experiences with others. The way each participant chose to be present in the Circle was respected. For some participants, it felt more comfortable to have the camera off or read from prepared notes when speaking. If the Circles were held in person and the option to remain off camera would not have been a possibility, would the dynamics of some Circles have been different? In addition to the technology impacting the experience during the Circle, there were also impacts beyond. With each participant logging on individually, there was little opportunity for collective healing without a community present to debrief or support each other once the Circle officially concluded. While Vanessa generously provided her contact information to participants should anyone need to debrief the experience, the role of communal support provided with an in-person event was highlighted as necessary for collective processing of all that was shared in the Circles.

Meaningful engagement with First Nations on whose land the BCTF building is located

Making land acknowledgement statements is an important practice used to advance decolonization within BCTF spaces. However, as we discussed with the Project Team during data analysis, meaningfully putting words into practice requires reorienting commonplace protocols and building relationships. In planning the Circles, an important element of making the land acknowledgement process more meaningful was to connect with an Indigenous Elder from the territory on which the BCTF building stands to formally welcome those attending the sacred ceremony

¹³ To ensure the perspectives of the Project Team were included in the data analysis along with other participants from the locals, they held their own Talking Circle with the facilitator.



and officially open the Talking Circle series. After attempts to reach out, we were not able to engage an Elder, prompting us to modify the acknowledgment protocol. Stepping back to critically reflect as a team, “Why weren’t we able to honour this protocol?”, we as Research staff together with Project Team members discussed the need for establishing a meaningful relationship with the local First Nations communities. Moving forward, one implication of this project is to encourage deeper conversations about how to move away from words of acknowledgement and towards meaningful recognition of and relationships with the Indigenous peoples upon whose territories union work takes place.

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Information, Research and International Solidarity Division
100-550 West 6th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2
research@bctf.ca

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