

The Prevalence and the Price of Police in Schools

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Since the 1900s, U.S. public schools have employed a growing number of school resource officers (SROs) – defined here as sworn law enforcement officials. In 1975, only 1% of schools reported having police officers on site, but by 2018, approximately 58% of schools had at least one sworn law enforcement official present during the school week.¹ In response to school shootings in the 1990s, federal and state legislation spurred this rapid proliferation of SROs. Since 1998, the federal government has invested over \$1 billion to explicitly increase police presence in schools, and over \$14 billion to advance community policing, which can include SROs.²

Policies that establish a police presence in schools respond to acute pressure on schools to keep students safe. While SROs are one of the most visible ways to promote students’ safety, research overwhelmingly suggests that SROs have no positive impact on students’ safety and may in fact make students less safe.

In this policy brief, I first outline federal and state policies related to SROs. I subsequently explore the research on the impact of SROs in schools. Finally, I present recommendations for alternative approaches to school safety.

What are SROs?

The only definition of “school resource officer” (SRO) in current federal law appears under the authorizing legislation for the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), “a component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing” primarily via grant resources.³ This statute defines an SRO as “a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with schools and community-based organizations.”⁴

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) removed the definition of “school resource officer” that was present in prior federal education law under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act. ESSA contains no provisions regarding the use of SROs. Due to the lack of a uniform, national definition of the role and responsibilities of school resource officers, definitions vary widely across states and jurisdictions.

Connecticut state policy defines SRO as “a sworn police officer of a local law enforcement agency who has been assigned to a school pursuant to an agreement between the local or regional board of education and the chief of police of a local law enforcement agency.”⁵ If boards of education want armed security personnel in their schools, Connecticut state law requires that they hire “a sworn member of an organized local police department or a retired police officer.”⁶

Increase of SROs: Fueled by Federal Funding

In 1975, only 1% of schools reported having police officers on-site. By 2003-2004, 36% of schools reported having a police presence.⁷ The most recent data indicate that 58% of schools had at least one SRO or other sworn law enforcement officer present at least one day a week.⁸ We may expect this growth to continue as National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) argues that “[s]chool-based policing is the fastest-growing area of law enforcement.”⁹ Research shows that SRO programs are implemented for two primary reasons: (1) as a response to school violence, specifically, a publicized mass shooting event at a school; and (2) because of available grant funding to create such a program.¹⁰

The first use of SROs in schools is widely reported to have been in Flint, Michigan, in the early 1950s.¹¹ While police have had a presence in schools since then, it has only been over the past 20 years that the practice of assigning police officers to schools on a full-time basis has become more widespread. The number of SROs expanded significantly beginning in the 1990s due to legislative initiatives in response to concerns over a series of school shootings including the Columbine tragedy.

The 1994 reauthorization of ESEA included provisions that established school safety as a core focus for the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE).¹² It also included the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, which authorized federal support for police in schools via a grant program wherein local education agencies could use funds to hire and train SROs.¹³ Between 1994 and 2009, up to 40% of federal funding for this act could be used to hire and train school police and support other security measures.¹⁴

Additionally, a 1998 amendment to the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 encouraged partnerships between schools and law enforcement. This legislation significantly increased the number of SROs in schools by providing funding through the COPS Office “COPS in Schools” grant program, which remains the largest sustained federal effort to support SROs.¹⁵ Between 1999 and 2005, it awarded approximately \$823 million in grants to districts for hiring SROs, funding 7,242 positions in hundreds of communities across the nation.¹⁶

Funding for the COPS in Schools program ended in 2005. However, law enforcement agencies are encouraged to apply for funds to hire SROs via other COPS Office grants programs.¹⁷ This change made it more difficult to track the grants awarded exclusively for SROs.¹⁸ Overall, since 1998, the federal government has invested over \$1 billion to explicitly increase police presence in schools,¹⁹ and over \$14 billion to advance community policing, which can include SROs.²⁰

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In recent years, federal funding and rhetorical support for SROs have increased following tragic school shootings. For example, despite their concerns about the unintended negative consequences of SROs, the Obama Administration renewed funding to increase the number of SROs across the country after the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.²¹ Following the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, the Trump Administration prioritized school resource officer positions in selecting COPS grants recipients.²²

Federal Policy on SROs

Despite their growth and the substantial federal funding SROs attract, there is very little federal policy delineating the role of SROs. The absence of SROs from federal educational policy is perhaps due to the Obama administration's concerns over unintended negative consequences of police in schools.²³ In 2014, the Obama administration issued guidance aiming to make school environments more equitable by favoring the social emotional needs of students over exclusionary discipline policies that disproportionately affected students of color and students with disabilities.²⁴ This guidance included parameters for the appropriate use of law enforcement in schools and put schools on notice that they may be in violation of civil rights laws if they or their SROs engaged in practices that disparately impacted students of color. However, the Trump administration rescinded this guidance and communicated a clear shift back to what some have called "law-and-order" approaches.²⁵ Overall, the vagueness of federal law has led to large variation in the role, expectations, and accountability of police in schools.

Moreover, federal-level data collection on SROs is also severely lacking. SROs are not required to register with any national database, police departments are not required to report how many of their officers work as SROs, and school systems are not required to report how many SROs they employ.²⁶ Since 2013-2014, the U.S. Department of Education has collected survey data every other year that details the number of student referrals and arrests made by school police (including SROs) in public schools, and which students are most affected. The data also include the number of counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and nurses in school compared to SROs. The data from the 2015-2016 school year, released in April 2018 is the last data set released to the public. Given this overall lack of most basic descriptive data it is perhaps unsurprising there is also little information on the roles of SROs nationally nor how, if at all, SROs are trained. By failing to collect these data, the federal government effectively makes it extremely difficult to monitor the work of SROs and hold them accountable.

Patchwork of State Policy

Federal policy and accompanied funding initiatives fueled the growth of SROs programs which are now operated in all 50 states.²⁷ Yet, the lack of federal law on SROs has led to a patchwork of state policy. Out of all 50 states and Washington D.C., only 26 specifically define SRO in state statutes or regulations.²⁸ These state-level definitions do not specify the role of SROs in schools. Most states encourage schools or districts to enter into a Memorandum of

Understanding (MOU) with local law enforcement if they provide an SRO. Connecticut, Massachusetts, Ohio, and South Carolina require MOUs to outline the role of the SRO.²⁹ NASRO asserts that the role of SROs should be defined via a “triad concept” wherein they have three main roles in schools: “educator (i.e., guest lecturer), informal counselor/mentor, and law enforcement officer.”³⁰

To carry out this role, NASRO suggests SROs receive at least 40 hours of specialized training in school policing prior to being assigned. NASRO’s Basic SRO training is set up as a 5-day, 40-hour block of instruction.³¹ Twenty-eight state statutes or regulations include language regarding training requirements for SROs, but these also vary widely and laws in only two states specify a required length of training.³² In several states, the training is simply what is required of traditional law enforcement, including firearm or active shooter training.³³ Instruction regarding how to effectively interact with youth averages around four to six hours across all states.³⁴ Training in sixteen states includes what is required of traditional law enforcement in addition to school-specific training. However, the majority of these requirements are extremely vague. Few states explicitly require training in de-escalation or conflict resolution, mental health, youth development, or school climate.³⁵ Only Maryland and Utah explicitly include provisions for training in “implicit bias and disability and diversity awareness with specific attention to racial and ethnic disparities” and “cultural awareness,” respectively.³⁶ Thus, across states there is wide variation in expectations regarding SRO training. Additionally, training is primarily standard police training, with little education on working in school settings and with youth.

Connecticut Policy

Schools in Connecticut began to hire SROs in the late 1990s.³⁷ Between 1998 and 2004, Connecticut received more than \$9 million from the U.S. Department of Justice’s COPS in Schools grant program.³⁸ Since 2008, Connecticut police have received over \$57 million in grants from the COPS Office Hiring Program, although it is unclear whether this funding has supported SROs.³⁹ There is no central public reporting of and, in turn, very little information on the presence of SROs in Connecticut. Approximately 21% of Connecticut schools reported the presence in their building of a sworn law enforcement officer for the 2013-2014 year. In the 2015-2016 school year⁴⁰, this increased to 30% of Connecticut high schools, 18% of middle schools, and 14% of elementary schools. A 2018 report on survey data collected by the Office of Legislative Research from 113 of 170 districts in Connecticut shows that 70% were using SROs.⁴¹

Per state law, SROs are sworn police officers. Required training for SROs in Connecticut consists of traditional law enforcement officer training and is overseen by the Police Officer Standards Training Council. As of 2017, SROs and local police officers were mandated to receive 14 hours on “the handling of juvenile matters.”⁴² However, the only specifics for SRO training listed in state law related to education and policing indicates that “such training shall include drug detection and gang identification.”⁴³

Connecticut law also requires that “each local or regional board of education that assigns a school resource officer to any school ... shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with local law enforcement agency regarding the role and responsibility of such school resource officer.”⁴⁴ The MOU must include “provisions addressing daily interactions between students and school personnel with school resource officers.”⁴⁵ MOUs are widely considered important tools to clarify how SROs should operate in an educational environment.⁴⁶ However, most school districts employing SROs do not make MOUs available on their websites. There has not been a public review of MOUs since 2013, and there is currently no requirement that the MOUs be publicly accessible on school district websites or another centralized location.⁴⁷ This means that key stakeholders such as students and families lack easy access to information regarding their rights in relation to interacting with police in schools.

Overall, police are present in a substantial proportion of Connecticut schools. These police are largely the same police who are on the streets - they come from the same department, receive the same training, and report to the same chief. There is a lack of evidence on whether their attitudes or approaches to the job differ significantly from other law enforcement professionals.

The Impact of SROs in Schools

What is the impact of SROs on students’ safety in schools? SROs are categorically police officers and, as such, their prevalence in schools raises questions regarding the safety of children, especially children of color, children living in poverty, and immigrant children. Decades of evidence demonstrates racial and ethnic disparities in policing. Black and Latine⁴⁸ communities (youth and adults) are disproportionately subject to pedestrian and vehicle stops, citations, searches, arrests, and incarceration.⁴⁹ In addition to the rate of police contact, the nature of police contact harms communities of color. Incidents of police violence disproportionately impact Black individuals, who are 2.3 to 5 times more likely to be killed by police than whites.⁵⁰ Native and Latine populations are also at higher risk of being killed by police.⁵¹

Even if a young person does not personally experience unjust treatment by police, the experiences of others in their community can have vicarious effects.⁵² Such institutional and physical violence has detrimental effects on youth, causing elevated levels of stress, fear, trauma, and anxiety that strain cognitive functions and overall health.⁵³ Discriminatory police practices also shape the worldviews of young people of color, fostering distrust of authorities and inducing feelings of powerlessness.⁵⁴ Compared to white peers, Asian, Black, and Latine students are more likely to report feeling less safe with the police in their communities. For example, only 9% of Black youth, and 17% of Latine youth, and 20% of Asian youth in California responded that the statement “the police make me feel safer” was “very much” true – compared to 36% of white youth.⁵⁵ Given these realities, it is imperative to carefully examine the impact of police in schools. Evidence suggests that the presence of SROs in schools does little to improve children’s safety and may in fact reduce it.⁵⁶

SROs Do Not Guarantee Physical Safety

There is extremely limited evidence on the effectiveness of SROs in deterring violence. There is no empirical support for the suggestion that SROs prevent school shootings.⁵⁷ Research on averted school shootings – incidents planned by students and then prevented – suggests that the key is having trusted adults whom other students can inform.⁵⁸ One study found that students are much more likely to report a planned shooting to school staff members; they tell a police officer only rarely.⁵⁹ There is also little evidence on whether SROs can stop an active shooter or lower deaths or injuries when a school shooting happens. In 197 instances of gun violence at U.S. schools since 1999, SROs intervened successfully in only three instances.⁶⁰ A recent study found that among all schools that experienced a school shooting between 1999 and 2018, the number of injuries and deaths was actually about 2.5 times higher in schools that had an SRO.⁶¹ In sum, there is little evidence that SROs reduce the likelihood or mitigate the impact of school shootings.

SROs Can Negatively Impact Safety

In the triad model concept advanced by NASRO, in addition to their law enforcement role, SROs will act as another mentor, educator, or counselor. However, this assumption ignores the fact that Black youth, Latine youth, immigrant youth, indigenous youth, and youth living in poverty often come to school with harmful experiences with police that may perpetuate racial inequalities in educational, health, and social outcomes.⁶² By putting police in schools, we are exacerbating these issues. SROs are more likely to reproduce broader patterns of police targeting and criminalizing Black, Indigenous, Latine, and students of color while implementing policies supposedly designed to keep society “safe.”⁶³

SROs are more likely to work in schools serving high numbers of students of color

SROs are disproportionately placed in schools serving predominantly students of color, as opposed to schools serving predominantly white populations.⁶⁴ Among middle and high schools where more than 75% of students were Black, 54.1% had at least one SRO or security officer on campus. By comparison, among middle and high schools where over 75% of students were white, only 32% had these personnel.⁶⁵

SROs are associated with higher rates of exclusionary discipline and arrest

Additionally, numerous studies show that the presence of SROs in schools is associated with higher rates of exclusionary discipline – suspensions and expulsions – increased risk of students being pushed into the “school to prison pipeline”⁶⁶ Students of color across the nation, and in Connecticut in particular, are disproportionately subject to these exclusionary discipline practices.⁶⁷ In Connecticut, suspension and expulsion rates for Black and Latino male students are two to three times that of their white counterparts. The suspension rate for Black female students is around five times that of their white counterparts.⁶⁸ The presence of SROs is associated with increased racial disparity in suspension rates.⁶⁹

SROs also contribute to the criminalization of youth conduct. SROs create the potential to escalate school disciplinary issues – even minor ones – into arrestable offenses.⁷⁰ In one survey of SROs, 77% percent reported that they had arrested a student simply to calm them down⁷¹ and 55% reported arresting students for minor offenses simply because the teacher wanted the student to be arrested.⁷² The majority of school-based arrests are for non-violent offenses, such as disruptive behavior.⁷³ Relatedly, studies show that the presence of an SRO increases the number of arrests for “disorderly conduct” – an ambiguous, and thus subjectively applied, characterization of behavior.⁷⁴ This may be unsurprising since police are trained to focus on law and order, not student mental health or social and emotional well-being; SROs are using the tools they have. These tools are often wholly incompatible with schooling. The Advancement Project has documented 61 incidents of police brutality in schools over the past ten years.⁷⁵ Overall, research suggests that SROs’ potential to escalate conflicts puts students at risk.

SROs are associated with increased school arrests, and thus may accelerate the school-to-prison pipeline.⁷⁶ For example, schools that employed police had an arrest rate 3.5 times that of schools without police.⁷⁷ As with exclusionary discipline, students of color are disproportionately subject to school arrests.⁷⁸ In Connecticut, Black and Latine students are arrested at 4 times and 2 times the rate of white students.⁷⁹

This pipeline extends further for undocumented students, as contact with SROs can put them at risk of detention and deportation.⁸⁰ This risk is heightened in communities where local law enforcement is contracted with Immigration and Customs Enforcement under 287(g) agreements – which allows the Department of Homeland security to deputize selected state and local law enforcement officers to enforce federal immigration law.⁸¹ Since 2013, COPS Grants have required recipients to sign at 287(g) agreement in order to receive funds.⁸² There are several documented cases of SROs putting immigrant students at risk of “school-to-deportation pipeline.”⁸³ Trump Administration officials have also publicly urged SROs and school administrators to support the administration’s increased efforts to target undocumented individuals for deportation.⁸⁴

Research consistently demonstrates that racial and ethnic disparities in discipline are not the consequence of “differences in rates or types of misbehavior” by students of color and white students⁸⁵ but rather – conscious or unconscious – racial and cultural biases.⁸⁶ Studies show how SROs’ implicit bias criminalizes students of color and students living in poverty. School police

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in more suburban and homogenously white districts were largely concerned about protecting youth from external dangers. However, for school police in urban districts serving larger populations of students of color, “the students were the danger. Their work seemed to be much more about policing and the behavior management of the students rather than protecting them.”⁸⁷

To combat these negative consequences, many states have enacted policies to increase training to police, including SROs – especially implicit bias training. However, most officer training programs have not been rigorously evaluated and there is little evidence that implicit bias or similarly focused training is effective.⁸⁸ The limited research available shows that increased training is not associated with changes in behavior or reductions in racial disparities.⁸⁹

SROs’ presence can infringe on students’ rights

With few specific guidelines regarding the role and responsibilities of SROs, individuals in these positions often have wide latitude in how they carry out their job. The discretion SROs have in schools can lead to police overreach.⁹⁰ Because legal standards for searches and interrogations have a much lower standard within schools, SROs may operate with more latitude than other police officers, thus posing a threat to students’ civil rights.⁹¹

In addition, SROs’ presence in schools raises concerns regarding information sharing between schools and the legal system. “For example, schools are encouraged to collaborate with law enforcement by assessing student records for potential criminal activity.”⁹² SROs may also exploit their positions of authority over students – using them as informants.⁹³ According to a recent national survey, 48% of SROs monitor the social media use of the students at their school site.⁹⁴ The Waterbury CT Police Department website even promotes this information sharing as part of the city’s SRO program – “SRO’s have also played a major role in gathering intelligence and forwarding that to the Criminal Investigations Bureau to assist in juvenile-related crimes.”⁹⁵

SROs Interfere with Education

In addition to effects on students’ civil rights and safety, the presence of SROs and exclusionary discipline negatively impacts students’ academic achievement and can accelerate future misbehavior, truancy, and drop-out rates.⁹⁶ In particular, students who have contact with the criminal legal system through arrests and searches experience worse schooling outcomes than those who do not. Arresting students doubles their risk of dropping out.⁹⁷ The consequences of a school arrest extend far beyond youths’ public school outcomes and include the loss of access to higher education and funding, job eligibility, access to public housing, and increasing both the likelihood and consequence of future law enforcement contact.⁹⁸

It is not just arrests that have an impact on students, but more fundamentally, constant police contact in schools – spaces that are supposed to be safe and nurturing. The presence of police shifts the focus from learning and supporting students to over-disciplining and criminalizing them. Regular police contact, even if this contact is in passing, affects how Black and Latine youth perceive themselves, their school, and law enforcement.⁹⁹ Students of color have reported feeling the police are there to protect the school from them.¹⁰⁰ If schools socialize youth to believe that they are the target of SROs, students no longer perceive schools as welcoming or nurturing places nor educators as caring adults.¹⁰¹ Relatedly, other research shows that the presence of SROs reduced students’ feelings of school connectedness – the belief that adults and peers in the school care about them as humans.¹⁰² School connectedness is an important protective factor – young people who feel connected to their school are less likely to engage in behaviors that are harmful to themselves or others, are more likely to have better academic achievement, attendance, and persistence.¹⁰³ By alienating students, creating a sense of mistrust, and forming adversarial relationships, policing in schools can decrease, rather than foster, safe school environments where students are able to thrive emotionally, socially, and academically.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, trauma and anxiety symptoms can increase with the frequency of police contact, regardless of where that contact occurs.¹⁰⁵ For many students of color, police presence in schools can cause re-traumatization given their negative experiences with law enforcement in their communities.¹⁰⁶ The racialized disproportionalities in discipline and policing can cause what is referred to as racial trauma - the exposure to race-based adversity, discrimination, and stress.¹⁰⁷ Increased anxiety and trauma are harmful to youths’ development and learning and can result in decreased academic achievement.¹⁰⁸

Lastly, the focus on SROs has also diverted attention and funds from other areas of education that could support students. Between 1999 and 2015, the percentage of students who reported security guards or assigned police officers in their schools increased from 54% to 70 while the number of school counselors increased by only 5%, after adjusting for the growth in student enrollment.¹⁰⁹ There are also more sworn law enforcement officers than social workers in our nation’s schools, with many states employing two-to-three times as many police officers in than social workers in schools.¹¹⁰ Over 4,800 schools reported employing more school police and security than school-based mental health providers.¹¹¹ Across the country 1.7 million students are in schools with police but no counselors; 3 million are in schools with police but no nurses; 6 million students are in schools with police but no school psychologists; 10 million students are in schools with police but no social workers.¹¹² Compared to white students, Latine, Asian, and Black students are more likely

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to attend schools where the districts chose SROs over counselors.¹¹³ “Every dollar spent on [policing in schools] is a dollar that could instead be invested in teachers, guidance counselors, and health professionals that support,” rather than criminalize, youth.¹¹⁴ A clear picture emerges where schools serving predominantly white students invest in mental health supports for students, while those serving mostly children of color instead prioritize a police presence.

Recommendations

The research shows that policing in schools undercuts the development of a healthy, just, nurturing environment, especially for students of color. Evidence-based alternatives to school policing are grounded in child development, relationship-building, and justice that address safety concerns in such a way that protects the well-being, dignity, and human rights of all students, families, and school personnel.¹¹⁵ The following recommendations are based on the calls of youth activists of color and their allies who have been fighting for the disentanglement of policing and schooling for decades.

Remove Police from Schools and Divest from SRO Programs

- **Schools, districts, and states must remove police from schools and divest from SRO programs.** The removal of police from schools should be enshrined in policy at the local, state, and federal level.
 - An example of federal-level policy that could prompt such change is the Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act (S. 4360/H.R. 7848). Introduced in July 2020, this act would prohibit federal funding from being used for law enforcement personnel in schools and instead would award \$2.5 billion in grants toward evidence-based and trauma-informed services to address the needs of marginalized youth and improve academic outcomes.¹¹⁶
- In addition to the removal of SROs, **districts must craft clear policies should specify when and how police are allowed on school grounds.** Policies and MOUs with police departments should: limit the cases when law enforcement can be called into a school; protect school personnel if they refuse to cooperate or facilitate in the criminalization of a student or their family member on campus by local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies; and establish particular safeguards to ensure students’ human and constitutional rights are protected.¹¹⁷

Invest in Student Support Services

- **Schools, districts, and states must invest in student support services and staff trained to ensure positive and proactively safe school climates, such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, behavior interventionists, and/or other support staff.**¹¹⁸ Unlike police, these professionals undergo years of training, including extensive study of child and developmental psychology, mental health, trauma, and myriad other subjects directly applicable to nurturing youth, including how to safely restrain if

someone is a threat to themselves or others.¹¹⁹ Instead of disciplinarians, these professionals can understand what the student's needs are – whether it be a therapist, a dentist, help with housing or food.¹²⁰ These individuals are fundamentally more qualified to respond to students' needs and support them in a humanistic and holistic way that fosters school connectedness and ultimately increases school safety.¹²¹

- **State and federal policy should at minimum require that schools employ the number of support staff that meets evidence-based professional to student ratios** recommended by professional associations such as the National Association of School Psychologists, School Social Work Association of America, American School Counselor Association, and American Nursing Association.¹²² Funds allocated for SROs and police departments should be reinvested via these policies initiatives to ensure all requirements are adequately funded.

Invest in Alternative Approaches to Safety and Discipline

- **Schools should invest in support staff other than police who can and do prevent and address safety concerns and conflicts.**¹²³ Successful models include student safety coaches¹²⁴ and intervention workers¹²⁵ - roles responsible for proactive needs identification and de-escalation.
- **Invest in alternative approaches to safety and discipline rooted in holistic anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and liberatory knowledge and values.**¹²⁶ Examples of evidence-based alternative approaches include restorative justice, transformative justice, and trauma-sensitive or trauma-informed schooling.¹²⁷ At the center of each of these approaches is the development of: healthy relationships; processes that support the healing of harm and transformation of conflict; and just and equitable learning environments that confront oppressive structures and systems.¹²⁸
- **State and federal policy and funding initiatives must incentivize the adoption of alternative approaches and the accompanying ongoing education of all members of a school community - school personnel, students, families, and community members.**

Engage in a Deliberate, Effective Process to Transition Away from Policing in Schools

- The complete removal of police without the adequate investment in alternative student support services and safety and discipline structures will be detrimental to the success of these alternatives and the overall movement for police-free schools. A lack of robust investment in and development of alternative structures and capacity will leave a vacuum that breeds uncertainty, risking the school community's perception of safety thus perpetuating the falsehood that police are necessary. Schools and districts must follow best practices for change management which includes allocating the appropriate resources.
- To reiterate, **complete removal of police is the end goal, but the simultaneous process of divesting and investing must be carried out deliberately.**

- **Decision-making around transition processes must take into consideration power dynamics and ensure that all voices from the school community are meaningfully incorporated – with student voice as the driving force.**
- A deliberate process, for example, may begin with first establishing a new MOU that limits SROs' involvement in schools as well as information sharing between schools and police departments. Schools and districts may train staff, students, and community members about the appropriate roles of and their rights relative to SROs. The MOU and explanation of SROs' roles should be easily accessible on schools' and districts' websites. Schools may then begin a participatory initiative to decide which student support service personnel to hire and which alternative approaches to safety and discipline to adopt.¹²⁹ Schools may begin the ongoing education process for personnel, students, and families around these alternative approaches while building new organizational structures to support the integration of these approaches into day-to-day school life. As the capacity and structures become more robust, schools may begin removing SROs and limiting police involvement.

Conclusion

The increasing presence of police in schools has been motivated by federal funding initiatives and fears of school shootings. Despite the largely well-intentioned use of SROs to ensure school safety, safety cannot exist amidst a system of policing that criminalizes youth of color and undermines the quality relationships, and just and healthy cultures necessary for students to flourish emotionally, socially, and academically.¹³⁰ Instead, the use of SROs in schools reproduces unjust racialized patterns of discipline and state violence that exists outside of schools.¹³¹ White youth and youth of color are having vastly different experiences of policing out of school, vastly different perceptions of police in school, and thus vastly different educational opportunities.

We must disentangle the systems of policing and schooling. This removal of police from schools must be carried out in conjunction with new, robustly funded, liberatory policies that ensure all students are socially, psychologically, and physically safe. That is, creating safe schools for all students means avoiding overly simple reactionary solutions and doing the deep work of dismantling oppressive structures and building new structures to proactively address systemic root causes and unmet needs that lead to threats to safety.

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- ¹ Diliberti, M., Jackson, M., Correa, S., & Padgett, Z. (2019). *Crime, violence, discipline, and safety in U.S. public school: Findings from the school survey on crime and safety: 2017-2018 (NCES 2019-061)*. Washington DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Note, because SROs are not required to register with a national database nor are police departments or school systems required to report how many SROs they use, all data presented here are estimates based on schools' self-reports.
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- ³ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, n.d.
- ⁴ 42 U.S.C. §3796dd-8
- ⁵ Conn. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 10-170-10-233m
- ⁶ Conn. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 10-170-10-244a
- ⁷ ACLU, 2017
- ⁸ Diliberti, et al., 2019.
- ⁹ National Association of School Resource Officers, 2020a
- ¹⁰ Counts, J., Randall, K. N., Ryan, J. B., & Katsiyannis, A. (2018). School resource officers in public schools: a national review. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 41(4), 405-430.; James, N. & McCallion, G. (2013). *School resource officers: Law enforcement officers in schools*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
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- ¹³ Brock, Kriger, & Miró, 2018; James & McCallion, 2018
- ¹⁴ ACLU, 2017
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