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School Resource Officers and the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Evaluating Responses to School Safety Concerns in an Age of School Shootings and Renewed Calls for Racial Justice

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Justice Policy Institute

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1. Executive Summary

When instances of gun violence and school shootings reached a pinnacle in the early 90s, many schools across the United States responded to the crisis by further implementing School Resource Officers (SROs). The influx of SROs in American schools, blending the criminal justice and education systems, has not only been largely ineffective in preventing tragic events, such as mass shootings, but has instead criminalized the acts of children, exacerbating juvenile arrests and intensifying distrust between communities and police.

In this report, we first trace the development of SROs to demonstrate how their presence is intertwined with the disproportionate policing of students of color. We call into focus the robust literature emphasizing SROs relation to the school-to-prison pipeline—policies that increase the probability of students interacting with the larger criminal justice system—and study how policies that increase the presence of SROs exacerbate these issues. In our examination of SROs, we uncover that the lack of standardized practices and functions of SROs contributes to their unequal, problematic outcomes. Furthermore, our analysis of SROs elucidates the “Columbine Effect,” which describes how fear of future mass violence contributes to heightened SRO presence and stricter criminalization of students. Despite the tendency of this response, our research points to the inconclusive effects these measures have on preventing acts of mass violence and find that they instead largely magnify negative outcomes for students of color.

Recognizing the harmful effects of SROs and their ineffectiveness, our report then interrogates why SROs remain a dominant fixture in schools and go-to response to calls for increased safety. Our research finds that parents and educators are a key stakeholder in matters of education policy and largely support, or at least do not detest, the existence of SROs. Additionally, we find that the non-profit National Association for School Resources Officer

(NASRO) bolsters the public reputation of SROs and helps maintain their everlasting presence. Accordingly, we claim that shifts in public opinion that recognize the pitfalls of SROs and the benefits of alternative methods are necessary to advance meaningful policy change.

The final section of our report charts paths forward beyond SROs, examining the forces against SROs and the promise of alternative methods for school safety. Our research reveals that in the wake of the Uvalde shooting, there is growing support for the measures that consider alternatives to SROs. Moreover, we find convincing evidence that models that prioritize student physical and mental health and restorative justice practices provide feasible, just, and more effective approaches to public safety. Finally, we explore the measures taken by California's Oakland Unified School District to remove all SROs and transition to alternative safety models through the 2020 passage of the George Floyd Resolution. Our case study reveals the importance of sustained altering of public opinion to expose the problems of SROs, continued organizing to build necessary political power, commitment to a larger shift in school culture, and community buy-in from a variety of key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders.

Ultimately, our report reveals the paths forward to build more equitable school safety policies in the wake of growing concerns for the safety of children. By embedding the policy issue of SROs within both the context of the rising number of acts of mass violence and a reckoning for racial justice, we reveal how uplifting just, alternative models of school safety can meet this critical moment and promote equitable outcomes. Our findings underscore the need for investment in the shaping of public opinion among key stakeholders, community organizing to influence policymakers, and thoughtful implementation of alternative practices as we transition away from SROs.

2. Policy Recommendations

2.1 Utilize MOA/MOUs to Standardize SRO Roles

These crucial documents, which have often been underutilized, are a critical component of defining what is acceptable in the role of SROs. This allows for buy-in between all stakeholders, including parents and students. Without clear expectations set on the national, state, and district level, SROs are rendered ineffective and sometimes overtly harmful to students and their future outcomes. Memorandums of Understanding also make it easier to advocate for further reform by allowing advocates to point to the specific problems with SROs in a given area. Finally, they make it easier to hold SROs accountable when problems arise.

2.2 Implement Restorative Justice Programming and Non-Disciplinary Professionals

In some instances, the rules established for SROs under Memorandums of Understanding will not be enough, and this calls for replacing some existing use of SROs with Restorative Justice programming. As we explore in our case studies and interviews, RJ programming has often been shown to be more effective at addressing the specific needs of students than SROs. We have found that, in many instances, SROs are required to serve in non-law enforcement roles, too. For example, in Oakland, CA schools, dismantled SRO departments have been repurposed to strengthen school culture and monitor PPE stocks throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, even without abolishing SROs, using some of their funding to hire non-disciplinary professionals can produce better outcomes for students and lessen the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline.

2.3 Change by the Culture by Including All Stakeholders

Despite the importance of Recommendation #1 and #2, we acknowledge it is not enough to devise legal regulation, implement community programming, and bolster social and health-based resources for students alone to combat the school-to-prison pipeline. Changing a community's approaches to discipline, safety, and in-school policing requires a cultural shift. This cultural shift requires a fundamental change in the collective approach to governing student behavior which often must be grounded on an awareness of the harmful effects of excessive disciplinary action and the value of non-punitive, restorative alternatives. As we explore in our case studies, RJ programming, whether or not it is followed by the removal of SROs, is most successful in motivated communities with long-term plans for implementation, especially when acting with local advocates.

2.4 Change Key Stakeholder, Especially Parent, Opinion of SROs

Although the effects of SRO presence and the school-to-prison pipeline most visibly impact students, when engaging with community stakeholders, we recognize the necessity of achieving buy-in from parents and educators. School safety is an extremely salient and emotional issue in the United States, given its history with mass shootings in schools. Parents carry that emotional burden more than any other community stakeholder. Therefore, it is crucial to achieve the trust of parents who care about their children's safety but ultimately want the best for their children's future outcomes as well as the educators working within the schools. In the case of Oakland, CA, over a decade of organizing and education campaigns about the detrimental effects of SROs was necessary to create the conditions for meaningful SRO policy change and community buy-in.

3. School Resource Officers

3.1 History of Implementation

The utilization of school resource officers was popularized in the 1950s as a response to the integration of schools resulting from the Civil Rights movement.¹ During this period, as de jure forms of segregation were deconstructed, white parents and politicians asserted that Black children would bring disorder into white schools.² As a result, school administrators implemented SROs as a form of “social and economic control” with tactics to police primarily Black and Latino students.³ The first case of police officers being permanently assigned to schools was in 1953 in Flint, Michigan, where local leaders argued that officers would stimulate a sense of community between the local police department and city youth.⁴ The new policy garnered positive media coverage and sparked the establishment of similar programs in the 1960s in school districts in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Los Angeles, California.⁵

The new reliance on law enforcement to discipline students within schools yielded significant, prejudiced patterns. In fact, efforts to station police officers were targeted almost exclusively at poor Black and Latino neighborhoods despite guidance from a committee on juvenile justice in 1957 encouraging police officers to be stationed in every public school.⁶ Additionally, New York City Police Department officials portrayed Black and Latino students in

¹ Megan French-Marcelin and Sarah Hinger, “Bullies in Blue: The Origins and Consequences of School Policing” (New York, NY: American Civil Liberties Union, April 2017).

² French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue,” 3.

³ French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue,” 3.

⁴ “History of School Policing & The School-to-Prison Pipeline” (Advancement Project & Alliance for Educational Justice, n.d.), <https://policefreeschools.org/timeline/>.

⁵ Sherlin Kathy, “History of School Resource Officer Program” (NARSO, Inc, 1998), http://blackfootpolice.org/sro/sro_history.html.

⁶ French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue,” 3.

low-income neighborhoods as “‘dangerous delinquents’ and ‘undesirables’ capable of ‘corroding school morale.’”⁷

The issue of the disproportionate impacts of the rise of SROs on students of color in the 1950s and 1960s was further exacerbated by the War on Drugs in the 1970s. The War on Drugs was a series of laws increasing penalties and enforcement for drug possession and usage. Drug Policy Alliance argues that the War on Drugs “provided a moral, non-racially explicit justification and funding to increase the presence and roles in schools across the country.”⁸

SROs, sometimes posing as high school students, normalized conducting searches in schools for drugs and arresting students for even minimal amounts of marijuana.⁹ Like with police outside of schools, SRO presence was disproportionately high in neighborhoods of color, and enforcement was far stricter to people of color than their white counterparts.¹⁰

Furthermore, the popularization of the Broken Windows Theory in the 1980s, which posited that the enforcement of minor crimes would prevent serious crimes down the road, established SROs as the first line of defense against a wave of future crime and paved the way for “zero-tolerance policies” that disproportionately fell on students of color.¹¹ The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 exacerbated the racial disparity in enforcement by allowing law enforcement to legally engage youth based on “assumptions of future

⁷ French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue,” 3.

⁸ “Snapshot: The War on Drugs Meets the Education System” (Drug Policy Alliance, n.d.), uprootingthedrugwar.org.

⁹ Blaine Harden, “Va. Schools Using Undercover Police To Combat Drugs,” *The Washington Post*, March 22, 1978, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1978/03/22/va-schools-using-undercover-police-to-combat-drugs/c0784d05-cf4a-4728-ac7d-061a847a80ed/>.

¹⁰ Wendy Gomez, “Abolishing School Resource Officers Amidst the Black Lives Matter Movement: A History and Case Study in Oakland and Los Angeles,” *Journal of Public and International Affairs*, May 5, 2021, <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/abolishing-school-resource-officers-amidst-black-lives-matter-movement-history-and-case-study>.

¹¹ French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue,” 6–7.

behavior.”¹² The lack of a definition for “pre-delinquency” coupled with officers’ bias led to minority students being disproportionately punished for infractions, no matter the severity.¹³

First marked by the establishment of the federal Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), federal support for school resource officers grew in the 1990s and continues to this day. COPS was first formed to oversee the Violent Crime Control and Enforcement Act of 1994, which allocated \$9 billion to increase the presence of SROs and advance “community policing.”¹⁴ The 1990s also witnessed the creation of the 1994 Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) and the COPS in Schools (CIS) program in 1999.¹⁵ Since 1999, state and federal governments have invested nearly \$2 billion in SROs, with the number of SROs growing from 9,445 in 1996 to 14,337 in 2003.¹⁶ That number is now closer to 19,000 across the country.¹⁷ Additionally, in February of 2022, Republican Congressman Chris Jacobs of New York introduced H.R.6712, the School Resource Officer Act of 2022.¹⁸ If enacted, the bill would allocate \$500 million to the Justice Department’s COPS program each year between 2023 and 2026, requiring that at least 30 percent of the program’s hiring dollars be spent on SRO salaries and benefits. Though the legislation has yet to move out of the committee, it has garnered cosponsorships from a number of house representatives, including New York Republican Elise Stefanik, who made headlines in May 2021 for replacing Liz Cheney as chair of the House Republican Conference.¹⁹ Supporters of the bill cite the importance of strengthening

¹² French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue,” 5.

¹³ Gomez, “Abolishing School Resource Officers Amidst the Black Lives Matter Movement.”

¹⁴ French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue,” 8.

¹⁵ Michelle Mbekeani-Wiley, “Handcuffs in Hallways: The State of Policing in Chicago Public Schools” (Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, February 2017).

¹⁶ Lisa Thurau and Lany Or, “Two Billion Dollars Later” (Strategies for Youth, October 2019); Mbekeani-Wiley, “Handcuffs in Hallways.”

¹⁷ Josh Sanburn, “School Resource Officer Fired for South Carolina Arrest,” *Time*, October 29, 2015, <https://time.com/4093517/south-carolina-school-police-ben-fields/>.

¹⁸ Chris Jacobs, “Text - H.R.6712 - 117th Congress (2021–2022): School Resource Officer Act of 2022,” legislation, November 1, 2022, 2021/2022, <http://www.congress.gov/>.

¹⁹ “Jacobs Introduces Legislation to Support School Resource Officers,” Representative Chris Jacobs, February 16, 2022, [http://jacobs.house.gov/media/press-releases/jacobs-introduces-legislation-support-school-resource-officers](http://jacobs.house.gov/media/press-releases/jacobs-introduces-legislation-support-school-resource-officers;);

relationships between student populations and local police forces. Notably, the Obama administration warned districts that disciplinary policies that disproportionately impact people of color or those with disabilities may be in violation of civil rights statutes. However, the Trump administration rescinded this warning.²⁰

3.2 The Decentralized Training of SROs

The National Association for School Resources Officers (NASRO) is a not-for-profit organization that educates and trains school resource officers to provide safety and security to schools across the globe.²¹ NASRO established a basic curriculum for officers to assume a “triad” role, delineating their responsibilities into serving as a “teacher, informal counselor, and law enforcement officer.”²² However, training curriculum for SROS is highly variable across the United States, leaving these officers with varying degrees of capability and confidence in performing their wide range of responsibilities.²³

Before a police officer is deployed to a school, NASRO advises that they complete a basic forty-hour course over a five-day period that centers on de-escalation techniques, underscoring the importance of understanding the teen brain, and the role of law enforcement in a school environment, while also focusing on strategies for mentorship, informal counseling of students, and classroom management.²⁴ This training does come with a cost—\$495 for

Barbara Sprunt, “New York’s Elise Stefanik Replaces Cheney In Republican Leadership Spot,” *NPR*, May 14, 2021, sec. Politics,

<https://www.npr.org/2021/05/14/996540840/new-yorks-elise-stefanik-installed-as-new-gop-conference-chair>.

²⁰ Stefanie Dion Jones, “The Prevalence and the Price of Police in Schools,” October 27, 2020,

<https://education.uconn.edu/2020/10/27/the-prevalence-and-the-price-of-police-in-schools/>.

²¹ “About NASRO,” accessed October 17, 2022, <https://www.nasro.org/main/about-nasro/>.

²² “About NASRO.”

²³ Kandace T. Jones, “School Resource Officers’ Reports of Training and Perceptions of High School Students with Disabilities” (Utah State University, 2022),

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2680245394/abstract/92757CEA58F2489APO/1>.

²⁴ Jones, “School Resource Officers’ Reports of Training and Perceptions of High School Students with Disabilities.”

non-NASRO members and \$445 for NASRO members.²⁵ The NASRO also offers a more intensive course that is twenty-four hours over three days and focuses on the topics like “(a) learn strategies for working with school administrators on crime prevention and problem-solving, (b) develop an understanding of what causes and how to solve school violence, and (c) conduct site assessments of school buildings.”²⁶ The cost of this advanced course is \$395 for non-NASRO members and \$345 for NASRO members.²⁷ Notably, the NASRO highlights that the organization does not certify SROs, so participation in their programs tend to depend on their availability in different states where “there is no expiration date on their training, no requirements for renewal, and no revocations for misconduct.”²⁸ As a result, the NASRO holds no accountability for the officers they train and subjects them to no further education as values of what the role of an SRO is in a school might evolve over time.

Furthermore, despite the fact that these training programs are recommended by the U.S. Department of Education, there is a complete lack of centralized training requirements for SROs.²⁹ As a result, a 2018 review of national SRO policies found that only fifteen states possess legislation specifying SRO training requirements.³⁰ Of the fifteen states, six specify the number of hours required for training, with California, Indiana, Missouri, South Carolina, and Tennessee requiring at least 40 hours of training.³¹ The review also found that seventeen states have “no laws on SRO certification, use, or training” and nine states “only require that SROs be certified

²⁵ Jones, “School Resource Officers’ Reports of Training and Perceptions of High School Students with Disabilities.”

²⁶ Jones, “School Resource Officers’ Reports of Training and Perceptions of High School Students with Disabilities.”

²⁷ Jones, “School Resource Officers’ Reports of Training and Perceptions of High School Students with Disabilities.”

²⁸ “School Resource Officers’ Reports of Training and Perceptions of High School Students with Disabilities - ProQuest,” accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www-proquest-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pagepdf/2680245394?accountid=11311>.

²⁹ Jones, “School Resource Officers’ Reports of Training and Perceptions of High School Students with Disabilities.”

³⁰ Jennifer Counts et al., “School Resource Officers in Public Schools: A National Review,” *Education and Treatment of Children* 41, no. 4 (2018): 414, <https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2018.0023>.

³¹ Counts et al., “School Resource Officers in Public Schools,” 414.

law enforcement officers.”³² Therefore, laws pertaining to the training for SROs, such as the programs established by the NASRO, are highly inconsistent and even often absent from state to state. Moreover, each state varies on the quality of training SROs undergo. While firearm or active shooter training is required in some states, very few make training in de-escalation techniques or conflict resolution a requirement.³³ In addition, Maryland and Utah are the only states with explicit provision for implicit bias, disability awareness, or diversity and cultural awareness training.³⁴ In Connecticut, a law requires SROs to undergo training regarding children’s mental, social, emotional, and behavioral health needs.³⁵ Even within states, oftentimes two schools in the same district will be staffed by two different police departments or by officers from both departments. Thus, one district may need to set different training requirements or expectations for SRO behavior for each of their schools in order to join the varying disciplinary approaches and procedures of each working officer.³⁶

The lack of training mandates in many states, inconsistent training curriculums, and the out-of-pocket costs of many trainings contribute to a notable lack of preparedness among SROs. In fact, a 2018 Education Week Research Survey of SROs exhibited that “about 1 in 5 respondents said they didn’t have sufficient training to work in a school environment, only 39 percent said they had training on child trauma, and about half said they hadn’t been trained to work with special education students.”³⁷ Additionally, a study from the International Association of Chiefs of Police found that in 76 percent of respondent states, juvenile justice training was

³² Counts et al., “School Resource Officers in Public Schools,” 414.

³³ Ben Erwin and Zeke Perez Jr., “A Turning Point: School Resource Officers and State Policy,” *EdNote* (blog), July 9, 2020, <https://ednote.ecs.org/a-turning-point-school-resource-officers-and-state-policy/>.

³⁴ Erwin and Perez Jr., “A Turning Point.”

³⁵ Erwin and Perez Jr., “A Turning Point.”

³⁶ Madeline Titus (Community Mediation and Restorative Services, Inc.), Zoom interview, November 4, 2022.

³⁷ Stephen Sawchuk, “School Resource Officers (SROs), Explained: Their Duties, Effectiveness, and More,” *Education Week*, November 16, 2021, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-resource-officer-sro-duties-effectiveness>.

not required for law enforcement beyond the basic training received at police academy.³⁸

According to juvenile justice advocates, including Director of Strategies for Youth Lisa Thurua, SROs are not only unprepared to work with students, who are largely seeking mentorship and parental relationships with law enforcement, but approach young people with hostility and distrust.³⁹ Considering the wide range of duties required of an SRO, it makes sense that many feel as though minimal voluntary training or a lack of specialized training renders them unprepared to serve children in a school setting and serve the roles of law enforcement officer, counselor, and teacher.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU), an agreement reached between school district administrations and local law enforcement agencies, is a crucial piece of the SRO puzzle. These memoranda essentially amount to SRO rulebooks. And though they can vary from district to district, they tend to dictate the purview of SROs, the disciplinary tools at their disposal, procedures for hiring and rehiring SROs, administrative and fiscal policies, and more. In recent years, a number of progressive enclaves have begun to amend their MOUs in order to curb the criminalization of students, particularly those of color. In New York City, teachers are now tasked with addressing nearly all student misconduct, while SROs are told to use “diversionary tactics in place of arrests or summonses for low-level offenses or misdemeanors, including graffiti, marijuana possession, or alcohol consumption.”⁴⁰ In Chicago, SROs are now entirely prohibited from intervening in school discipline.⁴¹ And a recent Massachusetts law establishing a

³⁸ Joseph Ryan et al., “The Growing Concerns Regarding School Resource Officers,” *Intervention in School and Clinic* 53 (June 11, 2017): 105345121770210, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451217702108>.

³⁹ Lisa Thurua (Strategies for Youth), Zoom interview, December 6, 2022.

⁴⁰ Stephen Sawchuk, “School Police Operations to Get an Overhaul in Two Big-City Districts,” *Education Week*, July 3, 2019, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-police-operations-to-get-an-overhaul-in-two-big-city-districts/2019/07>.

⁴¹ Yana Kunichoff, “A First Look at the \$33 Million Deal on Chicago School Police,” *Chalkbeat Chicago*, January 15, 2020, sec. District management, <https://chicago.chalkbeat.org/2020/1/15/21121728/here-s-a-first-look-at-the-33-million-deal-between-chicago-schools-and-the-city-s-police-department>.

commission to rework MOUs statewide states, “school resource officers shall not: (i) serve as school disciplinarians, enforcers of school regulations or in place of licensed school psychologists, psychiatrists or counselors; and (ii) use police powers to address traditional school discipline issues, including non-violent disruptive behavior.”⁴² The previously mentioned national review of SRO policies concluded with recommendations to establish an MOU to outline specific roles and responsibilities for SROs in addition to creating standardized training that prepares SROs to meet the unique needs of students.⁴³

3.3 The Effects of Increasing SRO Presence

3.3.1 Positive Outcomes of Increased SRO Presence

In 2013, crime policy analyst Nathan James and social policy specialist Gail McCallion of the Congressional Research Service (CRS) presented an extensive brief for Congress to evaluate the likely impacts of expanding funding to SROs across the country.⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly, their research found that schools with SROs had significantly greater levels of law enforcement involvement compared to those without assigned officers. Schools with SROs were more frequently patrolled and subjected to both safety and criminal investigation, while their students were more likely to be arrested.⁴⁵ Additionally, they found that schools with SROs were more likely to create written plans to manage shootings, large scale fights, hostages, and bomb threats as well as conduct school risk assessments and create agreements with law enforcement for emergency situations.⁴⁶

⁴² “General Law - Part I, Title XII, Chapter 71, Section 37P,” accessed October 17, 2022, <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter71/Section37P>.

⁴³ Ryan et al., “The Growing Concerns Regarding School Resource Officers,” 189.

⁴⁴ Nathan James and Gail McCallion, “School Resource Officers: Law Enforcement Officers in Schools” (Congressional Research Service, June 26, 2013).

⁴⁵ James and McCallion, “School Resource Officers” 8.

⁴⁶ James and McCallion, “School Resource Officers” 9.

Crucially, however, the report notes that “few studies have reliably evaluated [SROs] effectiveness.”⁴⁷ The authors note that no studies at the time of publishing their analysis properly assessed their effects, largely due to the long-term, systematic processes necessary to discern objective conclusions. For instance, a 2013 study on the effects of SROs on crime found that schools with SROs have a 12 percent higher crime rate, but offers little about the true effects on public safety and the forces behind this trend.⁴⁸

Consistent with the critique of the existing literature within the CRS report, a 2010 report published by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services in the U.S. Department of Justice found that studies reporting positive results from SRO programs rely not on objective evidence but rather on participants’ perception of the effectiveness of the program.⁴⁹ This report also notes that other studies demonstrating positive results do not isolate incidents of crime and violence, making it impossible to distinguish the effect of the presence of SROs on crime rate from the impacts of other factors.⁵⁰

To address the lack of credible, robust research on the effects of SROs, Emily Owens—Chair of the Department of Criminology, Law, and Society at the University of California, Irvine—published an article titled “Testing the School-to-Prison Pipeline” in 2017. While her research finds clear evidence that SROs can be damaging to students in the long run by increasing the likelihood of arrests within schools, she also finds that SROs “increase school safety, and help law enforcement agencies make arrests for drug crimes occurring on and off

⁴⁷ James and McCallion, “School Resource Officers” 9.

⁴⁸ Chongmin Na and Denise C. Gottfredson, “Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offending Behaviors,” *Justice Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (August 1, 2013): 619–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2011.615754>.

⁴⁹ Barbara Raymond, “Assigning Police Officers to Schools,” Problem-Oriented Guides for Police (U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, April 2010): 8.

⁵⁰ Raymond, “Assigning Police Officers to Schools” 9.

school grounds.”⁵¹ Her research notes that “school survey data” point to SROs increasing school safety, but emphasizes that this increase in perceived safety comes at the cost of a greater likelihood that students come in contact with “the formal criminal justice system, rather than the principal’s office.”⁵² However, multiple studies since 2005 suggest that SROs do not have a clear effect on students’ feelings of safety within schools, bringing into question which group’s sense of safety is being taken into account when advocating for SROs.⁵³ Additionally, Owens’ research finds that Cops in Schools grants, which come from the Department of Justice’s Community Oriented Policing Services, are correlated with a 1.1 percent to 1.9 percent reduction in disruptive criminal incidents in school, which suggests that the presence of officers does lead to improved handling of criminal issues on campus.⁵⁴

A 2021 article published in the *Children’s Legal Rights Journal* echoes a similar tradeoff presented by the presence of SROs. The researcher writes that SROs can improve relationships between students and law enforcement, which leads to a new pathway for reporting violent crime or presenting opportunities to address the root of criminal behavior, thereby increasing school safety.⁵⁵ She also notes that “it is theorized” that SROs can deter criminal activity within schools, preventing fighting on campus or other illegal activities out of fear of being caught.⁵⁶ However, she highlights that despite the positive impact of SROs on perceived school safety, there are also

⁵¹ Emily G. Owens, “Testing the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 36, no. 1 (2017): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.21954>.

⁵² Owens, “Testing the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” 30.

⁵³ Nicole Bracy, “Student Perceptions of High-Security School Environments - Nicole L. Bracy, 2011,” *Youth & Society* 43, no. 1 (April 20, 2010); J. Mitchell Miller et al., “Reaffirming the Significance of Context: The Charlotte School Safety Program,” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 33, no. 5 (September 1, 2005): 477–85; Suzanne E. Perumean-Chaney and Lindsay M. Sutton, “Students and Perceived School Safety: The Impact of School Security Measures,” *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 38, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 570–881; Matthew Theriot and John Orme, “School Resource Officers and Students’ Feelings of Safety at School - Matthew T. Theriot, John G. Orme, 2016,” *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 14, no. 2 (December 30, 2014).

⁵⁴ Owens, “Testing the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” 30.

⁵⁵ Madeleine Morris, “School Resource Officers: Do the Benefits of Student Safety Outweigh Their Negative Impacts?,” *Children’s Legal Rights Journal* 41, no. 2 (January 1, 2021): 194.

⁵⁶ Morris, “School Resource Officers,” 194.

harsh consequences associated with heightened SRO presence, emphasizing how the presence of SROs exacerbates the school-to-prison pipeline particularly for students of color.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, her article concludes by arguing that SROs “can foster safer school environments if implemented correctly.” To counteract the disproportionate arrests of students of color and students with disabilities presented by SROs, she makes three recommendations: “ 1) make issuing a citation or arresting a student a last resort; 2) focus on making schools less like prison environments; and 3) increase training requirements for SROs, with a special focus on handling students with disabilities and recognizing implicit bias.”⁵⁸ A 2011 study on national and state implementation of SRO programs makes similar recommendations to clearly delineate the behavior of SROs, arguing that without such an agreement “the SRO could actually reduce, not increase school safety.”⁵⁹ At the same time, they conclude that the frequency of crime across schools creates “a need in schools for an SRO to promote school safety.”⁶⁰ For that reason, they emphasize that when SRO policies are carefully crafted and implemented, they can create meaningful differences in the lives of at-risk students and on campus safety.⁶¹

3.3.2 Negative Outcomes of Increased SRO Presence

While the existing literature on SROs lacks consensus on SROs’ effects on school safety, studies widely find that the presence of SROs increases the likelihood of students being arrested and contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline. In fact, a 2018 systematic meta-synthesis on research on SROs found a positive correlation between SRO presence and rates of arrest and

⁵⁷ Morris, “School Resource Officers,” 196.

⁵⁸ Morris, “School Resource Officers,” 197.

⁵⁹ Martha Cray and Spencer C. Weiler, “Policy to Practice: A Look at National and State Implementation of School Resource Officer Programs,” *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas* 84, no. 4 (May 1, 2011): 164.

⁶⁰ Cray and Weiler, “Policy to Practice,” 165.

⁶¹ Cray and Weiler, “Policy to Practice,” 169.

exclusionary discipline; the research also did not find any statistically significant impact of SROs on student feelings of safety.⁶² For instance, in the already explored 2016 article by Owens, she concludes that even “a well-intentioned grant program aimed at improving school safety for at-risk children appears to have also resulted in the accumulation of arrest records for young students.”⁶³ While her research uncovered improved reported levels of public safety, she found that the presence of law enforcement funded by COPS in Schools grants leads to more arrests, especially for children under the age of fifteen.⁶⁴ Owens found that the presence of SROs automatically lowers the threshold for what is considered criminal behavior, leading to increased arrests for students in and out of school.⁶⁵ This finding is consistent with findings in Kathleen Nolan’s 2011 *Police in Hallways: Discipline in an Urban High School* which show that non-criminal student behavior often becomes viewed as criminal behavior when police are integrated into schools.⁶⁶ Accordingly, mixing police with students at a young age has lasting consequences, with Owens noting that children who are arrested or incarcerated experience increased likelihood of failing to graduate high school, being ineligible for student loans, obtaining a criminal record, and struggling to find employment opportunities.⁶⁷

As already alluded to in the discussion of SROs disproportionate placement in schools with students of color, SROs cause unequal harm for students of color, primarily for Black students. According to the ACLU, as of 2013, more than half of high schools with majority Black or Latino student populations have SROs; Black students were more than two times as

⁶² James Utt, “Empirical Research on School Resource Officers” (University of Arizona College of Education, 2018), <https://coe.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/SRO%20Fact%20sheet.p>.

⁶³ Owens, “Testing the School-to-Prison Pipeline.”

⁶⁴ Owens, “Testing the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” 14.

⁶⁵ Owens, “Testing the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” 12.

⁶⁶ Kathleen Nolan, *Police in the Hallways: Discipline in an Urban High School*, NED-New edition (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsfnt>.

⁶⁷ Owens, “Testing the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” 12.

likely as their white classmates to be referred to law enforcement or arrested at schools.⁶⁸

Consistent with that finding, the US Department of Education found that Black students without disabilities accounted for 30 percent of school-related arrests in the 2017-2018 school year despite only representing 15 percent of the school population.⁶⁹ Crucially, the ACLU notes that there is consistently no evidence that these racial disparities in discipline are the product of different rates of misbehavior between white and non-white students.⁷⁰

These trends significantly exacerbate the school-to-prison pipeline for students of color, leading to life-long, detrimental impacts on many of these students. For instance, students who are arrested are twice as likely to drop out of school and four times as likely if they must appear in court for their arrest.⁷¹ Moreover, there are concerns over trends that demonstrate SROs responding more harshly to students of color, at times causing physical harm. One researcher notes a case in Osceola County, Florida where an SRO knocked a Black high school student unconscious and placed her in handcuffs in an attempt to mediate an altercation.⁷² As a result, she notes that “while SROs may improve the safety of some students, they often have the opposite effect on students of color.”⁷³

In addition to disproportionately harming students of color, numerous studies reveal that SROs can be particularly harmful to students with disabilities.⁷⁴ Most recently, an August 2022 working paper shared by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University applying regression discontinuity design to national school-level data from 2014 to 2018 found that the presence of SROs increased disciplinary and police action with disproportionate effects on Black students,

⁶⁸ French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue,” 11.

⁶⁹ Terry Nicquel Ellis, “School Resource Officers Often Criminalize Black and Brown Children, Experts Say,” *CNN*, June 9, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/07/us/school-officers-impact-on-black-students/index.html>.

⁷⁰ French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue,” 20.

⁷¹ Morris, “School Resource Officers.”

⁷² Morris, “School Resource Officers,” 196.

⁷³ Morris, “School Resource Officers,” 196.

⁷⁴ Morris, “School Resource Officers,” 195.

male students, and students with disabilities.”⁷⁵ Furthermore, the ACLU notes that the Center for Public Integrity found that in the 2012-2013 school year, children with special needs made up about 26 percent of all students referred to law enforcement nationally, despite representing only 14 percent of U.S. enrollment.⁷⁶ Moreover, in Morris's 2021 article in the Children’s Legal Rights Journal, she writes that “SROs can also be harmful to students with disabilities, largely by responding inappropriately to outbursts common to students with certain behavioral disabilities.” She notes this pattern is rooted in SRO’s lack of training on handling behavioral outburst and provides an example from Kenton County, Kentucky, where a third grader with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder was arrested by an SRO after having a severe temper tantrum.⁷⁷ When the child maintained his outburst after an SRO intervened, he was placed in cuffs for fifteen minutes. The handcuffs were placed around the boy’s elbows, pinning his arms behind his back even as he cried out in pain.⁷⁸ The 2017 report by the ACLU on SROs similarly claims that SROs do not possess the training to recognize student disabilities and therefore often treat the situation as criminal behavior despite federal civil laws which protect students from punishment in schools for behaviors associated with a disability.⁷⁹ This is a key reason why SROs can harm students: they assume disciplinary roles while not being required to participate in training that ensures the best solution for various types of children.

⁷⁵ Lucy Sorensen et al., “The Thin Blue Line in Schools: New Evidence on School-Based Policing Across the U.S.,” *EdWorkingPaper* 21, no. 476 (August 2022), <https://doi.org/10.26300/eqx-rc69>.

⁷⁶ French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue.”

⁷⁷ Morris, “School Resource Officers,” 196.

⁷⁸ Morris, “School Resource Officers,” 196.

⁷⁹ French-Marcelin and Hinger, “Bullies in Blue,” 22.

4. The Political Landscape Influencing SRO Policy

4.1 *The Columbine Effect*

The drastic expansion of SRO programs over the past decades must be contextualized within a larger political environment. Primarily, the most significant expansion of police in schools came in the 1990s in response to a national rise in crime and the deadly Columbine school shooting.⁸⁰ Magnified by the fact that security-camera captured footage of the massacre made the violence feel more proximate to the American public, the Columbine shooting fueled the already present movement for greater law enforcement presence in schools.⁸¹ In response, the Justice Department established the “COPS in Schools” program, which awarded \$750 million in grants to more than 3,000 law enforcement agencies and hired 6,500 new SROs between 1999 and 2005.⁸² The percentage of schools with police rose from 1 percent in 1975 to 40 percent in 2007.⁸³ Accordingly, the Columbine effect is a term used to capture the legacy and impact of the 1999 Columbine High School massacre. Interestingly, however, one year after Columbine, Pew Research found that the majority of the public believed that parents were responsible for the actions of their children and preventing such instances from occurring.⁸⁴

Furthermore, after the Columbine shooting in 1999, schools across the country heightened their security measures in an attempt to prevent another large scale massacre from surfacing in another school environment.⁸⁵ One student experiencing these heightened measures at a Texas high school explained it as such: “Over the summer, AISD [Allen Independent School

⁸⁰ Gomez, “Abolishing School Resource Officers Amidst the Black Lives Matter Movement.”

⁸¹ Mbekeani-Wiley, “Handcuffs in Hallways Amended”

⁸² Gomez, “Abolishing School Resource Officers Amidst the Black Lives Matter Movement.”

⁸³ Mbekeani-Wiley, “Handcuffs in Hallways Amended”

⁸⁴ Thomas A. Birkland and Regina G. Lawrence, “Media Framing and Policy Change After Columbine,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 52, no. 10 (June 1, 2009): 1405–25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209332555>.

⁸⁵ Matthew Gault, “I Went to High School in a High-Security Fortress. You Don’t Want That for Your Kids.,” *The Outline*, May 30, 2018, <https://theoutline.com/post/4739/allen-texas-high-school-arming-teachers-metal-detectors-columbine-school-shooting>.

District] had instituted a new clear or mesh backpack policy, installed metal detectors, brought in cops called school resource officers (SROs), and planned to randomly search kids in the hallways and classrooms.”⁸⁶ According to the *Texas Tribune*, Texas alone has spent fifty million dollars for bullet-resistant shields and school resource officers.⁸⁷ Texas’ endowment along with many other states have caused two million dollars to have been used for law enforcement measures since 1999.⁸⁸

It is important to note that although Columbine was a predominately white school, SROs were disproportionately assigned to predominately minority schools, particularly for armed officers. SROs are currently present at 51 percent of predominantly minority students, compared to 34 percent of predominantly white schools.⁸⁹ Accordingly, the Columbine Effect has had a disproportionate impact on students of color.⁹⁰ It has led to increased racial biases, disciplinary records, and incarceration. Disciplinary actions have intensified for Black students and have led to racial disparities and harsher punishments due to the fear of school violence resulting from the Columbine Effect.⁹¹

4.2 Post-Uvalde America

On May 24th, 2022, a lone gunman murdered twenty-two members of the Robb Elementary School Community. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement claims that SROs are expected to “immediately move into action to isolate, distract or neutralize the threat, even if

⁸⁶ Gault, “I Went to High School in a High-Security Fortress. You Don’t Want That for Your Kids.”

⁸⁷ Patrick Svitek, “After Uvalde Shooting, Texas Leaders Will Spend More than \$100 Million on School Safety, Mental Health,” *The Texas Tribune*, June 28, 2022, <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/06/28/uvalde-texas-funding-response-schools-mental-health/>.

⁸⁸ Thureau and Or, “Two Billion Dollars Later.”

⁸⁹ Mbekeani-Wiley, “Handcuffs in Hallways Amended”

⁹⁰ Kelly Welch and Allison Payne, “Racial Implications of School Discipline and Climate,” 2013, 125–38, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781626374867-010>.

⁹¹ Welch and Payne, “Racial Implications of School Discipline and Climate.”

that means one officer acting alone.”⁹² Yet, the officers at Robb Elementary School waited over an hour to intervene despite hearing continued shooting, a decision deemed “antithetical to everything we have learned over the last two decades since the Columbine massacre” by the Texas Department of Public Safety.⁹³ Accordingly, in October the school district took action to suspend its entire school police force in response to sustained protests from Uvalde parents.⁹⁴ Additionally, three parents of the victims are filing a multi-faceted lawsuit against the gunman, gun company, and SROs at fault for the prolonged mass shooting and “culture of noncompliance” with safety protocols at Robb Elementary.⁹⁵

Yet, after the shooting in Uvalde, states are still looking to increase police presence in schools.⁹⁶ In fact, despite controversy surrounding the inefficacy of the police response, many state officials argued that the police prevented even more violence and death.⁹⁷ Texas Governor Greg Abbott pushed this sentiment and used the Uvalde incident to praise the role of SROs in cases of mass shootings, expressing the necessity for the police presence in schools.⁹⁸ Moreover, the Uvalde Superintendent initially put forth plans for the school district to hire more police to be placed in schools as a direct response to the tragedy their community faced.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, states outside Texas are looking to increase police presence in schools as a response to the violence at

⁹² Katie Reilly, “Schools Are Putting More Cops on Campus—Despite the ‘Abject Failure’ in Uvalde,” *Time*, June 22, 2022, sec. U.S. Education, <https://time.com/6190182/school-resource-officers-ualde/>.

⁹³ Reilly, “Schools Are Putting More Cops on Campus—Despite the ‘Abject Failure’ in Uvalde.”

⁹⁴ J. David Goodman, “Uvalde Suspends Its Entire School Police Force,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 2022, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/07/us/ualde-police-suspended.html>.

⁹⁵ Alejandro Serrano, “Families of Three Uvalde Shooting Survivors Sue School District, Gun Makers, City Officials and Others,” *The Texas Tribune*, September 29, 2022, <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/09/29/ualde-school-shooting-lawsuit/>. <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/09/29/ualde-school-shooting-lawsuit/amp/>.

⁹⁶ Reilly, “Schools Are Putting More Cops on Campus—Despite the ‘Abject Failure’ in Uvalde.”

⁹⁷ Katie Reilly, “Gov. Greg Abbott, After Yet Another Texas Mass Shooting, Focused on Praising Police—as Questions Emerge About Their Response,” *Time*, May 26, 2022, <https://time.com/6182101/greg-abbott-ualde-shooting-response-texas/>.

⁹⁸ Reilly, “Gov. Greg Abbott, After Yet Another Texas Mass Shooting, Focused on Praising Police—as Questions Emerge About Their Response.”

⁹⁹ Associated Press, “Uvalde Superintendent Says District to Hire More Police,” *Los Angeles Times*, n.d., <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-06-09/ualde-superintendent-says-district-to-hire-more-police>.

Robb Elementary. In Virginia, many are responding loudly to the Uvalde incident, claiming that the shooting demonstrates the necessity of school resource officers. Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin plans to set aside \$50 million of the state budget that will go towards putting an SRO in every school in Virginia.¹⁰⁰

Based on the response from local and state officials in Texas as well as out of state reactions, there are evidently heightened concerns for students' safety, which mirrors patterns suggested by the Columbine Effect despite the shortcomings of SROs being central to this tragic event. However, the nation-wide tragedy has sparked public debate as to whether the presence of SROs enhances the safety of students in the face of mass violence. In Oregon, for example, one local article written in the wake up the mass shooting captures, "some parents are calling on Oregon districts that removed SROs to reinstate them, while others question how effective they are for protecting students."¹⁰¹ Notably, recent scholarship suggests that SROs are far less capable of stopping school shootings than the public assumes them to be. Analysis by the *Washington Post* in 2018 found that out of nearly 200 incidents of school gunfire, SROs have only successfully taken down an active shooter twice.¹⁰² Additionally, the *Post* found that at least 40 percent of schools affected by gun violence employed a police officer, suggesting that SROs are not a significant deterrent in many instances.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Rafael Sanchez-Cruz, "School Shooting in Texas Reignites Push for SROs in Virginia," *Wusa9.Com*, May 11, 2022, sec. crime, <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/crime/school-shooting-texas-reignites-push-sros-virginia/65-ce55f6e8-4126-4198-9b01-dfaf7956fd58>.

¹⁰¹ Christine Pitawanich, "In Wake of Texas Shooting, Debate over School Resource Officers in Oregon Resurfaces," *KGW8*, June 7, 2022, sec. Education, <https://www.kgw.com/article/news/education/sro-debate-in-wake-of-texas-shooting/283-21a8fe56-be36-42f6-9f61-f970f9c61cad>.

¹⁰² John Woodrow Cox and Steven Rich, "Scarred by School Shootings," *Washington Post*, March 25, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/us-school-shootings-history/>.

¹⁰³ Woodrow Cox and Rich, "Scarred by School Shootings."

4.3 Key Stakeholders

Despite the unequal, harmful effects of SRO presence and their contested efficacy, many essential stakeholders driving policy see SROs as necessary for the safety and wellbeing of students. Parents are a crucial demographic driving the expansion of SRO programming, with a 2021 YouGov poll of 9,000 U.S. adults finding that 45 percent believe SROs make schools safer, 29 percent think they do not have a significant impact on safety, and only 14 percent say that SROs make schools less safe.¹⁰⁴ Consistent with these findings, many parents in Boston Public Schools opposed a lift on the requirement of having at least one SRO on each school campus, with one parent stating, “I honestly think it’s a good idea having cops here because, nowadays, it’s unpredictable.”¹⁰⁵ Additionally, in February 2021, the L.A. Unified School District Board decided to cut 40 percent of its SROs.¹⁰⁶ Yet, a survey conducted with parents in the LA district revealed that many parents were in favor of SROs. According to the survey, 72 percent of Asian-American and Pacific Islander parents, 67 percent of Hispanic parents, 54 percent of white parents, and 50 percent of black parents agreed with the claim that police presence makes schools safer.¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, research exploring parents’ perception of SROs in the Seminole County Public School district in Florida—a district of over 60,000 students with at least one full-time

¹⁰⁴ Jamie Ballard, “Americans Tend to Believe Police Officers Make Schools Safer for Students” (YouGov, March 9, 2021), <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2021/03/09/police-officers-school-safety-poll>.

¹⁰⁵ Aisha Mbowe, “‘It’s Unpredictable’: Some BPS Parents Call for Officers to Be Put Back in Schools, Others Prefer Status Quo,” *WHDH TV 7 News*, February 10, 2022, <https://whdh.com/news/its-unpredictable-some-bps-parents-call-for-officers-to-be-put-back-in-schools-others-prefer-status-quo/>.

¹⁰⁶ Larry Sand, “Parents, Teachers Call for School Cops to Return,” *City Journal*, November 30, 2021, <https://www.city-journal.org/parents-teachers-call-for-school-cops-to-return>.

¹⁰⁷ Sand, “Parents, Teachers Call for School Cops to Return.”

SRO at each school—found the vast majority of respondents were in favor of SROs.¹⁰⁸ The study found that every surveyed parent believed that SROs made their child’s school feel safer and all but one parent currently believes that their child’s school has adequate safety and security.” At the same time, the study showed that every parent believed their child’s school could be a site for a school shooting.¹⁰⁹ One parent wrote in the comment section, “Law enforcement is so important in schools! It would be detrimental to remove them. They are protectors. What would happen if they weren’t there, and a school shooting occurred?”¹¹⁰ This sentiment captures the stance of many parents grappling with the normalcy of school shootings while attempting to advance policies that they believe ensure the safety of their children in schools. A 2018 *Washington Post* piece captured how concerns around school shootings dictates school safety measures more so than studies on the proposed policies, explaining that “fear has long dictated what schools invest in, and although campus shootings remain extremely rare, many superintendents are under intense pressure from parents to do something—anything—to make their kids safer.”¹¹¹

Teachers, principals, and district leaders are also major proponents of SROs for the sake of their students and themselves. An *Education Week* survey from June 2020 polling 1,150 teachers, principals, and district leaders found that 69 percent of individuals coming from districts with 10,000 or more students believed that armed officers belonged in local schools.¹¹² The survey also found that the belief that armed officers belong in schools is more common

¹⁰⁸ John Mayfield, “Parents’ Perceptions on the Impact That SROs Have on School Safety,” *Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies*, January 1, 2021, <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/10597>.

¹⁰⁹ Mayfield, “Parents’ Perceptions on the Impact That SROs Have on School Safety,” 65.

¹¹⁰ Mayfield, “Parents’ Perceptions on the Impact That SROs Have on School Safety,” 66.

¹¹¹ Woodrow Cox and Rich, “Scarred by School Shootings.”

¹¹² Holly Kurtz, “Educators Support Black Lives Matter, But Still Want Police in Schools, Survey Shows,”

Education Week, June 25, 2020,

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/educators-support-black-lives-matter-but-still-want-police-in-schools-survey-shows/2020/06>.

among high school teachers and principals (67 percent) than employees at elementary schools (51 percent), yet still represents the majority opinion in both groups.¹¹³ Furthermore, the survey found that almost three-quarters of teachers, principals, and district leaders believe that armed SROs are needed in order to protect campuses from an outsider threat, and 58 percent of respondents believed that there would be more deaths from school shootings in the United States if armed police officers were eliminated from schools. Interestingly, they also found that 33 percent of respondents believed that armed SROs are needed “because too many students are out of control.”¹¹⁴

Another crucial finding from *Education Week’s* 2020 survey is that educators largely do not believe that SROs disproportionately affect students of color and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Among the 1,150 educators surveyed, 59 percent completely disagreed and 19 percent partly disagreed with the statement that “Armed police officers contribute to the ‘school-to-prison’ pipeline by disproportionately arresting/ticketing students of color.”¹¹⁵ When asked whether they believe that SROs in their district treat students of color fairly, of the individuals who weighed in, 91 percent strongly believed that students of color are fairly treated by SROs.¹¹⁶

4.4 Anti-School Resource Officer Advocacy

While the majority of parents and educators support the presence of SROs, advocacy, education, and parent groups have been raising red flags about SROs for years. Numerous viral videos show incidents of horrific violence and excessive use of force by SROs. For instance, an

¹¹³ Kurtz, “Educators Support Black Lives Matter, But Still Want Police in Schools, Survey Shows.”

¹¹⁴ Kurtz, “Educators Support Black Lives Matter, But Still Want Police in Schools, Survey Shows.”

¹¹⁵ Kurtz, “Educators Support Black Lives Matter, But Still Want Police in Schools, Survey Shows.”

¹¹⁶ Kurtz, “Educators Support Black Lives Matter, But Still Want Police in Schools, Survey Shows.”

officer in Kentucky was shown handcuffing students aged eight and nine above the elbow for “non-compliance,” and another officer in South Carolina was shown throwing a teenage girl over her table for using her phone in class.¹¹⁷ These videos illuminate systematic problems with SRO policing, rallying advocacy groups in protest of continued SRO presence in schools.

Additionally, as outlined earlier in this report, numerous examinations into SRO policies and practices have showcased a detrimental and overly-reactive policing system for youth. For instance, a 2017 Department of Education-funded study found that poorly-implemented SRO programs and policies have fallen short in four main ways: problems with managing “student misbehavior,” exacerbating the school-to-prison pipeline, systematic lacks in training, and establishing the actual roles and responsibilities of SROs.¹¹⁸ This study concluded with a few potential recommendations and courses of action for school counties to remedy these major pitfalls in SRO programming: (1) revoke SRO ability to manage student misbehavior unless such behavior is criminal; (2) expand SRO training to also include cognizance of “behavior management, child development, communication techniques, and disability;” and (3) establish clear, specific, and more limited responsibilities for SROs.¹¹⁹ Another study by researchers Turner and Beneke called for the “softening” instead of “abolishment” of SROs, insisting that officers provide a unique opportunity for mentorship and the provision of care for lower-income students of color when implemented properly.¹²⁰

Nationally-recognized advocacy groups like the NAACP and the ACLU have shared their commitment to reforming and advocating against SRO programs as they stand. On their website, the NAACP published a list of shocking statistics and facts about the systematic

¹¹⁷ Ryan et al., “The Growing Concerns Regarding School Resource Officers.”

¹¹⁸ Ryan et al., “The Growing Concerns Regarding School Resource Officers.”

¹¹⁹ Ryan et al., “The Growing Concerns Regarding School Resource Officers.”

¹²⁰ E. O. Turner and A. J. Beneke, “‘Softening’ School Resource Officers: The Extension of Police Presence in Schools in an Era of Black Lives Matter, School Shootings, and Rising Inequality,” *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 23, no. 2 (2020): 221–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1679753>.

shortcomings and inequities within SRO programs. Accordingly, many national advocacy organizations and chapters are urging school boards to diminish the jurisdiction of SROs over the behavioral management of children and to clearly delineate their role in schools.¹²¹ The National Education Association (NEA) in particular has advocated for redirecting SRO funding into more investment in mental health resources and counselors instead of policing in schools.¹²²

4.4.1 Case Study: Wake Forest Black Student Coalition

One recent instance of on-the-ground advocacy pushing back against expanded SRO presence comes from Wake County, North Carolina. As many school districts responded to heightened parental pressure in schools in the wake of the Uvalde Elementary School shooting in Texas by pledging to expand law enforcement presence, Black student organizers in Wake County successfully raised concerns about these proposed policies. Malika Mobley, the co-president of the Wake County Black Student Coalition, is leading the charge against these proposed measures. She cites how, in her experience, school policing does “more harm than good” and “police presence is not part of the solution.”¹²³ Wake County has seventy-five officers from different law enforcement agencies across the county, a number which has been racked up after the Uvalde Elementary shooting to reassure parents, in accordance with the national trend.¹²⁴

The Black Student Coalition has been leading advocacy in the county for the removal of SROs since 2017 and is currently petitioning for expanded review of SRO training policies and

¹²¹ “How to Advocate for School Resource Officer Removal,” ACLU of Washington, March 17, 2021, <https://www.aclu-wa.org/pages/how-advocate-school-resource-officer-removal>.

¹²² James Paterson, “Making Schools Safe and Just,” *NEA News*, April 4, 2022, <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/making-schools-safe-and-just>.

¹²³ Associated Press, “Students of Color Push Back on Calls for Police in Schools,” *Spectrum News 1*, June 5, 2022, <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nc/charlotte/news/2022/06/05/students-of-color-push-back-on-calls-for-police-in-schools>.

¹²⁴ Associated Press, “Students of Color Push Back on Calls for Police in Schools.”

accountability practices.¹²⁵ The Wake County Black Student Coalition has also worked with the Youth Justice Project of the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, Education Justice Alliance, and ACLU of North Carolina to launch the #CounselorsNotCops campaign to demand “safe, Black-affirming schools free from the threat of police targeting and brutality.”¹²⁶ Following the death of George Floyd, the group introduced a proposal to replace SROs with counselors specializing in conflict resolution throughout their school district.¹²⁷ Their advocacy also includes meeting with school board members, releasing educational videos, organizing protests, and launching social media campaigns.¹²⁸ At one rally in downtown Raleigh in 2020, high school students from the coalition raised awareness for the poor track record of SROs at stopping school shootings and recounted personal accounts of excessive use of force against students.¹²⁹ This activism uplifted the concerns of students of color, and due to student reports and grievances, the Wake County school system last year purportedly made changes to its procedure for fielding grievances involving SROs and changes in their training to better prepare officers for the school environment, demonstrating the group’s ability to influence policy despite being a voice often left out of policy considerations dominated by parents and educators.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Associated Press, “Students of Color Push Back on Calls for Police in Schools.”

¹²⁶ “#CounselorsNotCops: Wake County Black Student Coalition Demands,” *Southern Coalition for Social Justice* (blog), October 7, 2020, <https://southerncoalition.org/counselorsnotcops-wake-county-student-coalition-demands/>.

¹²⁷ Williams, “Keep That Same Energy: Black Student Activists in Wake County Manage Stress, Burnout,” *North Carolina Public Radio*, September 7, 2022, sec. WUNC Youth Reporting Institute, <https://www.wunc.org/wunc-youth-reporting-institute/2022-09-07/energy-black-student-activists-wake-county-manage-stress-burnout-organizing-protest>.

¹²⁸ “#CounselorsNotCops.”

¹²⁹ Joel Brown, “‘Black Students Matter’: Wake Teens March to Pull Police from Schools,” *ABC11 Raleigh-Durham*, June 27, 2020, sec. Education, <https://abc11.com/camille-holders-wake-county-black-student-coalition-hillsborough-street-defund-sros/6273010/>.

¹³⁰ Associated Press, “Students of Color Push Back on Calls for Police in Schools.”

5. Alternatives to School Resource Officers

Since their implementation in the 1950s, SROs have increased in number and popularity each year. However, following the death of George Floyd and more recent research about the efficacy of SROs and their role in the school-to-prison pipeline, there have been calls to reform in-school policing by expanding school health services and implementing Restorative Justice (RJ) programming.

To disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, school policies must be altered, in light of RJ diversion practices, to prevent the cyclical mass suspension and expulsion of students. Dismantling the current approaches to discipline in the school system starts with implementing RJ, which enables schools to limit their number of suspensions and expulsions, replacing such traditional measures with creative alternative punishments that enable youth to atone for the harm they caused in a productive way.¹³¹ By providing training opportunities for educators in the fields of RJ, a paradigm shift can occur within the education system from focusing on school security and law enforcement to encouraging self-discipline, ensuring that, from a young age, youth will develop the ability to regulate their own behavior.¹³² Within the education system, social workers, counselors, and school administrators can be better utilized in handling youth disciplinary infractions. Altering the educational system by providing youth with counseling, restorative justice, and opportunities for self-discipline will begin to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

¹³¹ DeWitt Scott, “Developing the Prison-to-School Pipeline: A Paradigmatic Shift in Educational Possibilities During an Age of Mass Incarceration,” *Journal of Correctional Education (1974-)* 68, no. 3 (2017): 41–52.

¹³² Maisha T. Winn and Nadia Behizadeh, “The Right to Be Literate: Literacy, Education, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” *Review of Research in Education* 35, no. 1 (March 2011): 147–73, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X10387395>.

5.1 Expanding School Health Services

Schools that are properly staffed with school health services have improved attendance rates, better academic achievement, and higher graduation rates accompanied with lower rates of suspension and expulsion. Despite this fact, in the United States, fourteen million students are in schools with police but no counselors, nurses, psychologists, or social workers.¹³³ A 2019 study from the National Center for Education Statistics reports that 45 percent of public schools have one or more full- or part-time SROs stationed at the school at least one day per week.¹³⁴ However, 18 percent of schools did not have any sort of paid nurse, and 56 percent of school nurses split their time between more than two schools in 2018.¹³⁵ 60 percent of schools did not provide any sort of mental health services.¹³⁶ This trend was exacerbated along racial lines as well: in 2016, 21 percent of schools with a majority Black student body had more security on campus than mental health staff (counselors, psychologists, and social workers). However, only 2.5 percent of schools with a majority white population and 7.9 percent of non-homogenous schools experienced this resource imbalance.

The lack of health and social resources for students is not a question of financial inaccessibility. Cleveland State University's School of Urban Affairs calculates that, including cost of training, an SRO costs \$75,000 to \$97,000 annually, as compared to a school psychologist or nurse, whose average salaries are around \$77,000 and \$70,000 respectively.¹³⁷

¹³³ Amir Whitaker et al., "Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students" (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.), <https://www.aclu.org/embed/map/71968>.

¹³⁴ Kacey Nolle et al., "Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools. Findings from the School Survey on Crime and Safety: 2005-06. NCES 2007-361," *National Center for Education Statistics*, January 9, 2007.

¹³⁵ Michele Jacques, "School Nurses: An Investment in Student Achievement," *Kappanonline.Org* (blog), April 7, 2018, <https://kappanonline.org/maughan-school-nurses-investment-student-achievement/>.

¹³⁶ Nolle et al., "Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools. Findings from the School Survey on Crime and Safety."

¹³⁷ Edward Hill, "The Cost of Arming Schools: The Price of Stopping a Bad Guy with a Gun" (Cleveland State University, April 1, 2013), https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/urban_facpub/678/; Michael Griffith, "What Is the Cost of Providing Students with Adequate Psychological Support," *National Association of School Psychologists* (blog), October 17, 2018,

The consequences of these funding decisions on a federal and state level fall heavily on low-income and minority students who are overtly criminalized in their youth and ultimately forced into the school-to-prison pipeline.

5.2 Implementing Restorative Justice Programming

The Restorative Justice (RJ) framework aims to address wrongdoings between parties by involving all stakeholders (victims, offenders, and the community as a whole) in the process of redress. In theory, the framework recognizes the necessity of healing and partnership rather than punishment as the remedy. According to Daniel Van Ness and Karen Strong, renowned scholars in the field of RJ, the three underpinnings of RJ include repairing harm, stakeholder engagement, and the transformation of the role of the community and government, all of which differentiate this practice from other criminal justice actions. RJ is a concept and practice without strict definitional outlines across programs. It can take the form of victim-offender mediation, group conferencing, and other community-based examples.

As it can be difficult to quantify its effects, the efficacy of RJ programming in communities is subject to discourse. In a 2019 study on the effects of RJ intervention on probationers, researchers found that RJ intervention significantly reduced the incidence of recidivism by 66 percent for those who partook in the program compared to those who did not.¹³⁸ A pilot school within the Oakland Unified School District that implemented RJ methodology in its disciplinary policies witnessed an 87 percent decrease in suspensions and violence.¹³⁹ RJ is

<https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/policy-matters-blog/what-is-the-cost-of-providing-students-with-ad-equate-psychological-support>; Jacques, “School Nurses.”

¹³⁸ Joseph L. D. Kennedy et al., “Long-Term Effectiveness of a Brief Restorative Justice Intervention,” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 63, no. 1 (January 2019): 3–17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X18779202>.

¹³⁹ WeAreTeachers, “What Teachers Need To Know About Restorative Justice,” *We Are Teachers* (blog), September 2, 2022, <https://www.weareteachers.com/restorative-justice/>.

being used to decrease the race-based implications of increasing law enforcement in schools as well. The Center for Court Innovation has implemented RJ methodology in the court systems of Brooklyn, New York to take accountability for and combat against its internal racial biases by following the three tiers of RJ: Prevention, Intervention, and Reintegration.¹⁴⁰

RJ programs are largely funded through the relocation of existing funds and federal grants. In 2011, for example, one pioneering school district in Detroit utilized its Title I funding to hire a full-time RJ coordinator.¹⁴¹ Today, federal funding for districts ready to implement RJ programming on a wider scale is feasible. In 2022, Colorado Senator Michael F. Bennet introduced the Restorative Practices in Schools Act of 2022, which, if passed, would require the Department of Education to give grants to school districts to replace zero-tolerance policies with RJ practices across all ages.¹⁴²

5.3 Case Studies

5.3.1 Case Study: Madison, Wisconsin

The city and school district of Madison, Wisconsin offers the unique opportunity to examine the necessity, overwhelming support, and possible avenues of failure within the implementation of RJ programs.

5.3.1.1 Community Stakeholders in Madison, Wisconsin

The school district in Madison, Wisconsin includes a number of populations vulnerable to the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the population

¹⁴⁰ WeAreTeachers, “What Teachers Need To Know About Restorative Justice.”

¹⁴¹ Trevor Fronius et al., “Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: An Updated Research Review” (WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center, March 2019), <https://www.wested.org/resources/restorative-justice-in-u-s-schools-an-updated-research-review/>.

¹⁴² “Restorative Practices in Schools Act of 2022,” Pub. L. No. S. 3973, § Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, 20 U.S.C. 1234 (2022), <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/BILLS-117s3973is>.

of Madison is predominantly white and U.S. born with a 16.4 percent poverty rate.¹⁴³ However, in the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), minority enrollment is about 60 percent, with 23 percent of the population being Latino or Hispanic and 18 percent being Black.¹⁴⁴ 35.8 percent of students are on free or reduced lunch, and 22.8 percent of students are English learners.¹⁴⁵

In March 2022, in response to rising incidents of violence, the Madison School Board voted unanimously to form a committee dedicated to healing the school culture through alternatives to the existing zero-tolerance policies. With the backing of parents and administrators, the school board published their vision for restorative justice: “radically transformed school communities where students, staff, parents, and caregivers are safe, feel they belong, and are actively engaged.” To actualize this vision, they prioritized building “authentic” relationships with restorative belief throughout the community, especially among parent and adult populations.

5.3.1.2 Restorative Justice in Madison, Wisconsin

In order to implement RJ programming, the Madison School Board piloted a two-year project with YWCA Madison within La Folette High School and Black Hawk and Sennett middle schools, which later expanded into East High school and three additional middle schools. The school district allocated \$164,420 for payment to YWCA to train staff and help run restorative practice circles, with the objective of mediating the achievement gap between

¹⁴³ “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Madison City, Wisconsin,” n.d., <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/madisoncitywisconsin/LND110210>.

¹⁴⁴ U.S. News Education. “Madison Metropolitan School District,” n.d. <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/wisconsin/districts/madison-metropolitan-school-district-102029>.

¹⁴⁵ “Madison Metropolitan School District - U.S. News Education.”

minority and white students.¹⁴⁶ YWCA Madison’s RJ programs include community-based programming, workshops, and school-based learning.¹⁴⁷ In collaboration with Dane County Restorative Justice Committee, YWCA Madison launched an RJ initiative that allowed 12–16 year olds issued a municipal ticket by the Madison Police to participate in RJ programming as an alternative to municipal court.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, YWCA Madison offers three-day professional development training workshops for educators on restorative justice, the school-to-prison pipeline, examining privilege and oppression, empathy, consensus decision-making, and more.¹⁴⁹ There is need for hard data to determine if participation in these lessons result in decreased zero-tolerance disciplinary trends; however, the program’s effect on school culture is profound.

In the 2021–22 school year, the Madison district decided that all SROs stationed across its high schools were to be replaced with RJ coordinators tasked with ensuring educators were trained on the RJ approach, helping students manage interpersonal issues, and designing protocols for school safety in the absence of police. To support this transition, the Madison School Board unanimously approved a \$84,000 contract with Flywheel, a local organization focused on abolitionist RJ and racial justice workshops. There was an intended five year effort to establish effective restorative practices at La Follette High School under the guidance of Flywheel.¹⁵⁰ In 2021, however, La Follette high school suspended the contract due to

¹⁴⁶ Pat Schneider, “Madison Schools Starting to Embrace ‘Restorative Justice’ for Problem Behavior,” *The Cap Times*, December 29, 2012, https://captimes.com/news/local/writers/pat_schneider/madison-schools-starting-to-embrace-restorative-justice-for-problem-behavior/article_8c3ce84d-810b-5642-a63f-2027394bca27.html.

¹⁴⁷ “Restorative Justice,” *YWCA Madison* (blog), n.d., <https://www.ywcamadison.org/what-were-doing/restorative-justice/>.

¹⁴⁸ “Community-Based Programming,” *YWCA Madison* (blog), n.d., <https://www.ywcamadison.org/what-were-doing/restorative-justice/community-based-programming/>.

¹⁴⁹ “Restorative Justice Workshops,” *YWCA Madison* (blog), n.d., <https://www.ywcamadison.org/what-were-doing/restorative-justice/restorative-justice-workshops/>.

¹⁵⁰ Elizabeth Beyer, “La Follette Abruptly Suspends Contract with Restorative Justice Partner,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, December 18, 2021, https://madison.com/news/local/education/local_schools/la-follette-abruptly-suspends-contract-with-restorative-justice-partner/article_f7ac44fe-7dab-5044-85f5-6778deff8ecc.html.

disagreements with Flywheel over the scope of the work as well as community concerns about a rise in fights on school grounds. As seen in Figure 1, the number of high school fights spiked in 2021.

In February 2022, by a four to two vote, the Madison Board of Education on Monday approved a \$60,000 contract with a Milwaukee-based company, Blaquesmith. Inc, to provide RJ services to La Follette and East high schools.¹⁵¹ Due to the urgent need to remedy the past trauma and unsafe environment of the school, the effort was outsourced to the Milwaukee group instead of a local community RJ partner for immediate intervention rather than a multi-year commitment.¹⁵² The lack of long-term community partnership with these local restorative justice programs is a concerning aspect of Madison’s approach to RJ.

5.3.1.3 Flaws in the Infrastructure of Restorative Justice

The uptick of violence in these Madison schools has led many parents and other stakeholders to call for SRO reinstatement for the sake of the students’ safety. The question that emerges is whether this violence is a true reflection of a need for a return of SROs or a testament to the poor implementation of restorative justice programs. The latter appears to be self-evident in the case of Madison high schools, East High and La Follette High School.

The reasons for this rising violence cannot be solely assigned to the changing roles of SROs. Although SROs were no longer physically stationed at the school building, law enforcement was still present on campus, according to a log of emergency calls to East High this fall. Madison police responded sixty-three times to East High by December 2022 and its

¹⁵¹ Logan Reigstad, “School Board Approves Contract for ‘critical’ Restorative Justice Services at La Follette, East High Schools,” *Channel3000*, February 1, 2022, <https://www.channel3000.com/school-board-approves-contract-for-restorative-justice-services-at-la-follette-east-high-schools/>.

¹⁵² Reigstad, “School Board Approves Contract for ‘critical’ Restorative Justice Services at La Follette, East High Schools.”

surrounding area between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m which, on average, is once per day.¹⁵³ In examination of the tense partnership with Flywheel, the administrators and student body of La Follette High School have stated that Flywheel had fell short of its expected duties: staffing RJ coordinators each day; interacting with students to provide consistent support and resources; increasing support and focus on trauma-informed practices and social, emotional, and mental health; facilitating staff learning around best practices for implementing restorative justice; and establishing opportunities for measurable outcomes.¹⁵⁴

5.3.2 Case Study: Oakland, California

On June 24, 2020, the Oakland School Board unanimously voted to “completely defund, dismantle and terminate” theOakland School Police Department (OSPD) by passing the George Floyd Resolution.¹⁵⁵ After two years of dedicated organizing by Oakland California’s Black Organizing Project (BOP)—a non-profit advancing justice through organizing and community building—and with the support of Public Counsel and the ACLU, the Black Organizing Project made appeals to the Board of Education to dismantle the Oakland Schools Police Department over the department’s mishandling of conflicts in schools and its role in reinforcing the school-to-prison pipeline.¹⁵⁶ The passage of the bill made Oakland Unified School District the

¹⁵³ Wisconsin State Journal editorial board, “Bring Back SROs to Help Stem Violence in Madison Schools,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 14, 2021, https://madison.com/opinion/editorial/bring-back-sros-to-help-stem-violence-in-madison-schools/article_6e384bdb-5955-532e-9fbb-2ca3384571b5.html.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Beyer, “La Follette Abruptly Suspends Contract with Restorative Justice Partner,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, December 18, 2021, https://madison.com/news/local/education/local_schools/la-follette-abruptly-suspends-contract-with-restorative-justice-partner/article_f7ac44fe-7dab-5044-85f5-6778deff8ecc.html.

¹⁵⁵ “Community Demands New Restrictions on City Cops in Oakland Schools,” August 20, 2014, <https://blackorganizingproject.org/oakland-schools-adopt-new-regulations-city-police-officers/>; Judy Greenspan, “Black Organizing Project Wins Campaign to Dismantle School Police Department,” *Workers World* (blog), June 30, 2020, <https://www.workers.org/2020/06/49762/>.

¹⁵⁶ Samuel Getachew, “Oakland Eliminated Its School Police Force—So What Happens Now?,” *KQED*, March 11, 2021, <https://www.kqed.org/arts/13893831/oakland-eliminated-its-school-police-force-so-what-happens-now>.

nation's first district to eliminate an entire school police department. Critically, the bill allocates funds previously used for police officers to services such as school-based social workers, psychologists, RJ practitioners, and behavioral health professionals.¹⁵⁷

5.3.2.1 Recent Racial Upheaval in Oakland, California

A complete understanding of Oakland's decision to end its use of SROs, and the movement largely responsible for it, requires knowledge of some recent Oakland history. Oakland, California is a racially diverse city with a population of approximately 430,000 residents.¹⁵⁸ As of 2021, approximately 28.5 percent of residents are non-Hispanic White, 27 percent are Hispanic or Latino, 22.7 percent are Black, and 15.8 percent are Asian. Over the past decades, the Oakland community has been reeling from a number of tragedies involving shootings of unarmed Black men by law enforcement. On New Year's Day 2009, Oscar Grant was killed by a transit police officer, and videos of the murder were circulated widely on the internet.¹⁵⁹ The officer's acquittal of second-degree murder in July 2010 ignited a number of nonviolent protests across the city, which led to the arrests of more than one hundred people.¹⁶⁰ In 2011, the Oakland community also experienced the loss of Raheim Brown, who was shot and killed by an SRO.¹⁶¹ Brown was shot seven times while seated in the passenger seat of a stolen car; the offending officers claimed Brown was violently wielding a screwdriver, while in

¹⁵⁷ "George Floyd Resolution," Black Organizing Project, July 18, 2021, <https://blackorganizingproject.org/george-floyd-resolution/>.

¹⁵⁸ "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Oakland City, California," n.d., <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/oaklandcitycalifornia>.

¹⁵⁹ Sukey Lewis et al., "'On Our Watch' Litigation Reveals New Details In Police Shooting Of Oscar Grant," *NPR*, July 8, 2021, sec. On Our Watch, <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/23/1009486885/on-our-watch-litigation-reveals-new-details-in-police-shooting-of-oscar-grant>.

¹⁶⁰ Ewen MacAskill, "Oakland Riots after Verdict in Police Shooting of Oscar Grant," *The Guardian*, July 9, 2010, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/09/oakland-riots-oscar-grant-shooting-verdict>.

¹⁶¹ Jesse Strauss, "The Oakland School Police Killing of Raheim Brown Jr.," *San Francisco Bay View*, March 7, 2011, <https://sfbayview.com/2011/03/the-oakland-school-police-killing-of-raheim-brown-jr/>.

possession of a firearm. Not only did Brown’s killing shake the Oakland community, but it also strengthened their skepticism of SROs: the two officers involved in Brown’s death were patrolling a nearby school dance.

The George Floyd Resolution includes language that calls into focus the disproportionate negative impacts of police officers on people of color within Oakland. The 2021 resolution makes note that, in the 2015–2016 school year, despite making up only 26 percent of school enrollment, Black students accounted for 73 percent of in-school arrests.”¹⁶² Thus, although the radical changes that took place in Oakland were undeniably catalyzed by the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, and the uprising and reckoning that followed, these radical changes were also built on years of discontent in the Oakland community.

5.3.2.2 Implementation of the George Floyd Resolution

Following the historic measure, there is concern within the Oakland community that its implementation will not be fully realized.¹⁶³ But, there is buy-in from the Oakland Unified School Board. The school board is planning to reinvest six million dollars from the police department into school support systems, including mental health strategies.¹⁶⁴ To replace school police and the OSPD, the Board voted to employ more mental health professionals and social workers, while keeping officers in schools to handle higher level emergencies (e.g. active shooters, bomb threats, and sexual assaults).¹⁶⁵ Throughout the district, administrators are working to place a stronger emphasis on deescalating threats through community response rather than the presence of armed school officers.

¹⁶² “Emergency Preparedness / George Floyd Resolution,” accessed November 6, 2022, <https://www.ousd.org/Page/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ousd.org%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D20919>.

¹⁶³ Getachew, “Oakland Eliminated Its School Police Force—So What Happens Now?”

¹⁶⁴ Getachew, “Oakland Eliminated Its School Police Force—So What Happens Now?”

¹⁶⁵ Getachew, “Oakland Eliminated Its School Police Force—So What Happens Now?”

In the Oakland community, many parents and administrators believe that schools should have police officers for students' safety, but they should not be given the discretion to discipline or arrest students for nonviolent offenses and, consequently, provoke fear in schools.¹⁶⁶ In a letter written by forty-five administrators, it was stated that the OSPD's continued existence is funded "at the expense of programs far better suited" for the "academic, social, and health-related needs of our young people."¹⁶⁷

As students returned to campus during the COVID-19 pandemic in the latter half of 2021, the results of the disbanding of OSPD began to come to fruition.¹⁶⁸ In collaboration with the efforts of BOP, Oakland Unified School District created a new student safety plan which has revised the roles of SROs.¹⁶⁹ Culture and Climate Officers, formerly SROs, are now tasked with improving the environments of the schools instead of rule enforcement.¹⁷⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic further refined their roles, as Culture and Climate Officers were tasked with delivering meals to sick students' families and monitoring PPE supplies within Oakland Schools.¹⁷¹ This role redefinition, however, raises questions as to why trained law enforcement officers are still present in schools aiding in deliveries, providing emotional support, and working with custodial services at all. School districts like Oakland need to put more emphasis on community and mental health resources to create better and safer school environments without the use of officers.

¹⁶⁶ Getachew, "Oakland Eliminated Its School Police Force—So What Happens Now?"

¹⁶⁷ Getachew, "Oakland Eliminated Its School Police Force—So What Happens Now?"

¹⁶⁸ Ashley McBride, "Police-Free Schools: OUSD Security Officers Are Taking on a New Role," *The Oaklandside*, March 11, 2021, <https://oaklandside.org/2021/03/11/oakland-school-security-officers-police-department/>.

¹⁶⁹ Kyla Johnson-Trammeli, Curtiss Sarikey, and Jessica Black, "George Floyd District Safety Plan Phase 1 (Adoption)," December 9, 2020, <https://oaklandside.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/20-2147-Board-Memorandum-Resolution-Plan-George-Floyd-District-Safety-Plan-Phase-1-Second-Reading-1292020-1.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ McBride, "Police-Free Schools."

¹⁷¹ McBride, "Police-Free Schools."

As of today, the Oakland Unified School District has completely removed SROs from schools, but it has not fully eradicated violence. In August 2022, a thirteen year old boy was shot in an Oakland middle school. In the aftermath, Mike Hutchinson, an Oakland Unified School District Board Director, maintained his support for police-free schools in Oakland and called on the community as a whole to address the issue in a different way.¹⁷² This instance goes to show that there is no foolproof solution—as of yet—to the gun violence epidemic in schools. Continued violence and backlash after the Oakland Unified School District’s decision to fully remove SROs from schools will definitely have an impact on the way other districts attempt to answer the question of violence in the future.

5.3.2.3 Key Lessons from Oakland’s George Floyd Resolution

Over a year after the passage of the George Floyd Resolution, BOP’s Communication Director Jasmine Williams published an article outlining the lessons learned from Oakland’s transition to police-free schools.¹⁷³ Celebrating the new reality that students returned to a police-free campus in August 2021, Williams underscored four crucial steps required to create similar change across the country.

First, William notes that the public must understand that SROs harm students, and students of color in particular. She emphasizes that Oakland, like other districts, has spent millions of dollars on school police, surveillance, and other activities that have “derailed too many Black Lives” while not effectively promoting safety for all students.¹⁷⁴ Accordingly,

¹⁷² Haaziq Madyun, “City Leaders Weigh in on Lack of School Resource Officers in Oakland,” *KRON4*, August 31, 2022, <https://www.kron4.com/news/bay-area/city-leaders-weigh-in-on-lack-of-school-resource-officers-in-oakland/>.

¹⁷³ Jasmine Williams, “Lessons from Oakland’s Move to Police-Free Schools,” *EdSource* (blog), September 21, 2021, <https://edsource.org/2021/lessons-from-oaklands-move-to-police-free-schools/661400>.

¹⁷⁴ Williams, “Lessons from Oakland’s Move to Police-Free Schools.”

Williams argues that changing the narrative around public safety and uplifting the data to support the need for new modes of public safety was crucial to their victory.

Second, Williams underscores the need for organizing and political will. She notes the unanimous nature of the resolution's passage, reminding us that broad support from key political players is key. Crucially, she reminds us that community organizing to advocate for more just policy has been occurring since 2011, when Raheim Brown was killed by an Oakland school police officer.¹⁷⁵ This stresses the need for sustained organizing to bolster the necessary political will for meaningful change.

Third, Williams argues that removing school resource officers must be paired with a commitment to fundamentally change school culture. She writes that schools are “taking active steps to completely shift school culture, climate and discipline toward the goal of transforming our schools into sanctuaries where all students are free from racism, free from implicit bias, free from fear and free from physical danger.”¹⁷⁶ Williams outlines the specific steps being taken to make this possible: “12 new culture and climate ambassadors will support students and respond to situations that were previously handled by police, working with an expanded team of onsite therapists, social workers and other trusted adults to assess students’ mental health needs and reach out to parents as appropriate. A new, districtwide coordinator of safety will oversee safety planning and serve as a liaison to the Oakland Police Department. Just as critically, organizers from various community-based organizations led by the Black Organizing Project will work with teachers, parents and students to develop a comprehensive set of new policies that provide police-free alternatives for teachers and school administrators to respond to disciplinary issues, fights and non-life threatening incidents.”¹⁷⁷ It is clear that not only well-thought-out plans for

¹⁷⁵ Williams, “Lessons from Oakland’s Move to Police-Free Schools.”

¹⁷⁶ Williams, “Lessons from Oakland’s Move to Police-Free Schools.”

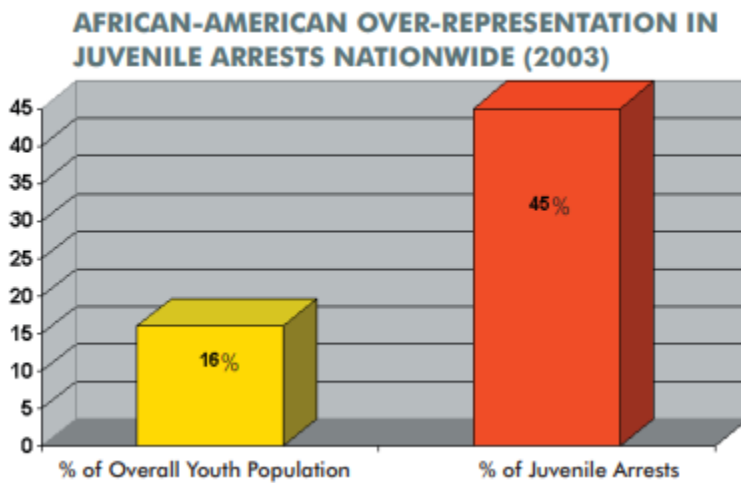
¹⁷⁷ Williams, “Lessons from Oakland’s Move to Police-Free Schools.”

transitioning to new models of public safety are crucial, but also that success may lay in the support from dedicated community organizations like the Black Organizing Project.

Fourth, in addition to receiving support from the Black Organizing Project, Williams underscores the importance of widespread community buy-in, especially during the transition and implementation phase of the resolution. She writes that the community must understand their part in ensuring the success of this new measure. Parents are working with teachers, school staff and community organizers to hold the district accountable to the resolution.¹⁷⁸

6. Figures

Figure 1:



(NAACP)

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