

June 18, 2020

Dear Superintendent, Austin ISD Board, and Community Members:

As members of the Austin community, we are calling on the Austin Independent School District (AISD) to divest from school policing in the district. Austin Justice Coalition is collaborating to advocate for policies and practices that create anti-racist, equitable, physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially safe schools.

Following [several districts' and universities' divestment from police](#), we ask that you, too, prioritize the health and safety of all of our students by: 1) divesting from strategies that contribute to the [school-to-prison pipeline](#), including excessive funding for school police departments; 2) reallocating funds to district-wide implementation of Culturally Responsive Restorative Practices; 3) publishing AISD Police Department budget information online; 4) Publishing AISD Police Department policies and data, especially Use of Force policy data online; 5) developing key performance indicators for AISD Police Department, and hosting an annual Board Work Session for status updates; 6) publishing School Safety and Security Committee information online; and

In making these changes, we will not only protect our students, we will reallocate resources toward upholding the district value of “whole child, every child.” Our communities of color are already disproportionately affected by this pandemic in terms of [public health](#) and [educational opportunity gaps](#). We must pause and ask ourselves, especially during this unprecedented time, who are we policing?

[Police brutality against Black Americans](#) has been a longstanding problem in the Austin community and in communities across our nation. The deaths of Michael Ramos, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Javier Ambler, Maurice De Silva, and hundreds of other victims of police brutality amplify this truth. The loss of these lives are a constant reminder of the physical and psychological harms that the presence of police in schools cause to our students who are Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color (BIPOC), as well as to students with disabilities. Again, Austin is no stranger to the [excessive use-of-force](#) complaints and disproportionality in policing.

[Black, Indigenous, and other students of color](#), as well as [students with disabilities](#), are over-represented in law enforcement referrals for offenses. Our Black and Latinx students are much more likely to get suspended or expelled—even for the same behaviors—than their White peers. For example, from 2011-2015, 20 percent of Austin’s referrals to juvenile probation were of Black students, though they make up just 7 percent of the student population. Our students face an increased likelihood of harm when interacting with School Resource Officers (SROs). Data also shows that SROs respond to incidents involving Black students and students with disabilities with escalated practices, without regard to whether these students pose actual threats. BIPOC students’ and students with disabilities’ contact with SROs is the [school-to-prison pipeline](#) in effect—leaving those students at a distinct disadvantage. We want

to be reassured that the Board of Trustees is holding SROs responsible for any and all disproportionate treatment of Black students, students of color, and students with disabilities through the establishment and monitoring of AISD Police Department key performance indicators.

School-based policing is one of the fastest growing areas of law enforcement. AISD's current budget vote looks to increase the amount of SROs in our schools. We ask that AISD Board of trustees ensure that no new School Resource Officers are added to the FY2021 AISD budget.

AISD released a statement on June 10, 2020, saying that, *"Our officers are an integral part of the school communities they serve. They operate as both support for students and staff and as public safety officials, allowing teachers and administrators to maintain their focus on educating our students."* Yet, as the Round Rock community has stated, *"there is no [data to suggest](#) that having police in schools results in safer schools. There, however, are copious amounts of [research](#) proving that police in schools is harmful to students of color."* It is important that AISD commits to ongoing transparency and regularly publishes the AISD Police Department budget, data, and policies online. Additionally, we want to know how the School Safety and Security Committee works to serve our district to protect all our students, and to fight against the school-to-prison pipeline.

When a student is suspended or expelled, they miss out on both their education and relationship-building opportunities, which are necessary to promote brain development and social and emotional growth, and to obtain future positive life outcomes. According to Texas Appleseed, *"for most of American history, schools did not maintain their own law enforcement departments. Schools once relied instead on natural and educational interventions and discipline practices."* In the last two years, AISD has implemented an alternative to police in 10 out of its 129 schools: Culturally Responsive [Restorative Practices](#). [According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices](#), *"The aim of restorative practices is to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and building relationships."* Focusing on developing strong connections and support contributes to a positive school climate. A well-implemented Culturally Responsive Restorative Practices program strengthens connections within the entire campus community and has been proven to reduce both exclusionary discipline and harmful behavior over time, which eliminates the need for police presence in schools.

In this moment of heightened awareness of the trauma and death experienced by so many people at the hands of police officers, AISD should follow in the footsteps of other districts like Portland, Minneapolis, Denver, and Montgomery County (Maryland) by divesting in school policing. Communities in Round Rock, Dallas, New York City, and Phoenix are also demanding these changes. AISD must take a stand against policing in schools for the sake of its students. This is why we urge AISD to divest from school policing and invest in our students' health and well-being by reallocating funds to the district-wide implementation of Culturally Responsive Restorative Practices.

In solidarity,



**AUSTIN JUSTICE COALITION**



TEXAS CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE COALITION

**TEXAS CRIMINAL JUSTICE COALITION**



**INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION**