Children First

IDRA

Transforming Education

Celina Moreno, J.D.
President & CEO

June 15, 2020

Dear school district leader,

People around the world have been deeply impacted by the murders of Black people by police officers and energized by the resulting protests. While many supporters of this movement are gaining a new understanding of systemic racism and the justice system, others have understood and experienced the potential harms of these systems for generations. Over-funded, over-used, and discriminatory policing systems are not new, and they are not limited to city streets. Many young people's first interactions with police are in their schools, where officers have the same power to arrest, ticket, and use force against children as any officer policing adults.

We urge you, as leaders in your communities, to play your part in changing inappropriate systems of punishment in our schools that disproportionately impact Black students, Latinx students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students. We urge you to end school policing in your districts and replace it with evidence-based programs and people that truly create school safety for all students.

As you make decisions about how to ensure safe schools for all students in your district, it is important to know the facts about school policing:

Police officers do not make schools safe. There is no evidence that school-based police officers make campuses safe or prevent targeted violence. Yet, police officers continue to have a regular presence in schools across the country, destabilizing campus communities in many ways. When police officers are in schools, students and teachers report feeling less safe.[i] The belief that police make safer schools is inconsistent with research. Worse, it drives ineffective and costly school "safety" approaches that create a false sense of security for some and endanger others. When schools rely on police, they limit opportunities for teachers and other staff to use effective classroom management tools and methods of care for young people, and they compromise students' academic and social development.

School police presence negatively impacts academic outcomes for all students. Research shows that increases in police presence in schools can lead to significant reductions in test scores, particularly for Black boys.[ii] Research also shows that increasing funding for school-based policing programs leads to decreased graduation rates, decreased college enrollment, and increased rates of exclusionary discipline.[iii] Interactions with punitive discipline systems, including school police, push students into the school-to-prison and school-to-deportation pipelines, increasing the likelihood of in-grade retention, school push-out, and contact with the justice and immigration systems.[iv]

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Black students do not misbehave more than their peers.[v] Yet, they are more likely to be referred to school police, resulting in disproportionate arrests, citations, use of force incidents, trauma, and other harmful outcomes. Latinx students, students with disabilities and LGBTQ students also have disproportionate contact with police in their schools. School policing systems not only lead to discriminatory outcomes, they perpetuate the systemic inequities and structural racism that created them – with dire consequences the world has recently seen unfold. They model, for all students, harmful stereotypes and promote the idea that certain students deserve to be criminalized.

Here are the facts:
- Black students made up 15% of U.S. student enrollment in 2015-16 but accounted for 31% of all school-related arrests and law enforcement referrals.[vi]
- In Texas, for example, Black students were 13% of the student population between 2011 and 2015 but accounted for 32% of tickets and complaints issued in schools, 22% of school-based arrests, and 40% of use of force incidents.[vii]
- Students with disabilities were 12% of the U.S. student population in 2015-16 but were 28% of all law enforcement referrals and arrests in schools.[viii]
- After high-profile incidents of school violence, schools serving predominantly students of color are more likely to adopt harsh security measures, like school police, even when those measures cannot be justified by any real safety concerns in the school.[ix]

It is possible to have police-free schools. There was a time when police officers were not stationed in schools as they are now. There are schools today that do not have police officers. We have the tools, research, and data to foster safe and supportive schools that do not rely on regular law enforcement intervention. School leaders must challenge and change their thinking about what school safety means for all students and invest in those strategies.

Schools must increase the presence of supportive adults – like counselors and social workers – who are trained to counsel, support and mentor young people without using punitive tactics. Many school districts do not meet the student-to-counselor ratio (250:1) recommended by the American School Counselor Association. In fact, 1.7 million U.S. students attend schools with a police officer but no counselor, and 10 million attend schools with a police officer but no social worker.[x] Schools must use models, like restorative practices, that build strong and trusting relationships between students and adults and address community needs and conflict in a safe and healthy way. Schools must commit to consistent and meaningful engagement with families and students, whose leadership is critical to ensuring safe and equitable schools.[xi]

Call to Action

School boards play a critical role in ensuring school safety. Leaders in the Minneapolis, Portland and Denver school districts recently committed to end their contracts with local law enforcement agencies. Other leaders, students, and policymakers are now pushing for similar action. In addition to providing important protections for students, these decisions cut costs at a time when schools struggle with COVID-19-propelled budget shortfalls.

We urge you to act now and take these steps to ensure all students in your district attend safe and supportive schools:

- End contracts between your school district and local law enforcement agencies and dissolve internal school district police departments. Doing so does not prevent a school from getting help from law enforcement agencies to address any specific, real and serious instances of violence and crime.

- Divest from school policing programs and other intrusive and unnecessary security and monitoring tools.

- Support the personnel, programs and systems that ensure student safety, including counselors, social workers, nurses, restorative practices programs and ethnic studies courses.

- Provide trainings for teachers and staff on combating institutional racism, implicit bias, and the school-to-prison pipeline and on implementing culturally-sustaining pedagogy and evidence-based approaches to classroom management.

- Convene families, students, teachers, and community-based organizations to work with district leaders to develop a plan for ensuring safe, equitable, and police-free schools.

School leaders must be courageous. Now is the time to challenge inequities and the systems that create them and to support excellent and equitable schools for all students. Attached is a template for a resolution you can help pass in your school district to end the presence of police in schools.

IDRA can also support your work to adopt positive strategies for your schools. The IDRA EAC-South, the largest of this nation's four federally-funded equity assistance centers, provides equity audits, technical assistance, training and coaching to schools, districts and state education agencies to create safe, equitable educational opportunities for students. We provide the vast majority of our services at no cost to schools within our region.

Should you have any questions or are interested in discussing ways IDRA can support your work to ensure excellent and equitable schools, please contact me at morgan.craven@idra.org.

Sincerely,
Morgan Craven, J.D.
National Director of Policy, Advocacy and Community Engagement
Intercultural Development Research Association

The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization, led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

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[i] See case studies from The Advancement Project, *We Came to Learn: A Call to Action for Police-Free Schools.*
https://advancementproject.org/wp-content/uploads/WCTLweb/index.html#page=1

[ii] Legewie, J., & Fagan, J. (August 29, 2018). "Aggressive Policing and the Educational Performance of Minority Youth." SocArXiv.

[iii] Weisburst, E.K. (Feb. 7, 2019). Patrolling Public Schools: The Impact of Funding for School Police on Student Discipline and Long-term Education Outcomes. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pam.22116

[iv] *See, e.g.,* The Council of State Governments Justice Center. (2011). *Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study on How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement.*
https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/breaking-schools-rules/.

[v] Russel J.S., & Williams, N.T. (March 2014). *Are Black Kids Worse? Myths and Facts about Racial Differences in Behavior: A Summary of the Literature.* The Equity Project at Indiana University. https://www.justice4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Are-Black-Kids-Worse-Myths-and-Facts-About-Racial-Differences-in-Behavior.pdf;
Okonofua, J., & Eberhardt, J.L. (2015). *Two Strikes: Race and the Disciplining of Young Students*, Psychological Science. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797615570365

[vi] Office for Civil Rights. (2019). 2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection, School Climate and Safety. U.S. Department of Education. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/school-climate-and-safety.pdf

[vii] Texas Appleseed and Texans Care for Children. (2017). Dangerous Discipline: How Texas Schools are Relying on Law Enforcement, Courts, and Juvenile Probation to Discipline Students.
http://stories.texasappleseed.org/dangerous-discipline

[viii] Office for Civil Rights. (2019). 2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection, School Climate and Safety. U.S. Department of Education. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/school-climate-and-safety.pdf

[ix] Nance, J.P. (2017). "Student Surveillance, Racial Inequalities, and Implicit Racial Bias," Emory Law Journal, 765. https://law.emory.edu/elj/content/volume-66/issue-4/articles/student-surveillance-racial-inequalities-implicit-bias.html

[x] ACLU. (2019). Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students. https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline/cops-and-no-counselors.

[xi] See IDRA resources for schools and communities to promote family leadership in education: https://www.idra.org/families-and-communities/education-cafe/

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