



NATIONAL
JUVENILE
JUSTICE
NETWORK

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POLICE-FREE SCHOOLS

PREPARED BY

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NETWORK**

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1200 G ST NW Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005

www.njjn.org
info@njjn.org

INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, Black and Brown students, their families, and communities have called for an end to the over-policing of students in U.S. schools. School-based police officers, often called School Resource Officers (SROs), are particularly criticized for targeting students of color and responding to mental health crises, teenage conflict, and non-violent crimes with unnecessary force. SROs are disproportionately concentrated in schools with a high proportion of Black and Brown students and Black and Brown students are disproportionately arrested on these school campuses. Nationally, Black youth are more than twice as likely as white students to be referred to law enforcement and three times as likely to be arrested as white students in some states.

School boards ostensibly placed police officers into schools to protect students from school shootings, often after widely publicized tragedies. However, recent research found that the rate of deaths in school shootings was actually **2.83 times greater** in schools with armed guards present. While there is little indication that SROs improve school safety, research shows that students stopped by police in their schools report even greater levels of emotional distress and post-traumatic stress disorder than young people stopped in any other location.

The death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police on May 25, 2020 sparked outrage and calls for change in policing on the streets and in our nation's schools. Yet reform in schools would not have been possible without years of effort by local activists. Below we profile several jurisdictions that recently removed police from their schools and detail how communities were able to wage successful campaigns and the types of resources schools have implemented in place of law enforcement.

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"TWIN CITIES" MINNESOTA



The area commonly known as the “Twin Cities” in Minnesota encompasses the two largest cities in the state - Minneapolis and St. Paul. Both of these cities’ school boards voted to remove school resource officers (SROs) from their schools in June of 2020, not long after George Floyd’s death. Both cities had long faced criticism over the use of SROs.

On June 2, 2020, Minneapolis Public Schools terminated the police department’s contract to provide school resource officers in their public schools. According to Kenneth Eban, Executive Director of Advancing Equity Coalition, while George Floyd’s murder was a turning point in support for police removal from schools, advocates had been organizing and fighting for the removal of police since at least the murder of Jamar Clark in 2015. Following Clark’s death, advocates argued that police did not represent safety and pushed for more counselors and social workers in the schools. However, it was difficult for the movement to maintain momentum. Then in 2018, Minneapolis police were further criticized when a photo of a Christmas tree decorated by the police in a racist manner was leaked, highlighting the disconnect between police and the communities they served.



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Eban said that despite criticisms of the police, advocates still had to overcome arguments by those who felt police made schools safer and school communities that had a positive relationship with their SRO. Nevertheless, the death of George Floyd forced the community to reevaluate the harm SROs were inflicting and what alternatives were available, leading the school board to end their contract with the police.

While this has been a momentous win for advocates, Eban said there is still a lot left to be done. He emphasized the need for police-free school advocates to focus on creating viable alternatives. Minneapolis began implementing Emergency Management Specialists, which are meant to serve as a liaison for emergency responders, in the 2020-2021 school year.

Also of vital importance is the way in which school staff view and respond to students. Many school staff continue to view students of color as threats, which can lead them to call 911 for minor incidents even if police are not stationed in the school. "We need accountability to ensure that we see kids as kids and students as students. We need to stop adultification of children, especially Black children." said Eban.

Citing students' need to be free from trauma, the St. Paul Public Schools Board of Education voted to remove police officers from all seven of their school campuses on June 23, 2020. St. Paul and Minneapolis have opted to use security forces designed to be more "student-friendly" and who are trained in de-escalation as part of their alternatives to SROs.

PORTLAND, MAINE



After years of fighting to remove police from schools in Portland, advocates finally achieved their win when the school board voted in early July, 2020 to end the contract with the Portland Police Department that supplied SROs to Portland and Deering high schools. Organizing by formerly incarcerated and marginalized youth was crucial to this effort. Activists from Maine Youth Justice, Maine Inside Out, Portland Outright, Empower Portland and other groups brought a perspective, and a set of insights, that were necessary for this victory.

Prior to the decision, two of the 18 schools in the Portland district had School Resource Officers. In 2019, the ACLU began advocating against a recent school board decision for police to use body-cameras, according to ACLU attorney Michael Kebede. Through this effort, the ACLU got to know members of the school board and raised questions on the use of police in Portland schools. The ACLU won their effort against body-cameras and, emboldened by the decision, worked with a school board member to introduce the first resolution to remove police from schools. The resolution was met with significant pro-police backlash and was ultimately withdrawn.

Then George Floyd's murder struck outrage around the nation and the political climate began to dramatically change. A local Black Lives Matter group included removing SROs in their list of demands, prompting the chair of the school board to reintroduce the resolution. While the resolution was still contentious (with petitions both in support and against it gaining many signatures) it passed the school board on a 7:2 vote.

The superintendent of the district, Xavier Botana, stated that the decision was in part a response to national movements calling for greater law enforcement accountability and a recognition of the ways that law enforcement institutions have perpetuated racism in schools and the country. A 2019 Maine study suggested that the use of SROs led to an increase in juvenile arrests, specifically among students of color, students with disabilities, and students otherwise marginalized or economically disadvantaged.

Portland schools are now switching gears and working on training social workers and other staff to respond to school matters in less invasive ways before relying on police for intervention. Funds saved from eliminating the two SRO positions will be put towards safety, restorative practices, trauma-sensitive practices, and any other equity needs in the school district.

VIRGINIA



Across Virginia, youth and their communities have been working to remove School Resource Officers (SROs) from the public schools with several jurisdictions ending or limiting their SRO programs.

Alexandria

Youth from Tenants and Workers United in Alexandria took the lead on advocating for police-free schools. Tenants and Workers United (TWU) works to organize low-income communities of color -- low-wage workers, immigrants, women, and youth- to fight for affordable housing, education justice, and immigrants' rights. Initially focused on implementing restorative practices in schools to decrease out-of-school suspensions and dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, they shifted focus after George Floyd's death, according to Ingris Moran, lead organizer for TWU. Youth began to campaign more heavily for the removal of police from Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS).

According to Rachael Deane, NJJN member and Legal Director of the Legal Aid Justice Center's Youth Justice Program, the youth initially petitioned the school board to end their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the police department. When the school board refused to do this, however, youth refocused their efforts on getting the city council to defund the SRO program. With legal and policy support from the Youth Justice Program, TWU youth led townhalls and advocated with city council members on a reallocation message asking them to distribute the money from the SRO budget to programs focused on strengthening students' mental health. Their hard work paid off on May 3, 2021, when Alexandria's city council voted 4 to 3 to end the SRO program in the public schools and reallocate the \$800,000 aligned for SROs towards school-based mental health support for students.

Deane said that it is now up to the school board to decide how to reinvest these funds. ACPS is collaborating with the Health Department and the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) to come up with recommendations as to how the money should be spent, and will present these recommendations to the school board in July. The city council will have to approve the plan. Moran stated that the youth are currently working on ways to collaborate with both the city council and the school board to ensure that their voices are heard and that money is reinvested to support staff and prevent youth from being further criminalized. TWU will continue to fight for systemic change in Alexandria to ensure that SROs are permanently withdrawn from schools and replaced with positive supports for youth rather than more security and surveillance.

Arlington

Arlington Public Schools established a School Resource Officer (SRO) Work Group in December 2020 to reimagine the relationship between the Arlington County Police Department (ACPD) and Arlington Public Schools (APS). Based on their recommendations, which were concurred with by the APS Superintendent Francisco Durán, the Arlington County Public School Board voted unanimously on June 24, 2021 to remove police from school hallways. However, the program is not being completely shut down. Law enforcement will no longer be stationed in schools but they will be available to step in if a crisis arises, though it is unclear where they will be located.

APS will train school staff and administration on how best to intervene in incidents that SROs used to handle. School officials will also host programs educating Arlington police how to better engage with students on emotional, cultural and community issues. In their report, the SRO work group makes several additional recommendations.

Charlottesville

Since the 2017 violent Unite the Right white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, the city of Charlottesville and its school system have engaged in racial justice discussions and have been considering local education equity. Following the death of George Floyd and the removal of SROs in Minneapolis, as well as massive protests against police violence in Charlottesville last summer, the city decided to take action. Local activists, including Charlottesville Black Lives Matter, were calling on the city to remove SROs. On June 11, 2020, Charlottesville's School Board, the city, and Police Department made a joint announcement that they had mutually agreed to remove SROs from Charlottesville's schools and that a new model for school safety was needed.

The Charlottesville school system formed a committee of staff, students, community members, and law enforcement to research and recommend a new safety model. The committee sought input from students of color, such as the Black Student Union at Charlottesville High School, which encouraged providing more social workers and guidance counselors to schools so that they could focus on the causes of behavior challenges. The committee also looked to Toronto schools, which removed SROs in 2017 and have seen suspensions drop by 25% and expulsions drop by 50% since that time. Inspired by the Toronto model, the city's proposed plan for Charlottesville schools will use school-hired safety monitors, which in Toronto were often individuals already working in the schools or the community. These monitors will be trained in de-escalation, mental health, and safety protocols in order to assist students and keep the hallways safe. The proposed plan also included strengthening community relationships, growing mental health supports, and using community mentors in the schools. Restorative practices will be taught to the staff, and students will learn social emotional skills for self-regulation and peer support.



Richmond

Advocates have been working to remove SROs from Richmond public schools for several years. Last summer, persuaded by protests and a virtual student forum on policing, Richmond Public Schools (RPS) Superintendent Jason Kamras recommended that officers be removed from schools and called for added mental health services. Unfortunately, the Richmond School Board still has not brought the issue up for a vote. NJJN Member Valerie Slater, Executive Director of RISE for Youth, believes that the school board has failed to vote on it because they don't see a viable alternative. RISE For Youth is working to continue to educate the school board and community members as well as looking to broaden the definition of the school resource officer to include other forms of support such as credible messengers. Slater explained that these messengers would be community members from similar backgrounds to the students that are trained in restorative practices and could serve as mentors to the students to "break down some of those cultural barriers preventing students from accessing resources that are available." Richmond faces a longer fight, as youth and advocates continue to organize and demand for change to reimagine the SRO program.



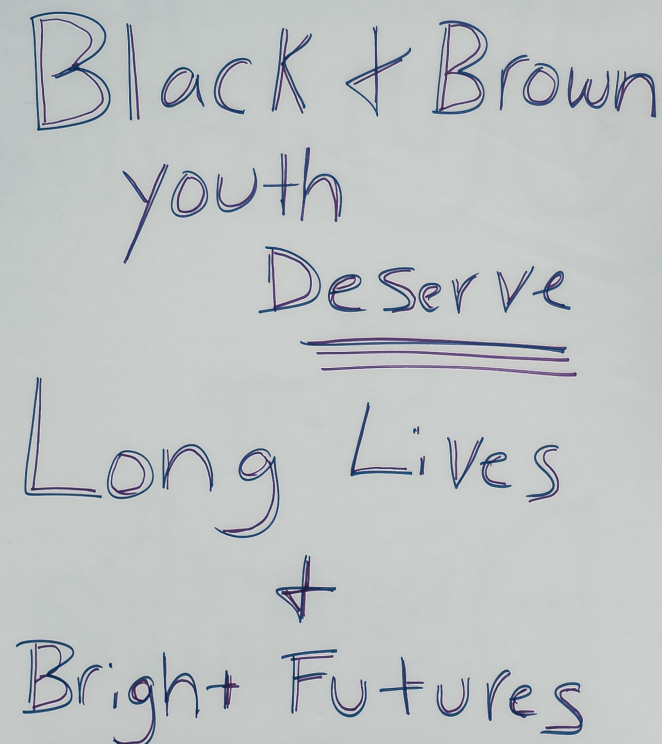
REFORM EFFORTS AROUND THE COUNTRY



Major reforms continue to occur around the country as advocates fight to make schools police-free and provide more appropriate supports for students. Below are some of the additional school districts that have removed police officers from their schools since George Floyd's death.

Denver, Colorado

In Denver, in-school police officers had monitored the schools for 22 years before the Denver Public Schools Board of Education voted unanimously on June 11, 2020, to end their contract with the police department and remove all school resource officers by June 4, 2021. Between 2014 and 2019 alone, 4,500 students were ticketed or arrested. Approximately 80% of those students were Black or Latinx according to Padres & Jóvenes Unidos, an advocacy organization that led the movement for police-free schools for over a decade. The school board directed the Superintendent to redirect the \$721,000 from the in-school police program to social workers, psychologists, and restorative justice experts. The board's resolution further directed the police department to create a policy limiting tickets, arrests, and referring students to law enforcement while on school grounds.



Black + Brown
youth
Deserve
Long Lives
+
Bright Futures

Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Following years of activism by students, some working with the social justice organization Freedom, Inc., the Madison Metropolitan School District Board of Education voted unanimously to immediately terminate its contract with the Madison Police Department on June 29, 2020. While George Floyd's death helped to prompt the change, it could not have happened without years of advocacy by young people who shared their stories and experiences, as well as data and examples from Madison and around the country that exemplified the harm SROs were causing students of color. The vote followed a shift in position by school board president and former police officer Gloria Reyes who had initially resisted calls to end the contract and after the Madison teachers' union voiced support for ending the SRO program. The elimination is estimated to give back \$380,000 to the school district that advocates are asking to be reinvested via transformative justice training, housing and transportation assistance, and other support for students.

On June 18, 2020, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors voted unanimously to end funding for school resource officers. Leaders Igniting Transformation, a student-led group, fought to remove police from schools for two and a half years. They asked for the money to be reallocated into hiring social workers, school counselors, and other support staff and in restorative justice training for teachers and school staff. The Milwaukee Police Department agreed that money should be reinvested into social services to support the school system.

Oakland, California

The Black Organizing Project (BOP) led efforts to get police out of public schools in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) for nearly a decade, achieving their goal on June 24, 2020. Their efforts began with BOP's launch of the Bettering Our Schools Campaign following the murder of Raheim Brown by an Oakland school police officer in 2011. On June 24, 2020, the OUSD Board of Education approved the **George Floyd Resolution to Eliminate the Oakland Schools Police Department** which directed the Superintendent to develop a new district safety plan through an "inclusive, community-driven process." For an alternative approach, BOP looked at Toronto, Canada, which removed armed police from their schools in 2017. The Toronto process focused on redistribution of school resources from policing to more support staff and student programs, policy changes limiting suspendable offenses, and the hiring of community advocates for leadership positions in the district.

In December, 2020, the OUSD School Board approved a comprehensive safety plan outlining how schools should respond to most situations without relying on the police. It included a new procedure for responding to mental health crises using mental health professionals instead of police and established a culture and climate department that will focus on building relationships with students and mediating conflicts using restorative justice. Former school security officers will focus less on rule enforcement and more on fostering a healthy school environment.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Youth, families, and communities around the country continue to fight to remove school-based police officers. See this [Police-Free Schools Tracker](#) to follow the progress being made and check out the research, articles, and websites below:

Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) Policy Platform

CJJ approved a policy platform to limit the presence of law enforcement in schools. The platform focuses on addressing racism at the front end of the youth justice system through: improving training for those who work with youth of color; ending the over policing of youth of color; ending the school-to-prison pipeline; and increasing investments in communities of color.

Cops and No Counselors

ACLU report examining how the lack of school mental health staff and increased police presences in schools is harming students and leading to an increased criminalization of school children. The report reviews school arrests and referrals to law enforcement data, with particular attention to disparities by race and disability status.

Effects of School Resource Officers on School Crime and Responses to Crime

Study conducted to examine the effects of increasing SROs in a sample of 33 public schools. The study findings suggest that increasing SROs does not improve school safety and that by increasing exclusionary responses to school discipline incidents it increases the criminalization of school discipline.

Ending School Contracts with Law Enforcement

American Bar Association (ABA) article discussing the importance of ending contracts with law enforcement to remove school resource officers (SROs) from schools.

#NoCopsNoGuns: Investing in Real Solutions

Advancement Project report that looks at research and the experiences of students across the country showing the harmful impact of police in schools. The report recommends that schools need to implement strategies that create positive, supportive learning environments that phase out law enforcement.

Police in Schools: A Background Paper

A background tool on the issue of police in schools, from the Education Civil Rights Alliance and the American Federation of Teachers.

Police in Schools: Developments, Issues, and Best Practices

ABA report discussing challenges and issues associated with policing in schools and outlining potential steps to improve outcomes.

Policy Brief: School Policing Disparities for Black Girls

Analysis from Girls for Gender Equity highlighting New York Police Department (NYPD) interventions targeting girls during the 2018-2019 school year with particular attention to the number of Black girls impacted.

Presence of Armed School Officials and Fatal and Nonfatal Gunshot Injuries During Mass School Shootings, United States, 1980-2019

Study of every recorded incident where one or more people were intentionally shot in a school building during the school day from 1980-2019. Researchers found that the rate of deaths was 2.83 times greater in schools with an armed guard present.

School-to-Prison Pipeline: Brochure

Advancement Project brochure that explains and defines the school-to-prison pipeline and provides recommendations on how to dismantle the pipeline to create safe, quality schools for all.

Sustaining Police-Free Schools Through Practices

Girls for Gender Equity tool-kit designed to offer theoretical grounding around policing within schools and providing a compilation of tips, templates, and resources to assist schools in reimagining and building strategies to sustain a police-free school.

We are Terrified Police in Our Schools Will Harm Us

Student-written opinion piece on why we need police-free schools and calling on Congress to pass the [Counseling not Criminalization in Schools Act](#).

We Came to Learn: A Call for Police-Free Schools:

Advancement Project report that examines policing practices in America's public schools and the historical roots in criminalizing Black and Brown youth. The report also looks at organizing and advocacy to advance a vision of school safety that is not reliant on policing.

When Girls of Color are Assaulted by School Police Officers

Girls for Gender Equity visual catalogue of assaults on girls of color by school resource officers (SRO's) that have been covered in the media since 2007.

ABOUT NJJN

The National Juvenile Justice Network leads a membership community of [60 state-based organizations and numerous individuals across 42 states and D.C.](#) We all seek to shrink our youth justice systems and transform the remainder into systems that treat youth and families with dignity and humanity. Our work is premised on the fundamental understanding that our youth justice systems are inextricably bound with the systemic and structural racism that defines our society; as such we seek to change policy and practice through an anti-racist lens by building power with those who are most negatively affected by our justice systems, including young people, their families and all people of color. We also recognize that other vulnerable populations - including LGBTQIA+, those with disabilities and mental illness, girls and immigrants - are disparately and negatively impacted by our justice systems, and thus we also seek to center their concerns in our policy change work.