Scripps Senior Theses   Scripps Student Scholarship

2022

Getting Police Out of Schools

Maya Lynch

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses

Part of the American Politics Commons, Education Commons, Political Theory Commons, and the Social Justice Commons

Recommended Citation

Lynch, Maya, "Getting Police Out of Schools" (2022). *Scripps Senior Theses*. 1990.
https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/1990

School Resource Officers, School Policing, Abolition

GETTING POLICE OUT OF SCHOOLS

A look at the history and impacts of school resource officers, and the most effective campaigns for

removing them from schools in line with abolitionist principles

By

Maya Koch Lynch

SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF ARTS

Professor Neiman

Professor Kim

July 2022

Political Science

Table of Contents

Abstract

This paper explores the rise and impact of police officers in schools, frequently referred to as School Resource Officers or SROs. In addition to attempting to delegitimize the common explanation that school shootings necessitate SROs and their ongoing presence, the paper goes on to outline two under-researched drivers of SROs. These are the immense underfunding of public K-12 schools which forces a search for additional sources of revenue alongside an ongoing effort to suppress student movements and control students of color. The paper then analyzes three case studies of school districts which, to varying degrees, removed SROs and evaluates their success against abolitionist reform metrics with the aim of drawing out the most important lessons. The evidence from this paper and its research suggests that student wellbeing necessitates nothing short of the total removal of SROs and policing from schools and the author hopes that this paper can play a small role in the accomplishment of this goal.

Introduction

According to the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)[1], a branch within the US Department of Justice, School Resource Officers (or SROs) are "sworn law enforcement officers responsible for safety and crime prevention in schools". Since their initial inception in the 1950s, SRO presence in schools and their overall scope of involvement and responsibility have grown dramatically. In theory, SROs are trained to perform three main roles consisting of 1. serving as law enforcement, 2. acting as a mentor or counselor, and 3. being an educator. Their true impact, however, is very different.

A Quick Note On Language

Although "SRO" is the most common term used today to refer to police stationed in schools, it is important to note that throughout history, and across school districts, the name may vary. This paper attempts to focus specifically on SROs, as they are the most prominent and visible source of police in schools but due to the lack of data, at times it is not possible to distinguish between different types of school police. Many of the most comprehensive statistics group SROs with other similar school security positions. Clarifications are included whenever any group beyond just "SROs" is discussed and whenever a school district or time period uses language other than "SRO". With that said, the slight flexibility around the category of "SRO's" discussed in this paper does not, I believe, undermine this paper's central points and research as my findings demand the removal of all policing bodies from schools, regardless of what name is used to describe them.

---

[1] Supporting safe schools. SUPPORTING SAFE SCHOOLS | COPS OFFICE. (n.d.). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://cops.usdoj.gov/supportingsafeschools

The Rise of SROs

In the 70 years since their founding, the number of SROs has skyrocketed. They can now be found in public schools in all 50 US states and in 2018[2], 45% of all public schools had an SRO present throughout the week. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the total number of "law enforcement officers" in schools (a number that groups SROs with other on-campus sworn law enforcement officers) was just over 42,000. In a 2019-2020 study[3] that grouped SROs with other security and sworn law enforcement officers, 65% of US public schools had one or more law enforcement officers present at least one day a week. The breakdown of this was that just under 55% of elementary schools, nearly 82% of middle schools, and almost 85% of high schools had law enforcement officers present weekly on school grounds.

These numbers are even starker when compared to the fact that in 1975 only 1% of schools reported having police officers.[4] This aligns with the claim from the National Association of School Resource Officers[5] (NASRO) that "school-based policing is the fastest-growing area of law enforcement." Today some school districts have larger SRO departments than the police forces that work in major cities. New York Public Schools, for example, have more "school safety agents" than the number of police in the cities of Las Vegas, Boston, Detroit, or Washington D.C.[6]

The First SRO Program

The creation of the first SRO programs in schools is directly correlated with the timing of the Civil Rights Movement and the increase in integrated learning environments. Soon after the 1954 *Brown v. Board*

[2] National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019061.pdf

[3] Digest of Education Statistics, 2021. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a part of the U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_233.70.asp

[4] Homepage: Center for Education Policy Analysis, research, and Evaluation. Center for Education Policy Analysis Research and Evaluation. (2022, May 11). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://cepare.uconn.edu/

[5] Ibid

[6] A look at school safety. New York Civil Liberties Union. (2017, August 4). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.nyclu.org/en/look-school-safety

of Education Supreme Court decision, which ended the legal segregation of public schools, SRO programs sprang up in cities across the country including Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, New York City, Oakland, Seattle, Tucson, and more.[7]

Starting in 1953, just a year before the *Brown v. Board* ruling, the first official SRO program began in Flint, Michigan, and was designed in line with the "community policing" ideals that were dominant at the time.[8] The stated aims of the program were to foster "positive relationships between youth and police, strengthen community-police connections, and support safe learning environments by protecting students and staff from high threat situations".[9] Despite this claim, many writers and historians believe that "the real motives, however, likely had more to do with white fear, privilege and resentment" as these first SROs were placed in Bryant Community Junior High School which was a low-income racially integrated district.[10] With the civil rights movement gaining traction, the increasing unease from middle and upper-class white families largely led to the SRO program's creation.[11] As is true today, despite its claimed mission, SROs served to protect white students and school property from the "delinquency" that is largely associated with black and brown students, students with disabilities, and low-income students.[12]

[7] Henning, K. (2021, July 19). Cops at the Schoolyard Gate. Vox. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22580659/police-in-school-resource-officers-sro
[8] Mark Otto, J. T. (2021, October 13). Timeline. #PoliceFreeSchools. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://policefreeschools.org/timeline/
[9] History of the School Resource Officer Program. Blackfoot Police. (n.d.). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from http://blackfootpolice.org/sro/sro_history.html#:~:text=The%20First%20School%20Resource%20Officer,served%20as%20teachers%20and%20counselors.
[10] Henning, K. (2021, July 19). Cops at the Schoolyard Gate. Vox. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22580659/police-in-school-resource-officers-sro
[11] Gomez, W. (2021, May 5). 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. Princeton University. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/abolishing-school-resource-officers-amidst-black-lives-matter-movement-history-and-case-study
[12]Ibid

Militarization

SROs, like other forms of police, are also becoming increasingly armed and militarized. Despite their position in schools, these officers often carry weapons similar to regular law enforcement including firearms, batons, tasers, and pepper spray. A 2019-2020 study found that over 50% of sworn law enforcement officers in schools carried a firearm.[13] To put this in perspective, this means 38,400 schools have law enforcement officers walking around school campuses with firearms (this included 17,400 elementary schools and 72% of the law enforcement officers in high schools).[14] Similar numbers are also true for the carrying of physical restraints. The carrying of chemical aerosol sprays is common , as well, and are present in about 29,000 public schools.

Through the US Department of Defense's "Program 1033" which "authorizes the transfer of excess defense materials to federal, state and local agencies for law enforcement purposes," school districts around the country have also been "receiving military-grade weapons."[15] This includes weapons like those used by SWAT teams, mine-resistant-tanks, M-16 rifles, and even grenade launchers.[16] Since the program was started "10,000 jurisdictions have received more than $7 billion of equipment" and school law enforcements have received "millions of dollars of heavily militarized equipment".[17] While pushback from students and community members has had some success in pushing districts to return some of these weapons, and only a

---

[13] Digest of Education Statistics, 2021. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a part of the U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_233.70.asp

[14] Diliberti, M. (2019). Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019061.pdf

[15] Knefel, M. (2018, June 25). Why are police using military-grade weapons in high schools? Rolling Stone. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/why-are-police-using-military-grade-weapons-in-high-schools-71120/

[16] Ferris, S. (2022, January 28). Children's rights groups Urge Defense Program to stop giving school cops military hardware. Center for Public Integrity. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://publicintegrity.org/education/childrens-rights-groups-urge-defense-program-to-stop-giving-school-cops-military-hardware/

[17] Lawrence, C. (2021, September 29). Federal militarization of law enforcement must end: News & commentary. American Civil Liberties Union. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.aclu.org/news/criminal-law-reform/federal-militarization-of-law-enforcement-must-end#:~:text=A%20program%20called%20%E2%80%9C1033%2C%E2%80%9D,than%20%247%20billion%20of%20equipment.

relatively small percentage of school districts seem to be recipients of the weapons, Program 1033 is still

ongoing and continues to bring these immensely dangerous weapons into schools.[18]

True Impacts of SROs

So what is the impact of SROs on students? The short answer is that there is no broad evidence that

SROs make schools safer. Instead, there is extensively documented evidence of the detrimental impact that

SROs have on student mental health, on creating climates of distrust and unease in schools, on widening

racial disparities and violence, and on furthering the school to prison pipeline to the extent that some have

started referring to this phenomenon as the prison to prison pipeline.

Before beginning the discussion about SRO impacts and school safety, it is important to note that

there has been an overall decline in youth crime rates and school shootings since the early 90s.[19] The

number of violent deaths, homicides, and suicides at school have all generally decreased since the 90s.[20]

This is also true,with an exception for bullying, and for at-school victimizations including thefts and

assaults.[21] Schools appear to be the safest place young children and adults can be. To put this in context

more than 99.5% of all deaths of school-aged children occur anywhere other than school.[22] This is not to say

that we can't make schools safer, as any harm that comes to students is too much, but that if we want to

truly be targeting and improving the safety of our school-age children, we need to start focusing elsewhere.

[18] Henning, K. (2021, July 19). Cops at the Schoolyard Gate. Vox. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22580659/police-in-school-resource-officers-sro
[19] Washington, K. (2021, June 15). School resource officers: When the cure is worse than the disease. ACLU of Washington.
Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.aclu-wa.org/story/school-resource-officers-when-cure-worse-disease
[20] Violent Deaths at School and Away From School and School Shootings. Coe - violent deaths at school and away from school
and school shootings. (2022, May). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/a01/violent-deaths-and-shootings?tid=4
[21] Ibid
[22] Dupont, D. (2020, February 5). Sociologist presents research behind headlines about school safety. BG Independent News.
Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://bgindependentmedia.org/sociologist-presents-research-behind-headlines-about-school-safety/

With regard to crime in schools, a 2013 Congressional Research Service report concluded that there was "little rigorous research showing a connection between the presence of police officers in schools and changes in crime or student discipline rates."[23] In a meta-analysis of 12 studies, done by the Justice and Prevention Research Center, the "common non-curricular policing strategies" were found to have "no overall effects on measures of crime...in schools".[24] The report goes on to conclude that despite minimal research, the research available "fails to support a school safety effect" of police presence in schools.[25]

There is also no conclusive evidence that "the presence of school-based law enforcement has a positive effect on students' perceptions of safety in schools."[26] In fact, research has shown that SROs "generally increase students' fear and negatively impacts students' perceptions of safety."[27] In a study of mostly students of color in Los Angeles, "the researchers found that 60 percent or more of Black students in the district did not believe that school police were trustworthy or cared about them".[28] Of the studied group "73% found police overly aggressive and 67% said they tended to escalate situations rather than calming them down".[29]

The presence of SROs in a school also drastically escalates the punitive responses to student behavior. Schools with SROs experience a 3.5 times higher rate of arrests when compared to non-SRO

[23] Goldstein, D. (2020, June 12). Do police officers make schools safer or more dangerous? The New York Times. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/us/schools-police-resource-officers.html

[24] Stern, A., & Petrosino, A. (2018). *What do we know about the effects of school-based law enforcement on school safety?* Justice & Prevention Research Center. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/JPRC-Police-Schools-Brief.pdf

[25] Ibid

[26] Nayeb, H., & Meek, A. (2020, June 23). What the research shows: The Impact of School Resource Officers. Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.clccrul.org/blog/2020/6/23/research-sros#_edn2

[27] Ibid

[28] Sparks, S. D. (2020, November 20). Do school police make black students feel more or less safe? Education Week. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.edweek.org/leadership/do-school-police-make-black-students-feel-more-or-less-safe/2020/06

[29] Sparks, S. D. (2020, November 20). Do school police make black students feel more or less safe? Education Week. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.edweek.org/leadership/do-school-police-make-black-students-feel-more-or-less-safe/2020/06

schools.[30] In some states, this difference goes up to 8 times higher.[31] These impacts fall most heavily on marginalized students as can be seen in a study by the DOJ which found that the increases in offenses and exclusionary reactions due to SROs "were most evident for Black and Hispanic students compared to White students".[32] This is especially true since SROs are also overwhelmingly placed in disproportionately low-income schools and schools with high populations of students of color. In these schools with the highest poverty rates, research has shown SRO presence increased the probability of student arrest by a shocking 402%. [33]

Research done by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found that "schools with SROs have higher arrest rates, especially for non-serious offenses like disorderly conduct, than schools without SROs".[34] This is true in part because SRO involvement "results in harsher punishments for minor offenses" when compared to the typical responses of other school staff like teachers and administrators.[35] As mentioned above these impacts disproportionately fall on marginalized students, with Black students and students with disabilities experiencing incredibly high rates of intensified criminalization. Students with disabilities are "arrested or referred to law enforcement at nearly three times the rate as their non-disabled peers"[36] and a look at the 2015-2016 school year shows that Black students nationally account for more than double their

[30] Washington, K. (2021, June 15). School resource officers: When the cure is worse than the disease. ACLU of Washington. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.aclu-wa.org/story/school-resource-officers-when-cure-worse-disease
[31] Ibid
[32] Cross, S. (2021). Are effects of school resource officers moderated by Student Race and ethnicity? Office of Justice Programs. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.ojp.gov/library/publications/are-effects-school-resource-officers-moderated-student-race-and-ethnicity
[33] Stop flushing money down the pipeline: A call to divert federal money ... National Women's Law Center. (2021, November). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SRO-Funding-FS.pdf
[34] Jawando, W., & Riemer, H. (2021, February 4). *Bill 46-20, Police – School Resources Officers – Prohibited*. Montgomery County Council. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2684_1_14214_Bill_46-20_Publichearing_20210204.pdf
[35] King, R., & Schindler, M. (2022, March 9). A better path forward for Criminal Justice: Reconsidering police in schools. Brookings. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-reconsidering-police-in-schools/#:~:text=LONG%2DTERM%20REFORMS-,Break%20the%20School%2Dto%2DPrison%20Pipeline,to%20the%20criminal%20justice%20system
[36] Washington, K. (2021, June 15). School resource officers: When the cure is worse than the disease. ACLU of Washington. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.aclu-wa.org/story/school-resource-officers-when-cure-worse-disease

population percentage in their arrest rates (in 2015, the 15% of Black students in the US accounted for 36% of the school arrests)."[37]

These harsher reactions often result in exclusionary responses (like suspensions or expulsions) which force students to miss class time. This factor contributes greatly to the school to prison pipeline; a "national trend wherein youth are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal legal systems".[38] Exclusionary behavioral responses steal learning days from students, weaken relationships with teachers and peers, create distrust among students, and increase the likelihood of more extreme punitive measures like arrests for the student. Studies find that a single arrest leads to a 25% increase in the likelihood of the student dropping out of school.[39] This reverberates later into students' lives, making it more difficult to find employment and increasing the likelihood of later interactions with the police.[40] With over 50,000 school-based arrests occurring nationally in the 2015–2016 school year, many for minor offenses such as "throwing a paper airplane, kicking a trash can, wearing sagging pants, and throwing a carrot at a teacher", it is crucial that everything possible is done to reduce these numbers, including the removal of their biggest driver; SROs.[41]

[37] King, R., & Schindler, M. (2022, March 9). A better path forward for Criminal Justice: Reconsidering police in schools. Brookings. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-reconsidering-police-in-schools/#:~:text=LONG%2DTERM%20REFORMS-,Break%20the%20School%2Dto%2DPrison%20Pipeline,to%20the%20criminal%20justice%20system

[38] Frankfurter, M. (2022, April 4). School-to-prison pipeline. American Civil Liberties Union. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/juvenile-justice-school-prison-pipeline

[39]King, R., & Schindler, M. (2022, March 9). A better path forward for Criminal Justice: Reconsidering police in schools. Brookings. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-reconsidering-police-in-schools/#:~:text=LONG%2DTERM%20REFORMS-,Break%20the%20School%2Dto%2DPrison%20Pipeline,to%20the%20criminal%20justice%20system

[40] King, R., & Schindler, M. (2022, March 9). A better path forward for Criminal Justice: Reconsidering police in schools. Brookings. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-reconsidering-police-in-schools/#:~:text=LONG%2DTERM%20REFORMS-,Break%20the%20School%2Dto%2DPrison%20Pipeline,to%20the%20criminal%20justice%20system

[41]Ibid

These impacts are all still holding true, if not getting worse, despite over 60 years of SRO presence in schools. This is because these detrimental impacts on students happen regardless of the official name used for SROs, the exact model followed by a given school district, and the amount of training received by officers. Increases in training for SROs have been found ineffective in studies as "50% of SROs fail to apply their training and positively engage with children in practice."[42] Similarly, a look at the available data on training that has been mandated for police shows that they "do not correct the racial imbalances in arrests." [43]No amount of training undoes the bottom line that SROs are disastrous for student wellbeing, success, and racial and social equity in schools.[44]

All of this is true while counties across the country pay an average of $62,000 a year (and as much as $125,000 a year) per full time SRO, and the federal government "has invested more than $1 billion to subsidize the placement of police in schools".[45] This federal funding has resulted in more than "46,000 additional SROs patrolling hallways".[46] This is an immense amount of financial power being invested into a structure that is actively harming students, especially the most marginalized students and flies in the face of research that has over and over again found effective approaches to improving student safety including "more funding for counselors, psychologists, and social workers; positive behavioral interventions and supports; restorative justice, social and emotional learning, and empathetic discipline programs".[47]

---

[42] Stop flushing money down the pipeline: A call to divert federal money ... National Women's Law Center. (2021, November). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SRO-Funding-FS.pdf
[43] Ibid
[44] Ibid
[45] Washington, K. (2021, June 15). School resource officers: When the cure is worse than the disease. ACLU of Washington. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.aclu-wa.org/story/school-resource-officers-when-cure-worse-disease
[46] Ibid
[47] Jawando, W., & Riemer, H. (2021, February 4). *Bill 46-20, Police – School Resources Officers – Prohibited*. Montgomery County Council. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2684_1_14214_Bill_46-20_Publichearing_20210204.pdf

Deconstructing the School Shooting Misconception

One of the most prominent narratives used when discussing SROs in schools is what this paper will refer to as the "School Shooting Misconception". This misconception follows that school shootings, and specifically the tragic shooting in Columbine, are the drivers for the increase of police in schools and the increase of SRO funding available. The reality, however, is that, while school shootings did cause a surge in public support for police in schools and spurred an increase in federal funding, two other main drivers of the increase in SROs are frequently conveniently left out of the conversation. These are the ongoing efforts to suppress student movements and organizing in schools and the desperate funding efforts made by schools who are severely under-resourced. Federal and state funding for SROs, frequently follow directly after student uprisings and, although it is of course difficult to prove conclusively, appear to be attempts to suppress and restrict student organizing. The other half of this is that the numerical increase of officers or surveillance technology in schools stems largely from underfunded public schools searching for additional grants and funding, and finding far fewer dollars available in other formats than what is available in grants attached to SROs and other forms of policing.

School Shootings

Before diving into under-resourced schools and the suppression of student movements as drivers of the increase in SROs it is important to first address the legitimacy of school shootings as a driver. In addition to all of the detrimental impact on students discussed in the section above, there is no evidence that SROs either prevent or reduce school shootings or that they make schools safer in the event of a school shooting.[48] Instead, there is some evidence that they may even make situations of school shootings more dangerous.

---

[48] Connery, C. (2020, October 27). *The prevalence and the price of police in schools*. Neag School of Education. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://education.uconn.edu/2020/10/27/the-prevalence-and-the-price-of-police-in-schools/

A study that analyzed all schools which had experienced a school shooting between 1999 and 2018 to schools that did not experience a shooting found that schools "with a SRO are more likely to experience a shooting event than schools without an SRO".[49] The summary of the study goes on to say that "while it might be tempting to attribute this to the idea that SROs are only placed in "bad" schools, there is no evidence that this is the case".[50] When the study compared the schools which did experience a shooting, they found that SROs actually seemed to correlate with a more devastating impact. The number of injuries and deaths caused during a school shooting in schools with SROs was 2.5 times higher than those in school shootings at schools without SROs. While researchers are still investigating why this correlation exists, it's clear that SROs do not make students safer in a situation of a school shooting.

With the goal of eliminating all school shootings, focusing on how to prevent these incidents is crucially important. Research on how to avert school shootings has found that of the places where school shootings were ultimately prevented, the "key is having trusted adults whom other students can inform".[51] SROs are very rarely that adult; in another study, students were far more likely to report planned school shootings to school staff members and "tell a police officer only rarely".[52] This, coupled with the fact that SRO programs actively detract from funding for the types of adults that students trust most; with 90 percent of students attending schools where the number of counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists do not meet the recommended professional standards, demonstrates that funding for SROs is taking away funding from our best school shooting preventative measures.[53] Despite the narrative that school shootings

[49] Dupont, D. (2020, February 5). Sociologist presents research behind headlines about school safety. BG Independent News. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://bgindependentmedia.org/sociologist-presents-research-behind-headlines-about-school-safety/
[50] Ibid
[51] Connery, C. (2020, October 27). *The prevalence and the price of police in schools*. Neag School of Education. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://education.uconn.edu/2020/10/27/the-prevalence-and-the-price-of-police-in-schools/
[52] Ibid
[53] Washington, K. (2021, June 15). School resource officers: When the cure is worse than the disease. ACLU of Washington. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.aclu-wa.org/story/school-resource-officers-when-cure-worse-disease

necesitate SROs and an increase in SRO funding to keep our students safe, the facts seem to demonstrate the opposite.

Under-Resourced Schools

It is no secret that public schools in the US are immensely underfunded. In 2020 a study was done which estimated "the investment needed in every school district in the country… to bring students up to national average outcomes".[54] The study, conducted by the Century Foundation, concluded that K-12 public schools are underfunded by nearly $150 billion annually, "robbing more than 30 million school children of the resources they need to succeed in the classroom".[55] While this measurement is based on a hypothetical future outcome, these numbers, especially the disparities the study went on to find, are very telling. Their research found that low-income districts and districts with more than 50% Black or Latino student enrollment are roughly twice as likely to have funding gaps. These gaps cost districts with those demographics roughly $5,000 or more in funding per student.[56]

Teachers are also immensely underfunded with the average teacher salary, across all experience levels, being $64,000. This leaves nearly a fifth of teachers trying to work other jobs outside of the school system and makes teachers roughly " three times as likely as all U.S. workers to juggle multiple jobs at once."[57] In a survey of teachers across the country, nearly all respondents (97%) reported "that their

[54] *TCF study finds U.S. schools underfunded by nearly $150 billion annually*. The Century Foundation. (2020, July 22). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://tcf.org/content/about-tcf/tcf-study-finds-u-s-schools-underfunded-nearly-150-billion-annually/?session=1
[55] Ibid
[56] Ibid
[57] Tate, E. (2022, March 30). *We all know teachers are underpaid but who imagined it was this bad?* Mother Jones. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2022/03/we-all-know-teachers-are-underpaid-but-who-imagined-it-was-this-bad/#:~:text=For%20new%20teachers%2C%20that%20income,of%20experience%20is%20about%20%2464%2C000.

geography experienced teacher shortages" with 91% believing that salaries contributed "either greatly (59%) or somewhat (32%)" to the local shortages.[58]

These issues leave schools, and especially school administrators in a constant search for additional sources of funding. According to research by Education Week, about eight percent of funding for the public education budget comes from federal sources, primarily through "grants for specific programs and services for students".[59] Since a huge amount of this funding is linked to the creation of SRO programs, it means that schools desperate for any additional source of funding may end up with an SRO program whether or not they had actively been wanting to create one. This can be seen in the fact that studies have shown that a large part of the increase of SROs is due to the amount of grant funding available to schools for the creation of SRO (or similar) programs.[60] Further evidence that these grants are driving SROs, and not other factors like school demand, is the fact that a majority of school administrators believe their school would not benefit from having an SRO.[61]

As can be seen in the following section, schools searching for additional income find a massive amount of federal funding available for the creation of SRO programs.

Federal Funding

Despite a surprising lack of direct legislation, a huge amount of funding for SROs comes from the federal government. The first federal source of funding for SROs was through the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which allocated $8.8 billion dollars to "expand law enforcement across

[58] Sheratt, E., & Calegari, N. (2022). *Teacher salaries and teacher shortages: The view from the classroom.* The Teacher Salary Project. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.teachersalaryproject.org/uploads/1/3/9/1/139153593/tsp-report-final.pdf

[59] Chen, G. (2022, June 22). *An overview of the funding of Public Schools.* Public School Review. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/an-overview-of-the-funding-of-public-schools

[60] Connery, C. (2020, October 27). *The prevalence and the price of police in schools.* Neag School of Education. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://education.uconn.edu/2020/10/27/the-prevalence-and-the-price-of-police-in-schools/

[61] James, N., & McCallion, G. (2013, June 26). *School resource officers: Law enforcement officers in schools.* Congressional Research Service. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R43126.pdf

the nation".[62] The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office was created to oversee these funds and since 1994, "has provided approximately $14 billion to 13,000 state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies" subsidizing more than "134,000 officer positions".[63] Many of these grants offered by the COPS office are used specifically to hire SROs.

In 1999, the COPS in Schools (CIS) program was created "to develop collaborative programs that involved local police departments in schools".[64] Since then, the federal government has invested over $1 billion to increase police presence in schools, and over $14 billion to advance community policing, which can include SROs.[65] This constituted the funding of hundreds of SRO positions in nearly every round of CIS grants.[66] The COPS in Schools grant program remains the largest source of federal financial support for SROs and between 1999 and 2005, it awarded approximately $823 million in grants to districts for hiring SROs.[67] This cumulatively funded 7,242 SRO positions in hundreds of communities across the US.[68]

In 2006 CIS was ended and replaced by the COPS Hiring Program (CHP) which, while it still focus on funding police positions, was slightly less centered around creating these positions within schools. Despite this, between 2013 and 2016, "CHP funded 725 SRO positions across 314 agencies".[69] From 2012

---

[62] *Where Does Funding for School Resource Officers Come from? Three Federal Programs Explained*. National Education Policy Center. (2021, July 13). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://nepc.colorado.edu/libraries/pdf.js/web/viewer.html?file=https%3A%2F%2Fnepc.colorado.edu%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2FNewsletter+sro-funding.pdf
[63] Ibid
[64] Mbekeani-Wiley, M. et al. (2017). *The State of policing in Chicago public schools - shriver center on ...* Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://www.povertylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/handcuffs-in-hallways-final.pdf
[65] Connery, C. (2020, October 27). *The prevalence and the price of police in schools*. Neag School of Education. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://education.uconn.edu/2020/10/27/the-prevalence-and-the-price-of-police-in-schools/
[66] *Where Does Funding for School Resource Officers Come from? Three Federal Programs Explained*. National Education Policy Center. (2021, July 13). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://nepc.colorado.edu/libraries/pdf.js/web/viewer.html?file=https%3A%2F%2Fnepc.colorado.edu%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2FNewsletter+sro-funding.pdf
[67] Connery, C. (2020, October 27). *The prevalence and the price of police in schools*. Neag School of Education. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://education.uconn.edu/2020/10/27/the-prevalence-and-the-price-of-police-in-schools/
[68] Ibid
[69] *Where Does Funding for School Resource Officers Come from? Three Federal Programs Explained*. National Education Policy Center. (2021, July 13). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://nepc.colorado.edu/libraries/pdf.js/web/viewer.html?file=https%3A%2F%2Fnepc.colorado.edu%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2FNewsletter+sro-funding.pdf

to2020, the CHP program "awarded approximately $1 billion dollars to 1,800 agencies and funded approximately 8,000 law enforcement officers".[70] This program drastically expanded over the last 3 years as both the Trump and Obama administration continued to prioritize and increase funding for cops in schools.[71] In 2021, the CHP program was set to provide $140 million worth of police funding, a record breaking amount.

There are also other federal programs, like the School Violence Prevention Program (SVPP) which while not funding SROs specifically, do provide grants for school surveillance equipment. This can include things like door locking mechanisms, school alarm and motion detectors, identification technology, and security cameras. In 2021 the SVPP intends to offer $53 million in school security grants.[72] Although this paper does not have the space to discuss in depth the impacts of these sorts of equipment, it is important to note that school surveillance technologies have similarly disproportionately harmful impacts on students of color, disabled students, and low-income students. In reference to school surveillance equipment, students report feeling "anxious, fearful, stifled, powerless, embarrassed, less motivated to learn" and perhaps most tellingly; "like they are in jail".[73]

The Suppression of Student Movements and Controlling Students of Color

The other main driver for the increase in the presence of SROs in schools is ongoing efforts to suppress student uprisings and organizing in schools and to control students of color. Initially put into

---

[70] *Where Does Funding for School Resource Officers Come from? Three Federal Programs Explained*. National Education Policy Center. (2021, July 13). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://nepc.colorado.edu/libraries/pdf.js/web/viewer.html?file=https%3A%2F%2Fnepc.colorado.edu%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2FNewsletter+sro-funding.pdf

[71] Connery, C. (2020, October 27). *The prevalence and the price of police in schools*. Neag School of Education. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://education.uconn.edu/2020/10/27/the-prevalence-and-the-price-of-police-in-schools/

[72] *Where Does Funding for School Resource Officers Come from? Three Federal Programs Explained*. National Education Policy Center. (2021, July 13). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://nepc.colorado.edu/libraries/pdf.js/web/viewer.html?file=https%3A%2F%2Fnepc.colorado.edu%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2FNewsletter+sro-funding.pdf

[73] Stop flushing money down the pipeline: A call to divert federal money ... National Women's Law Center. (2021, November). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SRO-Funding-FS.pdf

schools in part to "respond to white resident concerns that youth of color would disrupt white youths' education", the history of SRO presence in schools is incredibly racist, ableist, and frequently explicitly anti-integration and student organizing.[74] This especially pertains to the integration and liberation movements of marginalized student groups, specifically Black and Latine students, whose ideas challenged school systems and whose efforts were more likely to be deemed threatening by school administration, police, and white parents.

Over the last 60 years as there has been an immense growth of K-12 student-led movements (far too many for this paper to document in detail), many leading academics and youth organizers believe that the rise of SROs stems largely from a goal to suppress these increasingly powerful youth-led social movements.[75] Put aptly by scholar and justice reform activist Kristin Henning, since 1953, the rise of SROs in schools has grown "in lockstep with civil rights protests" and youth justice movements for the purpose of undermining and controlling students.[76] The following section walks through a few case studies of student student movements which were responded to by increasing police presence on campus and instances in which police were put into schools to control students of color. All of these take place in a fashion similar to the 1953 SRO program in Flint Michigan, which, as mentioned earlier, was created in response to racial integration and increasing unease among white families.

A Walk Through Student Struggles in the US

The first nearly district wide expansion of SROs in schools was in 1957 when the New York Public School district proposed placing an SRO in every school. Only 3 years after the Brown v Board decision,

---

[74] *Snapshot: The War on Drugs Meets the education system*. Drug Policy Alliance. (2021). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://uprootingthedrugwar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/uprooting_snapshot_PDF_education_01.26.21_v1.pdf

[75] Gomez, W. (2021, May 5). 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. Princeton University. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/abolishing-school-resource-officers-amidst-black-lives-matter-movement-history-and-case-study

[76] Henning, K. (2021, July 19). Cops at the Schoolyard Gate. Vox. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22580659/police-in-school-resource-officers-sro

this occurred as public schools across the country were slowly beginning the process of desegregation. The proposal "implicitly referenced Black and Latinx students while warning of dangerous delinquents and 'undesirables'' who were now able to "corrode" school morale.[77] Although this expansion was not ultimately fully successful (SROs were not put into every single school), this early example sets the stage for the ways in which SROs would continue to be used in an attempt to control the bodies and agency of students of color.

In the 1960s, as the civil rights movement surged, students became increasingly involved in the struggle for Black liberation. As historian Heather Thompson puts it "youth challenges to racial inequality had escalated throughout that decade [1960s], targeting numerous civic institutions, including in secondary schools. In response, school district officials across the country not only embraced more punitive policies but also began employing security staff to enforce them".[78] Many of the cities with the largest civil rights movements saw this through their implementation of SROs. Chicago, for example, began the "Officer Friendly " program which deployed 20 SROs to nearly 800 elementary schools, and the Miami Dade County Education Commission created a Security Services Department to protect life and especially "school property".[79] Miami Dade county soon had these officers deployed during regular school hours and after school as a night watch service.

A hot spot for civil rights organizing, especially during the The Long, Hot, Summer; "Baltimore City Schools experienced a great deal of civil rights activism".[80] In 1967 the district decided to "bring in a law enforcement presence of twenty-one officers".[81] During the 1970s, Baltimore City Schools dramatically

---

[77] Thornton, J., & Otto, M. (2021, October 13). The History of School Policing. #PoliceFreeSchools. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://policefreeschools.org/resources/the-history-of-school-policing-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-movement-part-2/

[78] Thompson, H. A. (2010, December). Why mass incarceration matters: Rethinking crisis, decline, and ... The Journal of American History. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from http://endnewjimcrownj.org/resources/Thompson_2010.pdf

[79] Thornton, J., & Otto, M. (2021, October 13). The History of School Policing. #PoliceFreeSchools. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://policefreeschools.org/resources/the-history-of-school-policing-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-movement-part-2/

[80] Thompson, H. A. (2010, December). Why mass incarceration matters: Rethinking crisis, decline, and ... The Journal of American History. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from http://endnewjimcrownj.org/resources/Thompson_2010.pdf

[81] Ibid

increased the policing of their schools and by 1984 had created their own Baltimore School Police Force. In a similar move to the vagrancy laws which empowered police to harass and arrest black people, in 1967 Maryland also made it illegal to "disturb school activities".[82] By 1968, the neighboring schools in D.C had also established "regular random check-ins at 136 elementary schools".[83]

In November of 1967, 3,500 mostly Black Philadelphia students walked out and marched to the Board of Education.[84] They demanded an end to regulations on wearing African dress, more Black teachers and administrators, and more Black history courses. In a brutal response, two busloads of police beat hundreds of students and arrested or seriously injured many.[85] In a variation on increasing police presence in schools, "the strategy of authorities in opposing the demonstration was to increase the ability of those authorities to move youth into the military".[86] The presence of military specialty programs in schools was hence increased in the years soon after in order to allow administrators to move student leaders and activists into those programs.

In 1966, New York Schools assigned one police officer to Lafayette High School in Brooklyn, and another eight four-person patrol cars to the area around the school "in response to 'racial tension'".[87] These police officers soon had created a "command post" in the center of the school. Later in 1968, mostly black student groups including the Citywide Student Strike Committee and the African-American Students Association, organized protests demanding increased student representation in decision making along with

---

[82] Goluboff, R. (2016, February 1). The police power that shaped the 1960s: Vagrancy law. Time. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://time.com/4199924/vagrancy-law-history/

[83] Thornton, J., & Otto, M. (2021, October 13). The History of School Policing. #PoliceFreeSchools. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://policefreeschools.org/resources/the-history-of-school-policing-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-movement-part-2/

[84] Whitehorne, R. (2002, September 25). *1967: African American students strike, Survive Police riot to force change*. Chalkbeat Philadelphia. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://philadelphia.chalkbeat.org/2002/9/25/22185400/1967-african-american-students-strike-survive-police-riot-to-force-change

[85] Thornton, J., & Otto, M. (2021, October 13). The History of School Policing. #PoliceFreeSchools. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://policefreeschools.org/resources/the-history-of-school-policing-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-movement-part-2/

[86] Enzinna, Wes: "Discipline, Contradiction, and the Mis-Education of Philadelphia: The African and African-American Curriculum in Philadelphia High Schools and the Challenge of Junior ROTC, 1967-2005," Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

[87] Pope, C. (2019, October). *Unthinkable*. Children's Defense Fund New York. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.cdfny.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/10/CDF-NY-Report-History-of-Policing-in-NYC-Public-Schools.pdf

other issues.[88] A sign during the walkouts read "Students Strike Against Racist Teachers, Extra Time and Cops in Schools. Youth Against War and Fascism." Instead, in 1969 New York City created the Office of School Safety which placed over 200 school security guards in public schools.[89] As a report by the Children's Defense Fund of New York put it "Police officers were assigned to schools to suppress student organizing and movement building".[90]

In 1971 in Boston, "over 50% of Black students staged a citywide strike of Boston Public Schools to protest endemic racism, system wide segregation, and poor educational conditions".[91] While the Boston School Police Force was not officially created until the early 1980s, police were frequently stationed at schools and patrolling school areas in response to student protests. Specifically, as Boston historian Matt Kautz explains, summarizing the two decades worth of student movements in Boston"the deployment of the BPD [Boston Police Department] into the schools began as a means to repress Black student dissent and demands for justice". [92]

Case Studies

The following sections summarize the information and timelines of movements to remove SROs in three school districts. Each district had varying degrees of success which will be discussed in the "Findings" section. The three district case studies are Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland, Chicago Public Schools in Illinois, and the Oakland Unified School District in California. The intent of examining these case studies is two-fold; first to document the history of a variety of groups pushing to remove SROs, and

[88] Ibid

[89] Thornton, J., & Otto, M. (2021, October 13). The History of School Policing. #PoliceFreeSchools. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://policefreeschools.org/resources/the-history-of-school-policing-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-movement-part-2/

[90] Pope, C. (2019, October). *Unthinkable*. Children's Defense Fund New York. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.cdfny.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/10/CDF-NY-Report-History-of-Policing-in-NYC-Public-Schools.pdf

[91] Thornton, J., & Otto, M. (2021, October 13). The History of School Policing. #PoliceFreeSchools. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://policefreeschools.org/resources/the-history-of-school-policing-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-movement-part-2/

[92] Peter. (2020, August 19). *"Safety and security" in Boston Schools: A history of police and repression, part 1*. School Diversity Notebook. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://sdnotebook.com/2020/08/19/safety-and-security-in-boston-schools-a-history-of-police-and-repression-part-1/

second, to allow us to better explore and evaluate the success of tactics used by students, community organizers, and parents to remove SRO's from schools. The shortcomings in each case will also serve as powerful lessons for all current and future SRO abolition movements.

Measuring Success: Abolitionist Reforms for Getting SROs out of Schools

Evaluating the success and shortcomings of each case study requires some criteria for what should be designated as "success" in a movement to remove SROs. This thesis will use an abolitionist framework drawn from Critical Resistance's work on the difference between "abolitionist reform" and "reformist reform" as the criteria for success.[93] Critical Resistance is a leading national organization that works to dismantle the prison-industrial complex and as such is a perfect guide for evaluating abolitionist success. The four criteria from Critical Resistance for abolitionist reform are as follows.

1. Reducing the "number of people imprisoned, under surveillance, or under other forms of state control"

2. Reducing the "reach of jails, prisons, and surveillance in our everyday lives"

3. Creating "resources and infrastructures that are steady, preventative, and accessible without police and prison guard contact"

4. Strengthening "capacities to prevent or address harm and create processes for community accountability"

For the purposes of the following section then, these criteria will be adapted slightly to a school based setting and the success of each movement will be evaluated by its ability to decrease the number of schools and students policed by SROs and limit the SRO scope of involvement. Additionally, success

---

[93] *Reformist reforms vs. abolitionist steps to end imprisonment*. Critical Resistance. (2021). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CR_abolitioniststeps_antiexpansion_2021_eng.pdf

requires the creation of alternative and non-policed resources, as well as increased harm prevention and community accountability processes.

Montgomery County Public Schools

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is the largest school district in Maryland and the 14th largest in the US.[94] Of the over 150,000 students in the district 33% are Hispanic, 22% Black, 25% white, 14% Asian, and less than 5% are of all other races. Additionally, 18% of students are Emergent Multilingual learners, just under 40% receive Free and Reduced Lunch, and another 12% of students are in Special Education programs.[95]

In 2001 the MCPS Board of Education, following the recommendations of their School Resource Officers Task Force, moved not to implement an SRO program in schools. They stated that "a clear and convincing need for the program was not demonstrated".[96] Yet only a year later in 2002 MCPS started assigning SROs to schools because it got federal grant money.[97] This was a clear example of the argument outlined earlier, that under-resourced schools are creating SRO positions simply because that is where there is available funding. The number of positions continued to grow and as of 2021, Montgomery County Police had 23 police officers, many of whom were armed, assigned as SROs, with an officer stationed in

[94] *Montgomery County Public Schools*. About us - Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, MD. (2020). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/about/

[95] Ibid

[96] *School Board approves curriculum policy and votes not to establish School Resource Officers Program*. MCPS Public Announcements - Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, MD. (2001, February 14). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://ww2.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/press/index.aspx?pagetype=showrelease&id=428

[97] Tan, R. (2021, August 25). *For first time in 19 years, Montgomery County Schools set to reopen without police*. The Washington Post. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/md-politics/montgomery-schools-police-officer-program/2021/08/25/99fe70d2-058b-11ec-a654-900a78538242_story.html

every single high school and in several middle schools.[98] This is even after a decrease of 5 SROs from the 28 total that had existed in 2020.

Impact of SROs in MCPS

A look at school-based arrests in MCPS found that "Black students are 275% more likely to be arrested than their white peers".[99] When compared to white students, Black MCPS students are also "nearly 20 times more likely to be held for pretrial detainment for misdemeanor offenses" and 85% less likely to be "referred to diversion programs for substance abuse and mental health screenings". These disproportionate impacts are also true for Latinx students who are "86% more likely to be arrested in school than their white peers".

Meanwhile, SROs in MCPS have also been "associated with more incidents of school crime and disruption" and have been "ineffective in protecting students".[100] This is despite the fact that Black police officers are significantly over-represented among SROs in MCPS high schools, undoing the argument that Black officers will not create the same racist impacts and unsafe power dynamics that white officers do.[101] In the 2018-2019 school year, out of the 163 arrests that occurred on MCPS campuses, 120 of these were made by SROs (74%). Further MCPS arrest and trend data "suggests that eliminating the SRO program

---

[98] Jawando, W., & Riemer, H. (2021, February 4). *Bill 46-20, Police – School Resources Officers – Prohibited*. Montgomery County Council. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2684_1_14214_Bill_46-20_Publichearing_20210204.pdf
[99] Ibid
[100] Ibid
[101] Ibid

could reduce school arrests in general".[102] All of this at the expense of approximately $125,280 to the

county per SRO position annually. [103]

At its current ratio of 1:1800[104], MCPS also falls far short of the 1:250 student to mental health and

counseling staff ratios[105] recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists and the

American School Counselor Association. This is despite the fact that school mental health programs have

been shown to "reduce suspensions, reduce behavioral problems, decrease absences, reduce disciplinary

problems and increase academic achievement".[106]

Legislation

On November 17th 2020, after ongoing student uprisings, Bill 46-20 was introduced to the

Montgomery County council which would prohibit the Montgomery County Police Department from

deploying SROs in MCPS. An analysis concluded that Bill 46-20 would save just over $3.5 million

annually if the SRO positions were abolished.[107] Bill 46- 20 proposed to better address student needs by

putting a large part of the savings towards 3 programs:

[102] Maryland Center on Economic Policy. (2020). *Public school arrest: Kids count data center*. Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/line/11036-public-school-arrest?loc=22&loct=2#2/any/false/2070,1739,1677,1611/asc/2160,3303,3304,2161,3305,3307,2157,7884/21366
[103] Jawando, W., & Riemer, H. (2021, February 4). *Bill 46-20, Police – School Resources Officers – Prohibited*. Montgomery County Council. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2684_1_14214_Bill_46-20_Publichearing_20210204.pdf
[104] Smedley, A. (2021). *MC defund/invest response to 04/23 press conference*. Google Docs. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_-BUR8-DbnsGg21tRLKvXkTYfJup1zgRdZd3sf_FPJ4/edit
[105] Jawando, W., & Riemer, H. (2021, February 4). *Bill 46-20, Police – School Resources Officers – Prohibited*. Montgomery County Council. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2684_1_14214_Bill_46-20_Publichearing_20210204.pdf
[106]Smedley, A. (2021). *MC defund/invest response to 04/23 press conference*. Google Docs. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_-BUR8-DbnsGg21tRLKvXkTYfJup1zgRdZd3sf_FPJ4/edit
[107] Jawando, W., & Riemer, H. (2021, February 4). *Bill 46-20, Police – School Resources Officers – Prohibited*. Montgomery County Council. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2684_1_14214_Bill_46-20_Publichearing_20210204.pdf

1) Providing funding for an after-school student service hub model to reduce risk factors for students through the Montgomery County Collaboration Council ($406,000)

2) Providing recreational therapeutic group activities for students through HHS ($312,455)

3) Providing funding for restorative justice training for MCPS educators and staff ($750,000)

The rest of the savings were to be rolled over a year to allow time for the county to "take a closer look at the counseling and therapy needs for students and look at addressing mental health professional ratios".[108]

For months prior to Bill 46-20 students had been protesting in Montgomery County, primarily under the slogan "We need counselors, not cops'." When the bill was announced, over 30 student-led organizations expressed support including many of the most prominent student groups like MoCo For Change, MoCo Against Brutality, and Young People for Progress.[109] These groups also attempted to raise awareness about the issues through social media and infographics as well as by holding teach-ins for students and families. Despite all of this effort and research which found that there was overall support for eliminating the SRO program among teachers and student government in MCPS, this bill stalled out during the public hearing phase.[110]

In February of 2021, likely in response to Bill 46-20, Bill 7-21 "Police – School Resource Officer – Building Positive Law Enforcement Relationships Within Schools" was introduced.[111] This bill would

[108] Jawando, W., & Riemer, H. (2021, February 4). *Bill 46-20, Police – School Resources Officers – Prohibited*. Montgomery County Council. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2684_1_14214_Bill_46-20_Publichearing_20210204.pdf
[109] Osorio, D. (2021). *From the SRO subcommittee - Montgomery County, Maryland*. Montgomery County Council. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/PoliceAC/correspondence/SRO-Subcommittee-CommentBill46-20.pdf
[110] Jawando, W., & Riemer, H. (2021, February 4). *Bill 46-20, Police – School Resources Officers – Prohibited*. Montgomery County Council. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2684_1_14214_Bill_46-20_Publichearing_20210204.pdf
[111] Ibid

authorize the Chief of Police to "assign a law enforcement officer to work as a school resource officer" upon the request of MCPS and would require more training for SROs.[112] This bill stalled out as well.

Stepping into the void, in April of 2021 the Montgomery County Executive announced the "Reimagining School Safety and Students' Well-Being" initiative. This was claimed to be a win for community organizers fighting to "defund" police as the program promised to remove SROs from schools.

The new policy however, wasn't actually going to change the number of police officers. Instead the county had decided to move from having SROs on campus to having "community engagement officers (CEOs) who would patrol the areas around schools.[113] The officers would not be on school grounds directly but instead be "stationed in the neighborhoods around school clusters" in line with the common "Community Resource Officer (CRO)" model.[114]

While these new CEOs would not respond to direct communication from school officials, they could be told by their department to respond to incidents on campus. In an early depiction of the program, these officers were also going to be expected to do school check-ins "at least once per day" and "be present during arrival, dismissal, and open lunch periods".[115] According to subsequent updates the CEOs would be "provided an office in the school building" and be "given the authority to respond to school service calls".[116]

[112] Jawando, W., & Riemer, H. (2021, February 4). Bill 46-20, Police – School Resources Officers – Prohibited. Montgomery County Council. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2684_1_14214_Bill_46-20_Publichearing_20210204.pdf

[113] Tan, R. (2021, August 25). *For first time in 19 years, Montgomery County Schools set to reopen without police*. The Washington Post. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/md-politics/montgomery-schools-police-officer-program/2021/08/25/99fe70d2-058b-11ec-a654-900a78538242_story.html

[114]Ibid

[115] Smedley, A. (2021). *MC defund/invest response to 04/23 press conference*. Google Docs. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_-BUR8-DbnsGg21tRLKvXkTYfJup1zgRdZd3sf_FPJ4/edit

[116] Prevots, G. (2022, April 27). *MCPS signs memorandum establishing updated CEO Program*. Silver Chips. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://silverchips.mbhs.edu/content/update-mcps-signs-memorandum-establishing-updated-ceo-program-34305/

Officials argued that this new system would allow the county to remove SRO's while staying in line with a Maryland state law which requires "adequate law enforcement coverage in all schools". Student activists however, having seen the potential to fully remove SROs through Bill 46-20 argued that this was a mere "repurposing" of the school resource officer program and was perhaps even worse than before. The Defund & Invest student coalition, a coalition of over 30 mostly student-led groups, wrote " It is just moving them (officers) outside the buildings and in the case of elementary and middle schools adding police presence where there was none before".[117] Student groups also came out with several statements against the decision but these were to no avail as the plan had already been set and currently still stands.[118]

Chicago Public Schools

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in Illinois is the third largest school district in the U.S.[119] Over 330,000 students attend one of the nearly 640 schools within the district. CPS serves a very low-income and marginalized population with nearly 70% of CPS students being "economically disadvantaged' and the student body being 89% non-white. Specifically, the student makeup is roughly 46.6% Hispanic, 36% African American, 10.8% white, 4.4% Asian, and another 2.2% of Native American, Pacific Islander, Mixed, or other racial identities.[120]

[117] Tan, R. (2021, August 25). *For first time in 19 years, Montgomery County Schools set to reopen without police*. The Washington Post. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/md-politics/montgomery-schools-police-officer-program/2021/08/25/99fe70d2-058b-11ec-a654-900a78538242_story.html

[118] YP4P. (2022). *Young People for Progress Instagram Post*. (@ypforprogress). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.instagram.com/ypforprogress/?hl=en

[119] CPS. (2022). *Stats and facts*. Chicago Public Schools. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.cps.edu/about/stats-facts/

[120] Ibid

SROs in CPS

Police were first introduced into CPS in 1966 through the "Officer Friendly" program which placed 20 police into elementary schools to teach about "good citizenship".[121] The number of police continued to grow through the following decades and spiked in the early 2000s with the increase in federal funding after Columbine. Illinois police departments were awarded over $3.2 million for "the hiring of police officers for schools" under the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) in Schools program.[122] By 2006, CPS was employing 585 part-time off-duty Chicago police officers and by 2008 had invested over $4 million in police surveillance equipment like the installation of blue light cameras, 105 surveillance cameras, and increased officer patrols near schools.[123] The first IGA (inter-governmental agreement) between CPS and the Chicago Police Department (CPD) was signed in 2008. It installed full-time officers in schools and required a payment of $223,275 from CPS to CPD. The cost to CPS was increased dramatically later in 2010 through a second IGA that committed $32.8 million over the next three years to CPD.[124]

In 2016, CPS had 248 full time police officers placed in 75 elementary, middle and highschools throughout the district.[125] An immense number of these officers have complaints lodged against them with the Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA). Infact, "67% of CPS officers have IPRA complaints, 31% of these officers have three or more complaints lodged against them, and 11% have ten or more".[126] Thus, in addition to the millions of dollars CPS spends to maintain these SRO positions, the settlements for acts committed by SROs assigned to CPS also cost the City of Chicago huge amounts of money. Between

[121] Mbekeani-Wiley, M. et al. (2017). *The State of policing in Chicago public schools - shriver center on ...* Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.povertylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/handcuffs-in-hallways-final.pdf

[122] Spencer, L. A. (2021, September 20). *Federal grants to put cops in area schools*. Chicago Tribune. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2000-09-08-0009080155-story.html

[123] Mbekeani-Wiley, M. et al. (2017). *The State of policing in Chicago public schools - shriver center on ...* Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.povertylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/handcuffs-in-hallways-final.pdf

[124] Ibid

[125] Ibid

[126] Ibid

2012 and 2016,[127] CPS officers "accumulated $2,030,652 in misconduct settlements for activities on and off school grounds".

The presence of these SROs is also contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline. Between 2013 and 2014 CPS schools had "4,848 referrals to law enforcement and 2,418 school-related arrests".[128] These referrals fall disproportionately against Black students and students with disabilities, and statistically increase their likelihood of future interaction with police.[129] Police incidents in CPS target "Black students at 4 times the rate of white students" with "Black women and girls experiencing school-based policing at seven times the rate of white women and girls".[130] Overall, Illinois students lose over one million instructional days per year as a result of suspensions, expulsions and arrests.[131]

History

In 2012, in response to the high suspension rate in CPS, a group of students from VOYCE (Voices of Youth in Chicago Education), began working on bill SB100. The bill, which was passed in 2015 represented "perhaps the most aggressive and comprehensive effort ever made… to address the 'school-to-prison pipeline".[132]As explained on the VOYCE website;

> SB 100 prioritizes the creation of safe and orderly schools while seeking to address
>
> excessive use of the most severe forms of discipline. Under the legislation students can

[127] Mbekeani-Wiley, M. et al. (2017). *The State of policing in Chicago public schools - shriver center on ...* Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.povertylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/handcuffs-in-hallways-final.pdf
[128] *2017-18 State and National Estimations*. Civil Rights Data Collection. (2019). Retrieved September 6, 2022, from http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Page?t= d&eid=32906&syk=7&pid=736
[129] Mbekeani-Wiley, M. et al. (2017). *The State of policing in Chicago public schools - shriver center on ...* Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://www.povertylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/handcuffs-in-hallways-final.pdf
[130] Ortiz, A., Rodriguez, V., Perez, C., & Hilke, W. et al (2020, June 22). *#copsoutcps*. CopsOutCPS. Retrieved September 7, 2022, from https://copsoutcps.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CopsOutCPS-Report-6.22.20.pdf
[131] Sanchez, J. I. (2014). *About SB 100*. VOYCE Project. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from http://voyceproject.org/initiatives/campaign-common-sense-discipline/sb100/
[132] Ibid

only be suspended, expelled or referred to an alternative school if all other "appropriate and available" alternatives are exhausted. In other words, suspensions and expulsions become the last resort, rather than the first response.

This can be seen in that the bill prohibited "zero tolerance policies unless required by Federal Law or School Code", limited "long-term out of schools suspensions, expulsions & alternative disciplinary placements", and "prohibits all disciplinary fines & fees".[133] The bill also provided additional resources for student academic and behavioral needs as well as increased consistency in school discipline across the district.[134]

Between 2012 and 2015, dozens of VOYCE students worked with and educated legislators on "how disciplinary practices were pushing students out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems".[135] One of the sponsors of the bill, Kimberly Lightfoot, explained the depth of community organizing that was needed to pass SB100 saying "we went to work engaging educators, administrators, parents, students and experts to help us build support for SB 100".[136] When VOYCE went on to become one of the leading student groups pushing to remove SROs, much of this work and previously developed connections carried over. The campaign for SB100, which lasted over two years, laid a foundation for the 2019/2020 resurgence to get police out of schools.[137]

In 2019, VOYCE, in partnership with Community Organizing on Family Issues (COFI), The ARK of St. Sabina, BUILD Inc, and Mikva Challenge, launched their "Rethinking Safety" campaign.[138] This

---

[133] Sanchez, J. (2015). *Support SB 100 as amended (sen. Lightford/rep. Davis) - Voyce Project*. Voices of Youth in Chicago Education. Retrieved September 7, 2022, from http://www.voyceproject.org/wp-content/uploads/SB100-1-Pager.pdf

[134] Sanchez, J. I. (2014). *About SB 100*. VOYCE Project. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from http://voyceproject.org/initiatives/campaign-common-sense-discipline/sb100/

[135] Ibid

[136] Ibid

[137] Ibid

[138] Degillo, M. (2021). *Whole School Safety*. VOYCE Project. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from http://voyceproject.org/woke/whole-school-safety/

campaign was committed to working "with CPS to develop a plan for holistic school safety that does not include SROs", organizing "for its adoption within CPS schools and system wide", and engaging "state-level officials including state legislators and ISBE to identify opportunities to advance the Rethinking Safety campaign at the state level".[139]

The movement to remove SROs from CPS was also led by #COPSoutCPS which is the Chicago branch of the #PoliceFreeSchools movement.[140] This group, which had previously won the demand for the Chicago Inspector General to conduct an audit of the SRO program, consisted of a coalition of 10 local, mostly student-led, organizations.[141] There were four clear demands from these groups:

1. Immediately terminate the $33 million dollar contract between CPS and the CPD

2. Remove all School Resource Officers from CPS beginning in the '20-'21 school year.

3. Re-invest the $33 million currently allocated for the CPD contract in non-police supportive services for Chicago students, including counselors, nurses, trauma-informed personnel and restorative justice hubs and practitioners. And,

4. Ensure all students have access to technology and internet for at-home learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and when school begins.

Activism from this coalition and student protests surged in CPS through the summer of 2020 in a fight for safe Covid-19 policies and for the removal of SROs from schools.[142] A leading argument amongst students was that if the SRO budget were re-allocated CPS could fund " 317 social workers, 314 school

[139] Degillo, M. (2019). *Rethinking Safety Initiative*. VOYCE Project. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://voyceproject.org/initiatives/

[140] McCarthy, V., & Garcia, L. (2019). *Data, #copsoutcps*. #CopsOutCPS. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://copsoutcps.com/map/

[141] Ortiz, A., Rodriguez, V., Perez, C., & Hilke, W. et al (2020, June 22). *#copsoutcps*. CopsOutCPS. Retrieved September 7, 2022, from https://copsoutcps.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CopsOutCPS-Report-6.22.20.pdf

[142] Lawrence, J. (2020, August 26). *CPS board votes to keep police officers in schools - again*. Block Club Chicago. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://blockclubchicago.org/2020/08/26/cps-board-votes-to-keep-police-officers-in-schools-again/

psychologists, or 322 nurses".[143] The "Police Free Schools Week" organized by #COPSoutCPS for June of 2020 engaged many students around the district in marches, educational sessions, roundtables, and social media conversations.[144]

In light of this student pressure, CPS knew it had to address the issue of SROs, but in the summer of 2020 ultimately decided to pass the choice of having SROs on to the individual schools.[145] The decision then, on whether to maintain SROs would ultimately be left up to the local school councils (LSCs) which are volunteer groups "composed of parents, teachers, and community representatives that govern individual schools".[146] The CPS Board of Education also formed the Whole School Safety Committee (WSSC) which focused on developing "a new process to create school safety plans that could be implemented without school resource officers".[147]

The WSSC was committed to "rigorous, authentic engagement with school community stakeholders' and developed a 5 step plan to be 1. led by 5 community based organizations who would then 2.gather district-wide input from school stakeholders, and 3. create recommendations for school-specific safety committees.[148] These school specific safety committees would then 4. gather input from their own communities to ultimately 5. revise the overarching recommendations and create a school tailored safety program that would be voted on by the Local School Councils in the summer of 2021.[149]

[143] COPSOUTCPS_UU5X5V. (2020, June 16). *New report!* #CopsOutCPS. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://copsoutcps.com/2020/06/16/new-report-on-copsoutcps/

[144] Temp, R. (2021, May 6). *Week of action!* #CopsOutCPS. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://copsoutcps.com/2020/06/14/week-of-action/

[145] Masterson, M. (2022, April 27). *CPS looking to improve transparency, accountability as it continues to Rethink School Safety.* WTTW News. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://news.wttw.com/2022/04/27/cps-looking-improve-transparency-accountability-it-continues-rethink-school-safety

[146] Spoto, M. (2021, July 21). *Final tally: Majority of CPS High Schools will reduce police presence on campus this year.* Block Club Chicago. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://blockclubchicago.org/2021/07/21/high-schools-police-campuses-majority-reduce-remove/

[147]Degillo, M. (2021). *Whole School Safety.* VOYCE Project. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from http://voyceproject.org/woke/whole-school-safety/

[148] Ibid

[149] *Whole School Safety Planning Process.* Chicago Public Schools. (2021, May 20). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from https://www.cps.edu/globalassets/cps-pages/services-and-supports/student-safety-and-security/whole-school-safety-plans/whole-school-safety-planning-process.pdf

The five community based organizations engaged with over 650 youth, parents, and other

stakeholders through 18 community meetings to develop their recommendations.[150] These meetings, which

were developed in line with the CPS' Healing Centered Initiative (HCI) Framework, asked community

members to develop holistic recommendations that extended beyond physical safety to include emotional

safety and relational trust in… particularly for our Black and Brown communities".[151] The final

recommendations of this committee included things like increasing "access to social emotional learning

(SEL) and mental health resources", "investments in student leadership and decision-making processes" and

providing "additional school-level support for trauma-informed crisis intervention".[152]

As a result of this work, spearheaded by students and community based organizations, in the

summer of 2021, 31 schools, in addition to 17 who had already done so in 2020, opted to use alternative

strategies to school safety.[153] Of the 53 CPS schools which previously had an SRO program of 2 officers, 20

schools voted to keep both SROs, "23 voted to keep only one of two" and another 10 voted "to remove both

SROs".[154]This meant that between 2019 and 2022, the budget for school police was cut by $15 million

dollars and the number of SROs was cut almost in half.[155] This moved the total number of SROs from 146

in 2019 to 74 in 2022.[156] All of this took place amidst national uprisings for Black Lives Matter and calls for

[150] *Whole School Safety Planning Process*. Chicago Public Schools. (2021, May 20). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from https://www.cps.edu/globalassets/cps-pages/services-and-supports/student-safety-and-security/whole-school-safety-plans/whole-school-safety-planning-process.pdf

[151] Ibid

[152] Ibid

[153] Spoto, M. (2021, July 21). *Final tally: Majority of CPS High Schools will reduce police presence on campus this year*. Block Club Chicago. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://blockclubchicago.org/2021/07/21/high-schools-police-campuses-majority-reduce-remove/

[154] Masterson, M. (2021, September 22). *School resource officers will stay in some CPS schools following Board of Education Vote*. WTTW News. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://news.wttw.com/2021/09/22/school-resource-officers-will-stay-some-cps-schools-following-board-education-vote

[155] *Whole School Safety Planning Process*. Chicago Public Schools. (2021, May 20). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from https://www.cps.edu/globalassets/cps-pages/services-and-supports/student-safety-and-security/whole-school-safety-plans/whole-school-safety-planning-process.pdf

[156] *Reduction of School Resource Officers over the Last 3 Years in CPS*. Voyce project. (2022). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from http://voyceproject.org/wp-content/uploads/WSSC-3Yr-Trend-Final-2.jpg

defunding the police, and against the backdrop of now nearly 8 years of direct student organizing against the policing.

In September of 2021, in a 4-2 vote, the CPS Board of Education moved to renew its agreement with CPD for SROs through a greatly diminished $11 million 1-year contract which assigned a minimum of 1 police officer to 43 high schools in the district.[157] Importantly, unlike in 2020 during remote learning, the savings created by schools which removed SROs were given to the schools themselves to re-allocate as they deemed most useful.[158] The local school councils were also "able to reconsider their decision and vote to remove their officers at any point".[159]

Schools that chose to remove SROs or reduce their numbers were able to "consider alternate resources worth up to $50K per SRO position".[160] The School Safety Plans and budgets would be reviewed annually to ensure that "schools can consider the trade-in as an ongoing resource and not just a one time program".[161] Some schools would be able to receive funds above $50K using the CPS Equity Index which is "based on indicators of socioeconomic or educational significance to elucidate opportunity differences across our school district".[162] CPS also chose to reinvest $3.2 million that had previously been earmarked for SROs, in "more supportive/proactive supports for students' ' such as restorative justice or culture and climate building.[163]

[157] Masterson, M. (2021, September 22). *School resource officers will stay in some CPS schools following Board of Education Vote*. WTTW News. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://news.wttw.com/2021/09/22/school-resource-officers-will-stay-some-cps-schools-following-board-education-vote
[158] Ibid
[159] Ibid
[160]*Whole School Safety Planning Process*. Chicago Public Schools. (2021, May 20). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://www.cps.edu/globalassets/cps-pages/services-and-supports/student-safety-and-security/whole-school-safety-plans/whole-school-safety-planning-process.pdf
[161] Ibid
[162] *Whole School Comprehensive Safety Plans*. Chicago Public Schools. (2022). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://www.cps.edu/services-and-supports/student-safety-and-security/whole-school-safety-plans/
[163] Masterson, M. (2021, September 22). *School resource officers will stay in some CPS schools following Board of Education Vote*. WTTW News. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://news.wttw.com/2021/09/22/school-resource-officers-will-stay-some-cps-schools-following-board-education-vote

As these decisions were ongoing, in total, by the end of 2021, 19 CPS schools had decided to retain

both SROs; 22 schools reduced to one SRO; and 12 schools exited the SRO program entirely. The schools

that "ditched one or both of their officers received nearly $3.3 million combined to pay for an alternative,

such as a restorative justice coordinator or a youth intervention specialist".[164] Additionally, all of the schools

that voted to remove SROs would not be allowed to reinstate them.[165] The budget for the SRO program in

CPS had been reduced by 2/3rds from $33 million to $11 million dollars.

Drawbacks

It is important to note however that despite what was overall deemed a large success, even by

student leaders, there were still major pitfalls.[166] The up to $50,000 for reinvestment given to schools per

SRO removed for example, while an important first step towards reallocating funds, paled in comparison to

the cost of the average campus police salary of $87,000, with an additional $65,000 in benefits.[167] This

means that schools choosing to remove SROs, especially those who removed SROs in 2020 and lost an

additional full year's worth of funding, were receiving less annual financial support from CPS.

The reallocation of funding also did not have guidelines preventing similar roles to SROs from being

created like the addition of "off-duty officers stationed at pickup and drop offs".[168] Some schools also

considered bringing in private security which activists said "could reduce accountability in cases of police

[164] Swartz, T. (2022, April 27). *School resource officers are under scrutiny again in CPS as dozens of high schools reconsider the controversial police program*. Chicago Tribune. Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-chicago-public-schools-school-resource-officer-program-20220427-bnm77d7idjbm3jbnb2ohldo5su-story.html
[165] Ibid
[166] Degillo, M. (2021). *Whole School Safety*. VOYCE Project. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
http://voyceproject.org/woke/whole-school-safety/
[167] Spoto, M. (2021, July 21). *Final tally: Majority of CPS High Schools will reduce police presence on campus this year*. Block Club Chicago. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://blockclubchicago.org/2021/07/21/high-schools-police-campuses-majority-reduce-remove/
[168] Ibid

violence against students".[169] In fact, 14 of the schools which received funding for removing an SRO, nearly half of all the schools, reinvested some or all of their funds into a "Security Officer" position.[170]

Perhaps even worse, when students returned to school in late August of 2021, 24 of the 33 schools that had voted to reduce or remove SROs, still had 2 SROs present and no timeline as to when they would all finally be removed.[171] The CPD had decided to "keep two officers in place at schools that voted to remove one" until its new contract with Chicago Public Schools was finalized.[172] Although this appears to have ultimately been resolved early in the 2021-2022 school year, this issue still raised an immense amount of distrust.[173] As local school council member Maira Khwaja put it, this "undermines the legitimacy of [local school councils] at the Black and Brown schools that made this decision," "What message does this send to kids? That you can organize, vote and win, but the police will still do whatever they want to do?".[174]

Oakland Unified School District

The Oakland Unified Schools District (OUSD) operates just outside of San Francisco, California and oversees a total of 80 elementary, middle, and high schools. About 35,000 students[175] attend these schools, 89% of which are students of color.[176] The racial breakdown is 44.2% Hispanic, 22.1% Black, 13.1% Asian

[169] Spoto, M. (2021, July 21). *Final tally: Majority of CPS High Schools will reduce police presence on campus this year*. Block Club Chicago. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from
https://blockclubchicago.org/2021/07/21/high-schools-police-campuses-majority-reduce-remove/
[170]*Whole School Comprehensive Safety Plans*. Chicago Public Schools. (2022). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://www.cps.edu/services-and-supports/student-safety-and-security/whole-school-safety-plans/
[171] Evans, M. (2021, August 26). *2 dozen CPS High Schools voted to remove one officer from campus. the cops are coming anyway*. Block Club Chicago. Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://blockclubchicago.org/2021/08/26/2-dozen-cps-high-schools-voted-to-remove-one-officer-from-campus-the-cops-are-coming-anyway/
[172] Ibid
[173] Evans, M. (2021, August 31). *CPS agrees to take 1 officer out of each of 24 schools that voted for removal*. Block Club Chicago. Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://blockclubchicago.org/2021/08/30/cps-police-comply-24-schools-request-remove-1-cop/
[174] Ibid
[175] *OUSD Strategic Regional Analysis 2016-2017*. Workbook: Sra1617_dashboard_schoolbased. (2017). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://dashboards.ousd.org/views/SRA1617_Dashboard_SchoolBased/Demographics?%3Aembed=y&%3AshowShareOptions=true&%3Adisplay_count=no&%3AshowVizHome=no
[176] *Oakland Unified Summary*. Kidsdata.org. (2019). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://www.kidsdata.org/region/161/oakland-unified/summary#37/family-economics

or Pacific Islander, 1% Native Hawaiian, .3% American Indian or Alaska Native, and the remaining 11.2% white. 28.9% of students live in low-income families and the school district has a 2.2% student homeless population rate, both of which are nearly double the rates of the nearby counties.[177]

The Oakland school district poses an interesting case study because it has its own school police department and did not contract out to the local police. From the 2013-14 through 2018-19 school years, OUSD had spent over $9.3 million dollars on the Oakland Unified School District Police Department (OUSDPD). Furthermore, demonstrating the commitment to the police program, between 2017 and 2020 OUSD had laid off 33 Restorative Justice Coordinators and only 3 School Police officers.

In June of 2020 however, the OUSD School Board voted to permanently remove SROs from all schools.[178] The bill was called "The George Floyd resolution to eliminate the Oakland School Police Department". The resolution also directed the district Superintendent to "ensure that henceforth the District will no longer employ law enforcement or armed security presence of any kind within District schools" and created a " community-driven process" for creating a revised safety plan for schools in the district.[179] Additionally, the resolution aimed to "identify funds to support Black students and all students of color".[180] These funds would be allocated to fund positions like "school-based case managers, social workers, psychologists, restorative justice practitioners, academic mentors and advisors, culture and climate leads, or other mental or behavioral health professionals".[181] The bill passed unanimously 7-0.

---

[177] *Oakland Unified Summary*. Kidsdata.org. (2019). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://www.kidsdata.org/region/161/oakland-unified/summary#37/family-economics

[178] *George Floyd Resolution to Eliminate the Oakland Schools Police Department*. Oakland Unified School District. (2020). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://www.ousd.org/cms/lib/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/123/20-1335%20Elimination%20-%20Department%20of%20Police%20Services%20-%20Board%20of%20Education.pdf

[179] Ibid

[180] Ibid

[181] Ibid

Background

The OUSDPD began in the 1950s with just a few security guards who patrolled school property. The programs, not coincidentally, co-occurred with a mass migration of Black people into Oakland during and after WW2 which increased the Black Oakland population by over 18 fold. As historian Donna Murch writes "Racial anxieties about the city's rapidly changing demographics led to an increasing integration of school and recreational programs with police and penal authorities".[182] In line with the argument that police in schools were used to control student movements and students of color, Murchs research found that the OUSD police force was designed to address "white residents' fears" and monitor the new, implicitly referenced Black, "troublemakers" and delinquent youth.[183]

Calls to remove OUSDPD had existed since the creation of the program, but were further fueled by research on the 2015-2016 school year which found that despite accounting for roughly a quarter of the student body, Black students in Oakland School District accounted for nearly 75% of arrests in schools.[184] In 2017-2018 about 45% of Oakland schools had at least one SRO present and 45 armed security guards, alongside 9 sworn police officers, which made up the OUSD Police Department. The cost of this to the district was over six million dollars each year.[185]

A grassroots organization based in Oakland called the Black Organizing Project (BOP) had been working for nearly a decade around the issue of eliminating SROs.[186] One of the early strategies of the BOP movement, through their "Bettering our school system campaign" was to work to establish a district-wide

---

[182] McBride, A. (2020, June 24). *How Oakland Unified School District got its own police force*. The Oaklandside. Retrieved September 7, 2022, from https://oaklandside.org/2020/06/23/how-oakland-unified-school-district-got-its-own-police-force/
[183] Ibid
[184] Gomez, W. (2021, May 5). *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*. Princeton University. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/abolishing-school-resource-officers-amidst-black-lives-matter-movement-history-and-case-study
[185] Ibid
[186] *George Floyd Resolution*. Black Organizing Project. (2021, November 2). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from https://blackorganizingproject.org/george-floyd-resolution/

school police compliant system and oversight committee.[187] It is important to note that BOP saw these

tactics as reformist because they would not ultimately lead to the decriminalization of black and brown

students but did find them useful later on because they forced the district to share relevant data about

policing in schools with the community.[188]

BOP and other student groups' work came to fruition before the summer of 2020 when the district

was able to successfully remove SROs from public schools. The districts saving from SRO funds would

now be redirected to hire more counselors, social workers and restorative justice coordinators. In 2020,

national pressure from the Black Lives Matter movement forced the OUSD board to meet with BOP, a

conversation which played a huge role in later passing the George Floyd resolution.[189] Previously OUSD

students and BOP had built extensive coalitions with hundreds of teachers, educators, school district

workers, the Oakland Education Association, and even the police chief. The forceful demands to end

anti-black racism and the SRO program from these coalitions, forced board members, some of whom had

previously supported SROs, to vote for SRO removal.[190]

One of the key successes of this movement was that the resolution to remove SROs also created an

official oversight role for BOP and other grassroots community organizations. This position would allow

them to continue their advocacy for reimagining safety from a formalized position and to center student

concerns.[191] This allowed organizations like BOP to help ensure that the OUSD school board did not simply

"replace its School Police Department with probation officers in schools or a rent-a-cop part-time

[187] *George Floyd Resolution*. Black Organizing Project. (2021, November 2). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://blackorganizingproject.org/george-floyd-resolution/

[188] Ibid

[189] George Floyd Resolution to Eliminate the Oakland Schools Police Department. Oakland Unified School District. (2020).
Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://www.ousd.org/cms/lib/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/123/20-1335%20Elimination%20-%20Department%20of%20Police%20Services%20-%20Board%20of%20Education.pdf

[190] Ibid

[191] *George Floyd Resolution*. Black Organizing Project. (2021, November 2). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from
https://blackorganizingproject.org/george-floyd-resolution/

position".[192] Since the George Floyd resolution, organizers have continued to advocate for a decrease in police presence in schools by limiting the number of circumstances in which school administrators would be able to call the police.

Findings

Evaluating these three case studies against the abolitionist vs reformist reform criteria from Critical Resistance allows us to take away lessons about what is needed for a successful SRO abolition movement. The following section will examine each case study individually and then end with a summary of all three cases with the aim of drawing out the most important takeaways. As a reminder, here is the abolitionist criteria that these case studies are being evaluated on:

1. Reducing the "number of people imprisoned, under surveillance, or under other forms of state control"

2. Reducing the "reach of jails, prisons, and surveillance in our everyday lives"

3. Creating "resources and infrastructures that are steady, preventative, and accessible without police and prison guard contact"

4. Strengthening "capacities to prevent or address harm and create processes for community accountability"

It is important to note that none of this evaluation is meant, in any way, to detract from the incredible work that these students and young organizers put into their movements. Fighting to remove SROs from schools means that these students are up against a very powerful and deeply entrenched carceral system. It is only with deep respect and admiration for these students that this section attempts to learn from their work.

---

[192] *George Floyd Resolution*. Black Organizing Project. (2021, November 2). Retrieved September 7, 2022, from https://blackorganizingproject.org/george-floyd-resolution/

Montgomery County Public Schools

Students in MCPS demonstrated the power of organizing and showing up. With comparatively little history of organizing against SROs in the area, these students, through months of protests and activism, were clearly able to put the issue of SROs on the agenda. Specifically, they were very successful in getting an immense amount of engagement from the community and local politicians. Despite varying degrees of alignment with student demands, three separate plans were put together in order to address the concerns students were raising. Without a doubt students in Montgomery County made SROs in school an issue to the extent that they forced action from local officials.

Had it passed, proposed Bill 46-20 would have hit nearly all four criteria for abolitionist reform and would have served as a great first step and major success for getting SROs out of schools. The bill would have drastically reduced the number of people under state control (criteria 1) and reduced the reach of prisons in everyday life (criteria 2) by removing SROs from every public school in MCPS and not reinstating those positions elsewhere. The bill also would have created resources, accessible without police contact, to prevent and address harm (Criteria 3 and part of Criteria 4) through its reallocation of funding towards student group therapy, restorative justice training, and after-school programs.

The only criteria that would not have been fully accomplished through this bill is the other half of criteria 4 which requires the creation of "processes for community accountability". While the importance of this criteria should not be understated, as can be seen in the Chicago Public Schools that ended up reinstating many of the SROs they had committed to removing, this also should not be used to write off the immense amount of progress Bill 46-20 would have been. Despite not passing, Bill 46-20, which MCPS students helped create, will be a part of the long-lasting legacy of student organizing efforts and will hopefully be signed into law someday soon, perhaps even with community accountability added in. This

foundation will make it significantly easier for these ongoing student movements to push for and pass anti-SRO legislation.

With this said, unfortunately the policy that was ultimately passed by the Montgomery County Executive, tells a different story. This policy failed to create avenues for community accountability or strengthen capacities to prevent harm (criteria 4). And, while one could argue that putting police in communities did create an additional type of resource, they certainly are not the resources abolitionists want and can clearly not be accessed without police contact (criteria 3).

With regard to the first two criteria; reducing the number of people under SRO control and the reach of the carceral system into daily life, the policy seems like it will likely work in the opposite direction. Despite initially removing SROs from school grounds, which could have potentially been considered a win, later information made it clear that SROs would still maintain an active presence on school campuses. Compounding this is the fact that none of the SRO positions were ever intended to be eliminated and that they were instead moved to a "Community Engagement Model." This simply means that these officers have a wider range of authority, one that now includes schools and the surrounding areas.

With this in mind, the new policy will actually be increasing the overall number of people under state control and the reach of surveillance into daily life (criterias 1 and 2) by having police continue to monitor school grounds and introducing police into neighborhoods where they had not previously been present. As such, this policy, in line with the views that MCPS student activists vocalized, can only be seen as an immense failure and clear example of reformist reform.

Chicago Public Schools

Students in CPS were building from a longer history of organizing against SROs than students in MCPS. This meant that they had already developed deeper connections with CPS officials which they could

tap into, and that they had already done the work to demand data and information gathering which would become very useful for student protests. VOYCE action around Bill SB 100, for example, meant that abolitionist students already had a strong connection with their legislators. Additionally, the background data is in part what helped the movement gain so much traction as it allowed student leaders to create a detailed list of clear demands and powerful slogans. Prominently, these slogans included the fact that if the SRO budget were re-allocated, CPS could fund "317 social workers, 314 school psychologists, or 322 nurses."

Since the decision around SROs in CPS was ultimately passed from the county level on to individual schools, one could argue that this analysis might be best conducted on a school by school basis. However, to keep the case studies consistent and because the student movements were happening at the district level, it seems most fitting to do the analysis at the county level. It is important to note here that although passing the decision of whether to keep SROs on to local schools prevented the possibility of district wide abolition, the way the decision played out among the schools may have still had a harm-reducing outcome. This is because while SROs have negative impacts for all students, it is well known that this is worst for Black and Brown students, lower income students, and students with disabilities. It is perhaps, not surprising then, that CPS schools with higher percentages of these students in their population, were more likely to remove their SROs and hence this diminished throughout the district, the worst impacts of SROs.

After allowing individual schools to decide whether to keep SROs, the overall outcome in CPS was that it did decrease the number of people under state control (criteria 1) as it halved the number of SROs in the district, and reduced the number of CPS schools with an SRO presence. For these same reasons, and because of the fact that it cut $22 million dollars from the CPS budget for SROs, this movement also was successful in reducing the reach of the carceral system into everyday lives (criteria 2). This marks a big win for CPS student organizers, as cutting the number of SROs in half and the program budget by 2/3rds is an

impressive feat. With that said, due to the fact that many CPS schools voted not to remove SROs at all, that a large number of schools which did remove SROs ended up hiring back private security positions, and that SROs remained for a while at many of the schools which voted to remove them, criteria 1 and 2 within the CPS movement should be seen as a success with some very big caveats.

Another overall accomplishment of the CPS movement is the fact that much of the SRO budget was given to schools to reallocate. This meant that up to $50,000 per SRO in every school could be reallocated towards resources that prevent harm and create accountability, all while being accessible without police contact (criteria 3 and 4). Unfortunately however, this amount was far from the total budget that had previously been allocated for each SRO.

While some of this reallocated funding, as mentioned before, was used towards private security (which detracts from both criteria 3 and 4), a lot of the funds were used to initiate positions for counselors, restorative justice coordinators, and other similar positions. As private security are often less visible and less likely to be held liable for harm, however, the increase of their presences can also be seen as a hit to the community accountability needed for criteria 4. This again leaves the CPS movement seeming like a tentative net success, but one that comes with some major drawbacks.

Oakland Unified Public Schools

Out of the three case studies examined, OUSD, and the Oakland area more broadly, clearly had the longest history of anti-police and anti-SRO organizings. While minimal research was done into school districts beyond these three case studies, it seems likely that OUSD has one of the most expansive histories of anti-police and anti-SRO organizing of any school district. This history seems to be the largest contributing factor to the outcome in OUSD and is also likely why this case study was the most successful. This is true despite the fact that OUSD had its own police force and as such, in some ways, was more deeply entrenched in the upkeep of SROs than MCPS or CPS.

The "George Floyd resolution to eliminate the Oakland School Police Department" was without a doubt a huge success. The resolution greatly reduced the number of students under state control and the reach of prisons and surveillance into everyday life (criteria 1 and 2) as it simply removed SROS from OUSD schools altogether. As the previous 2.5 million dollars spent by OUSD per year on SROS was committed to be reallocated towards hiring more counselors, social workers and restorative justice coordinators, the bill also serves as a huge success for criterias 3 and 4.

Unlike the other two case studies, OUSD was also very successful in creating processes for community accountability (part of criteria 4) through its creation of an accountability role for several community-based organizations like the Black Organizing Power. This allows these grassroot groups to continue to advocate for student demands and helps ensure that the school board does not simply replace the SRO program with other types of police (like many of the CPS schools did). As such, overall the OUSD movement fully hits all 4 criteria for abolitionist reform and as such should be considered a huge success for the movement to remove SROs. While only 2 years have passed since the George Floyd Resolution was passed, and there is always ongoing pressure for successful changes like these to compromise or backslide, OUSD serves as an amazing example of how ongoing community organizing can make a change at a systemic level.

Overall Analysis

The three case studies each had varying degrees of abolitionist success, with MCPS demonstrating reformist reform, CPS falling somewhere in between with mixed abolitionist success, and OUSD setting an example for what abolitionist reform surrounding SROs can look like. Each example showcases different strengths of student movements and all three cases bring us important lessons about how to successfully remove SROs from schools.

Students in MCPS showed up and made a splash, enabling them to force action around SROs and open up that dialogue. While so many factors go into any movement like this, it seems like most of the shortcoming in this movement stemmed from this issue being a relatively new topic to the political conversation in MCPS. Student organizers had less of a history of relationships with local elected officials on this issue which is potentially what led to the downfall of Bill 46-20. Had students in MCPS been able to tap into networks with other legislators beyond those two who co-sponsored Bill 46-20, or been able to rally constituencies into forcing their elected officials to vote, students might have been able to get Bill 46-20 past the hearing phase and signed into law.

Another point where MCPS students struggled was in keeping their movement active during the summer months and as such, the summer became a bit of a weak spot for student organizing. Because summer is a crucial time for deciding policies for the upcoming year, exemplified by the fact that the policy which was ultimately put into effect in MCPS was passed during the summer, a successful anti-SRO movement would have required student organizing to be more active year-round. Student groups had been less engaged in monitoring bills surrounding SROs over the summer and as such were also less prepared to react when one was ultimately passed. While it is of course not unusual for student movements to fade over the summer, this opens up a crucial time period for policies not in-line with student values to slip by, and is in part of the reason MCPS students could not prevent a reformist reform outcome.

This can also be understood as in part being due to a lack of history in anti-SRO organizing in MCPS, as many of these students were relatively new to organizing and as such struggled to keep the movement going after school was done for the year. The OUSD and CPS student movements, for example, both seemed more flexible to operate outside of the school-years structure, and were able to use the summer to their advantage by targeting political institutions through protests and organizing.

The CPS movement first hit a bump when the decision on SROs was passed on to individual schools. This can't be known to be a loss for sure, as had a district-wide decision resulted in no change at all, or a change like what ultimately unfolded in MCPS, it would have been a worse outcome. At the same time it also meant that the potential for a district wide change was lost. While one could point to a lack of consensus among students across CPS as a factor in this, it is important to note that CPS is also simply a massive district and as such it is much harder to coordinate district wide movements. With that said, this is perhaps one of the reasons for the mixed abolitionist success within CPS since student organizers shifted to focusing mostly on their own school votes instead of continuing a more comprehensive district-wide campaign. Had students continued leveraging the immense district-wide power they had developed leading up to individual schools decisions, instead of breaking off into smaller school focused groups, it seems possible that even more CPS schools could have been pushed to remove their SROs.

Another point of difficulty for CPS organizers, which was mentioned earlier, was the lack of accountability schools had after having removed an SRO. This allowed schools to simply rehire SROs in the form of private security and marked a clear point of reformist reform within the movement. While also difficult to plan for, this lack of accountability is part of what made CPS a mixed success and, in contrast, is what made OUSD such a powerful movement.

 The success of OUSD rests upon the decade of work organizers had already put in. OUSD students had access to immense amounts of data about SRO impact due to previous pressure for accountability metrics, and were operating with the support of community groups that had been doing the work for years. This meant that the movement was incredibly strategic and organized, allowing them to powerfully strike in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd and during the peak of the Black Lives Matter protests.

The movements in CPS and MCPS, due to their inability to implement f accountability measures, were both able to be somewhat co-opted for the purpose of furthering SRO presence. This took the form of

SROs in neighborhoods in MCPS, and the hiring of private security in CPS. This however, has not been shown to be true of OUSD, likely in part because of the accountability infrastructures that were successfully integrated into the George Floyd Resolution. Getting grassroot organizations an official seat at the table in Oakland, marks a success of its own, one which compounds the accomplishments of the anti-SRO movement as it helps ensure that this will be a long-term and sustainable change.

Summary

Each of these movements share powerful lessons for future student organizers. MCPS demonstrated the power of students to raise awareness around an issue and force action from elected officials. CPS students displayed their organizing experience through skillful demands and slogans, as well as their ability to achieve a goal of defunding local SROs. OUSD showcased how much a long-term plan of organizing can pay off. At the same time, both MCPS and CPS struggled with accountability for changes that happened in this mix of all their organizing efforts.They also both struggled with student organizing strategy, CPS specifically due to the scale of the district and the school by school decisions which broke down the cooperation and unity of the movement. MCPS, on the other hand, was able to maintain a district-wide focus during the year, but likely as a result of a lack of organizing foundation and history, struggled to keep the pressure on during the crucial summer months. Additionally, for similar reasons, MCPS students were not as able to build from ongoing relationships with elected officials and communities, and as such, despite being able to create an abolitionists reform bill, were unable to see it through.

An important final note to add, with regards to evaluating the success of all of these movements, is that alongside their reformist vs abolitionist impact in the policies in a district, all of these movements helped develop student power and networks in opposition to SROs. As of this writing, nearly all of the student-led organizations and coalitions studied, many of which had only been created in the last few years for the purpose of these fights, appear to be ongoing. This means that these movements helped develop and

showcase student power that continues to work against SROs. In some ways, this can be seen as one of the most important criterias in their success as it means that all three cases furthered the power and potential of student leaders and laid the foundation for future student movements against SROs to build from.

Conclusion

This paper, which set out to explore the rise and impact of SROs in schools, found over and over again that they have a detrimental impact on our students, especially Black and Brown students, lower income students, and students with disabilities. It is perhaps not surprising then that research shows that controlling students of color and student movements, as well as desperation due to immense underfunding in schools, are two main drivers for SROs. These two factors in the funding of SROs are often overshadowed by the disproven argument that school shootings necessitate SRO presence.

In the previous analysis of three case studies of districts which, to varying degrees removed SROs, this paper draws out 3 main lessons. These are the importance of building processes for accountability, the need for data and information gathering, and the power of a history of student organization to enable more strategic, stable, and lasting student power.

All evidence drawn from this paper and the incredible resources that went into it, suggest that student wellbeing necessitates nothing short of the total removal of SROs and policing from schools. It is my utmost hope that this paper can serve a small role in the accomplishment of this goal.