POLICE IN SCHOOLS

A BACKGROUND PAPER

EDUCATION CIVIL RIGHTS ALLIANCE

aft *A Union of Professionals*

This paper is intended to be a background tool on the issue of police in schools, from the Education Civil Rights Alliance and the American Federation of Teachers.

Increase in Law Enforcement in Public Schools, Especially Schools with More Students of Color

Over the past four decades, the presence of law enforcement in schools has grown substantially; only 1 percent of schools had security staff in the mid-1970s, but, according to the latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics, by 2017-18, the proportion of public schools in the U.S. with school security staff was 61.4 percent, with even higher rates for large schools and higher minority-enrollment schools. (**bit.ly/3kI7pTp** and **bit.ly/3kuJXZD**)

The U.S. Department of Justice initiated the COPS in Schools grant program in 1999, just after the highly publicized shootings at Columbine High School. By late 2012, the department had awarded more than $720 million in funding for more than 6,300 school resource officers (**bit.ly/33RgumQ**). According to the latest data from NCES, the proportion of public elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. with school security staff (including SROs, armed guards, etc.) had jumped to over 40 percent of schools by 2005-06, and then increased by another 20 percent from 2005-06 to 2017-18 (41.7 percent of schools to 61.4 percent of schools **bit.ly/3kuJXZD**).

In 2017-18, the proportion of public schools in the U.S. with school security staff was even higher than the 61.4 percent national average for:
- large schools (1,000 or more students)—94.3 percent;
- high schools—84.3 percent; and
- over 75 percent minority-enrollment schools—67.4 percent.

That growth in school security staff between 2005-06 and 2017-18 is driven almost entirely by the growth in sworn law enforcement, not security guards, according to NCES data (**bit.ly/33PmdcF**). And the proportion of students in schools with security staff is even higher than the proportion of schools with security staff, since the schools with the largest numbers of students are most likely to have security staff.

Schools with SROs Have Higher Arrest Rates, Especially for Disorderly Conduct (e.g., Non-Serious Offenses)
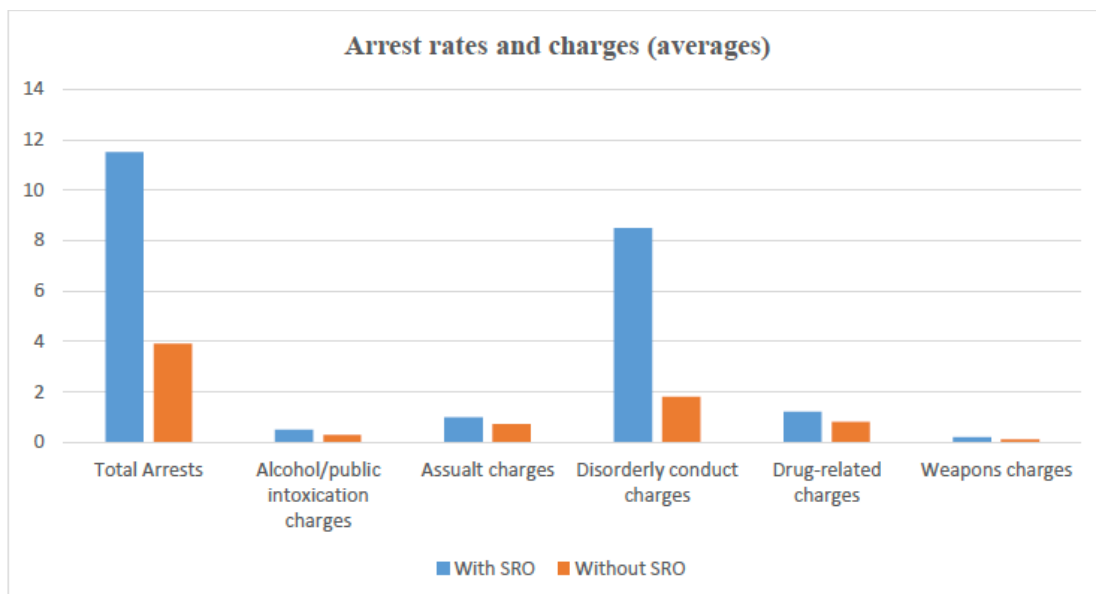
(**bit.ly/30Ms6Fs**)

When police are in schools, more students in those schools are arrested, and many of those arrests are for minor behavioral issues, often termed "disorderly conduct"—that is, typical adolescent behavior like talking back, refusing to comply with commands, etc. (**bit.ly/2DW03dI**) and (**bit.ly/33RHgLU**).

Racial Disparities in School Arrests and Law Enforcement Referrals (School-to-Prison Pipeline)
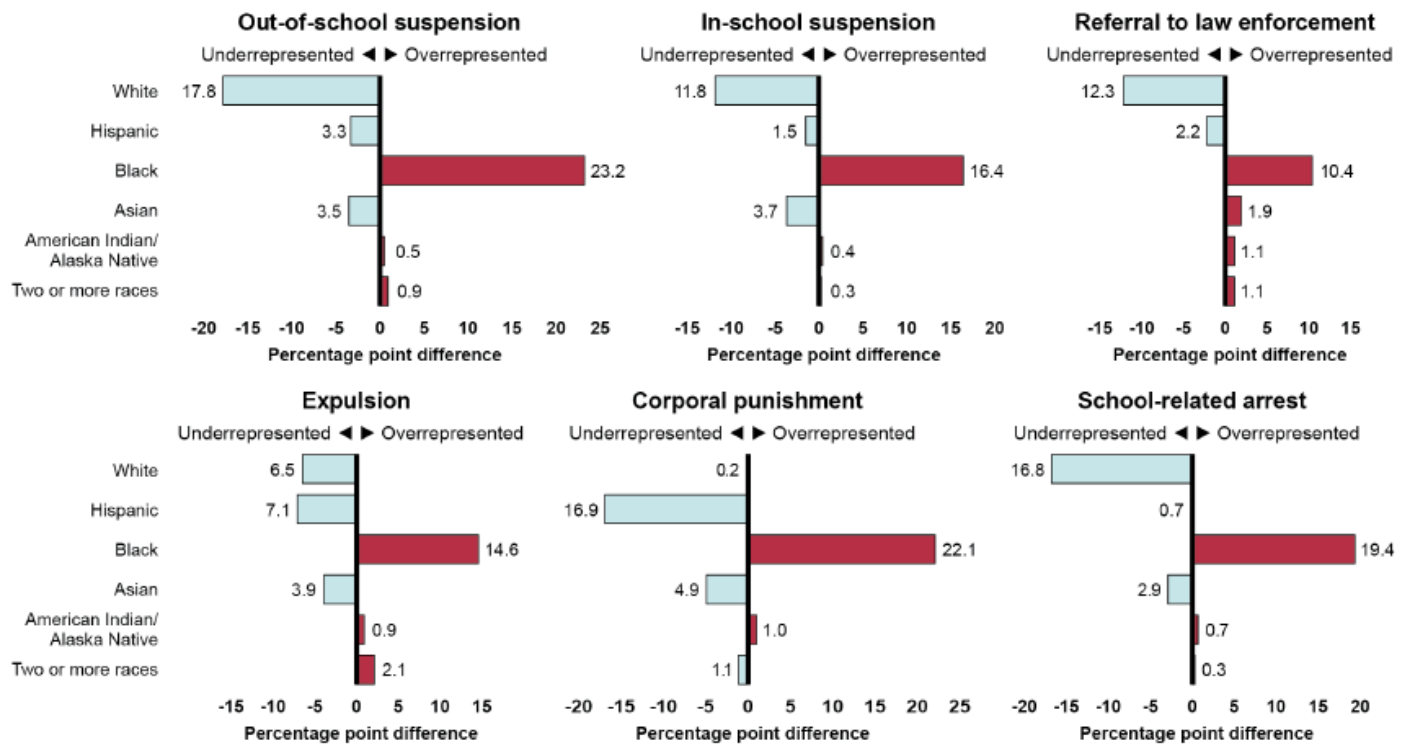
Which students are most likely to be arrested in schools? According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office 2018 Report, Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities, white students were 12.3 percent under-represented in school referrals to law enforcement and 16.8 percent under-represented in school-related arrests, but Black students were 10.4 percent over-represented in school referrals to law enforcement and 19.4 percent over-represented in school-related arrests (**bit.ly/3fLQyeE**). Research has shown that racial disparities in school discipline are primarily driven by factors other than the conduct of white students and Black students. (**bit.ly/2XPpiFM**).

Arrests of Young Children

The arrests of children in schools even includes arrests of our youngest children. Earlier this year, body camera footage captured the wrist zip-tying and arrest in school by police of a 6-year-old African American girl who had kicked a school staff member (**bit.ly/2DC7Z4m**). And that is not an isolated incident: Between 2013 and 2018, more than 30,000 children under the age of 10 were arrested in the U.S.; in fact, in just the latest year reported (2018), over 3,500 children under age 10 were arrested in the U.S. (**abcn.ws/30L8nGo**).

U.S. CCR 2019 *Beyond Suspensions: Examining School Discipline Policies and Connections to the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Students of Color with Disabilities* (**bit.ly/30Ms6Fs**)

Out-of-school suspension
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race	Value
White	17.8 (under)
Hispanic	3.3 (under)
Black	23.2 (over)
Asian	3.5 (under)
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.5 (over)
Two or more races	0.9 (over)

Percentage point difference (-20 to 25)

In-school suspension
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race	Value
White	11.8 (under)
Hispanic	1.5 (under)
Black	16.4 (over)
Asian	3.7 (under)
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.4 (over)
Two or more races	0.3 (over)

Percentage point difference (-15 to 20)

Referral to law enforcement
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race	Value
White	12.3 (under)
Hispanic	2.2 (under)
Black	10.4 (over)
Asian	1.9 (over)
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1 (over)
Two or more races	1.1 (over)

Percentage point difference (-15 to 15)

Expulsion
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race	Value
White	6.5 (under)
Hispanic	7.1 (under)
Black	14.6 (over)
Asian	3.9 (under)
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.9 (over)
Two or more races	2.1 (over)

Percentage point difference (-15 to 15)

Corporal punishment
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race	Value
White	0.2 (under)
Hispanic	16.9 (under)
Black	22.1 (over)
Asian	4.9 (under)
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.0 (over)
Two or more races	1.1 (under)

Percentage point difference (-20 to 25)

School-related arrest
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race	Value
White	16.8 (under)
Hispanic	0.7 (over)
Black	19.4 (over)
Asian	2.9 (under)
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.7 (over)
Two or more races	0.3 (over)

Percentage point difference (-20 to 20)

GAO 2018 *Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities* (**bit.ly/3fLQyeE**)

School Shootings (Given as Justification for School Police) Are Rare

School shootings are probably the most common justification for having police in schools, but those are relatively rare. If we look at the relative risk for children at school compared with everywhere else, 1.1 percent of homicides of children ages 5-18 occurred at schools, while 98.9 percent of homicides of children ages 5-18 occurred at other locations; in other words, schools have been—and remain—the safest place for students to be (**bit.ly/31FvQrP**).

Lack of Strong Evidence to Support Presence of Police in Schools
(from *The Trace 2019*, **bit.ly/33RA0PY**).

Further, there is a lack of strong evidence to support the effectiveness of police in schools in intervening when shootings occur, or preventing shootings, or otherwise increasing student safety (**bit.ly/33RA0PY**). In general, the police are not what has stopped school shooters:

- "There are a handful of documented cases in which an armed security guard or police officers have stopped a school shooting. … But it's more likely for active shooters to stop firing on their own, either by leaving or taking their own lives."
- "Mass shooting events are rare, difficult to anticipate, and usually end within minutes. It's unusual for armed bystanders or police to be in the right place at the right time."

And police generally don't prevent school shooters:

- "The record usually doesn't back up the deterrence theory—gunmen have often targeted schools with armed guards. In four high-profile 2018 school shootings—Kentucky's Marshall County High School in January; Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February; Maryland's Great Mills High School in March, and Santa Fe High School in Texas in May—attackers stormed campuses despite the presence of armed guards. In all four of those cases, guards failed to stop the gunman from killing."

> ## "We don't have any rigorous causal evidence that says armed guards reduce school shootings or school violence."
> —Matthew Mayer, Rutgers University professor, expert in violence in educational settings

So, if police in schools aren't proven to advance school safety, what is their impact?

School Police Perception of Role: Protecting from Intruder Harm, or Students of Color?

(**bit.ly/33RiMSY**)

"In a predominantly white and affluent suburban community, school resource officers worried most about intruders. Yet in an urban district made up predominantly of students of color and those who were low-income, police perceived students as the primary threat."(June 2020 study by University of Louisville)

Police in Schools Harm Students in Several Ways, Beyond Excessive and Disparate Arrests

It's important to note that excessive and racially disparate arrests are not the only negative result from police in schools.

- **Restraints:** According to federal data (which is vastly under-reported) (**bit.ly/3h0fzUw**), nearly 87,000 students were subjected to physical or mechanical restraints in the 2015–16 school year; and restraints disproportionately impacted Black students (27 percent of students restrained) and students with disabilities (71 percent of students restrained) (**bit.ly/3fLRS16**);
- **Assaults by Police:** Numerous cases of police officers assaulting African American students in schools, often using excessive force when students are noncompliant, were video-recorded or otherwise documented; no official national database exists, but see the #AssaultAt map (**bit.ly/3h0fMqM**);
- **Students of Color Feeling Less Safe:** Many African American students, understandably, report feeling less safe in schools with police presence (**bit.ly/3fPZi3p**).

Many Schools with Expenditures on School Law Enforcement Personnel Lack Counselors, etc.

There is a significant need for counselors, psychologists, social workers: "Students who are facing crisis or emotional distress incidents have mental health needs that generally would be better served by school counselors and mental health professionals, rather than law enforcement." (**bit.ly/30Ms6Fs**)

In fact, the decision to put significant public dollars into police in schools is a budget choice—one that comes at the price of not investing in personnel and approaches that can improve school climate and truly make schools safer, such as investments in school mental health professionals, including counselors, psychologists and social workers.

School police are expensive: The Los Angeles School Police Department budget is $70 million—funding that is not going to education and mental health services for students (**lat.ms/3aeUDqB**).

For example, 1.7 million students attend schools with police but no counselor. (**bit.ly/3gN2qhC**). According to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights data for 2015–16, schools reported having more than 27,000 SROs, compared to 23,000 social workers (**bit.ly/30Ms6Fs**).

Students of color are more likely to attend schools that employ school police officers, but no school counselors
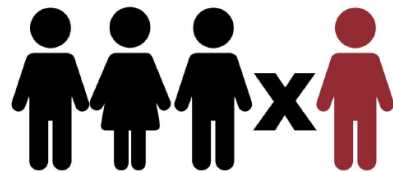
Black Students are **3 times more likely** to attend a school with more security staff than mental health personnel.

The Advancement Project report: *We Came to Learn* (2018) (**advancementproject.org/wecametolearn/**)

Some Other Evidence-Based Approaches Can Improve Student Safety

School districts and states must establish police-free schools, and redirect school police funding to school mental health professionals as well as other effective approaches, e.g.:

✓ Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (**bit.ly/2DIzusT**);

✓ Restorative Justice (**bit.ly/2PGz2ha**);

✓ Social and Emotional Learning (**casel.org/impact/**);

✓ Empathic Discipline (**bit.ly/30PRDxP**); and

✓ Schools complying with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, to identify children with disabilities—including emotional/behavioral disabilities—and ensure that these children get the services they need to maximize their success in education (**sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/**).

Several Key National Organizations and Resources for Police in Schools

1. The Advancement Project: see report *We Came to Learn* (2018) (**advancementproject.org/wecametolearn/**).

2. The Dignity in Schools Campaign: see Counselors Not Cops Campaign (**bit.ly/3gRIM40**).

3. The American Civil Liberties Union: see report *Cops and No Counselors* (**bit.ly/30Nqlbe**); also see ACLU-PA What Education Leaders Need to Know About School Policing (**bit.ly/3gPhprl**) and **EndZeroTolerance.org**.

4. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund: see report *Police in Schools Are Not the Answer*. (**bit.ly/31H3AFh**).

5. Additional Organizations: The Alliance for Educational Justice; see its Facebook page (**www.facebook.com/4EdJustice/**); The Center for Popular Democracy (**bit.ly/3fLUFaj**); and some funders, including Communities for Just Schools Fund (**www.cjsfund.org/**) and the Schott Foundation for Public Education (**schottfoundation.org**).