



## THE FACTS ABOUT DANGERS OF ADDED POLICE IN SCHOOLS

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Recent mass shootings in the U.S. invite us to reflect and take meaningful action to improve our national policies around gun control, access to mental health services for at-risk youth, and support for violence prevention and intervention programs in our nation's vulnerable schools and communities. As various proposals from a diverse array of stakeholders are considered, caution should be exercised against adopting policies that could worsen conditions for youth and families, support an unhealthy presence of police in schools, and lead to unnecessary involvement in the justice system for youth.

Research to date has demonstrated that it is counterproductive for public safety goals to add more police to schools. In order to reduce violence and promote educational objectives, it is far more effective to provide the nation's children with the necessary resources to support their emotional, mental, and scholastic development through strong school environments.

The following summarizes the research on placing more police in schools:

### **A Counterproductive Violence Reduction Strategy**

- Research studies show that placing armed police in schools actually increases physical dangers to youth.
  - A 2011 longitudinal study of 470 schools nationwide examined school safety over a period of years (2003-2004, 2005-2006, and 2007-2008) during which police officers were added to some schools but not others over time. The researchers found "...no evidence suggesting that [School Resource Officers] or other sworn law-enforcement officers contribute to school safety. That is, for no crime type was an increase in the presence of police significantly related to decreased crime rates. The preponderance of evidence suggests that, to the contrary, more crimes involving weapons possession and drugs are recorded in schools that add police officers than in similar schools that do not."<sup>1</sup>
- Most schools continue to be extraordinarily safe places for children.
  - Violence in schools has been dropping steadily for the past 20 years since its peak in 1993, along with violent crime generally.
  - More than 98% of youth homicides do not occur in schools; in the 2009-2010 school year there was approximately one homicide or suicide of school-age youth at school per 2.7 million.<sup>2</sup>

### **Expanding Juvenile Justice Referrals & Reducing Students' Opportunities to Succeed**

- Students who attend schools with on-site law enforcement are in greater danger of unnecessary involvement in the juvenile justice system through the criminalization of behaviors traditionally resolved through standard school discipline policies.
  - In a study using data from 2,270 U.S. schools from the National Center for Education Statistic's national School Survey on Crime and Safety, researchers used various demographic factors to compare the rate at which schools report offenses to the police. They found that schools using law enforcement officers report offenses to the police at a significantly higher rate than those not using such officers.<sup>3</sup>
- Law enforcement officers are ill-equipped to respond to students in need of mental health attention. Because police are not trained in fields such as education and developmental psychology, decisions such as whether to arrest a student rely on criteria which do not include the full range of options that would be provided if school officials responded.<sup>4</sup> In many of today's schools, police officers are now making decisions which were previously made by educational administrators.

## Disproportionate Effects on Youth of Color

- Studies routinely find that the minority composition of the school and the percentage of students identified as low-income are significant drivers in elevated percentages of offenses reported to the police.<sup>5</sup>
- Proposals that include increased police presence in schools disproportionately affect youth of color and are now known to drive the school-to-prison pipeline, a concern recently considered in a congressional hearing on the matter that drew experts together to discuss the increasingly troubling relationship between school misbehavior and juvenile justice involvement. Among the research discussed was the recent finding by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights that more than 70% of students arrested or handed over to law enforcement officials from school are youth of color.<sup>6</sup>
- In the fall of 2012, the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division filed a lawsuit in Mississippi for disparate treatment of youth of color in its school-related disciplinary actions after a comprehensive investigation revealed patterns of mistreatment toward youth that appear to fuel a school-to-prison pipeline.<sup>7</sup>

## Poor Use of Resources

- To the extent that security measures are ineffective, they create a false sense of security and a threatening environment directly as well as indirectly by diverting resources and money from more effective preventative measures.<sup>8</sup>
- As noted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), placing law enforcement officers in all of our nation's schools would consume one-seventh of the nation's police force.<sup>9</sup>
- Since 1999, the Department of Justice's COPS Office has awarded over \$750 million to more than 3,000 grantees, resulting in the hiring of more than 6,500 SROs.<sup>10</sup> At the same time that more police have been added to schools, mental health services and funding for guidance counselors and school psychologists has been reduced to historic lows. Yet, a common thread in recent mass shootings is the undetected or untreated signs of mental health disorders despite signs of trouble displayed by the shooters. In the 2008-2009 school year, 5,246 law enforcement officers were placed in New York City's public schools, while only 3,152 guidance counselors were employed.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Na, C. and Gottfredson, D. (2011). Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offending Behaviors. *Justice Quarterly*, pp 1-32; Similar results found in this study: Jennings, W. G.; Khey, D. N.; Maskaly, J.; & Donner, C. (2011). *Evaluating the Relationship between Law Enforcement and School Security Measures and Violent Crime in Schools*. *Journal of Police Negotiations* 11(2): 109-124.

<sup>2</sup> Robers, S., Zhang, J., Truman, J., Snyder, T.D. (2011). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2011*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics: Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> Torres, M. & Stefkovich, J. A. (2009). *Demographics and Police Involvement: Implications for Student Civil Liberties and Just Leadership*. *Education Administration Quarterly* 45(3): 450-473.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, B. (2006). Understanding and Assessing School Police Officers: A Conceptual and Methodological Comment. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. Vol. 34: 591-604.

<sup>5</sup> Torres, M. & Stefkovich, J. A. (2009). *Demographics and Police Involvement: Implications for Student Civil Liberties and Just Leadership*. *Education Administration Quarterly* 45(3): 450-473.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (2012). *The Transformed Civil Rights Data Collection: Revealing New Truths about our Nation's Schools*. Washington, DC: OCR. Available online: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-2012-data-summary.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs (2012). Justice Department Files Lawsuit in Mississippi to Protect the Constitutional Rights of Children. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. Available online: <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2012/October/12-crt-1281.html>. See also: [http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/spl/documents/meridian\\_complaint\\_10-24-12.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/spl/documents/meridian_complaint_10-24-12.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Addington, L. (2009). Cops and Cameras: Public School Security as a Policy Response to Columbine. *American Behavioral Scientist*. Vol. 52 (10): 1426-1446.

<sup>9</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police (December 21, 2012). Statement of IACP President Craig Steckler on Proposal to Place Armed Police Officers in All Schools. (available upon request.)

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> New York City ACLU (n.d.) *School to Prison Pipeline* Fact Sheet. Available online: [http://www.nyclu.org/files/stpp\\_numbers.pdf](http://www.nyclu.org/files/stpp_numbers.pdf).