DIVISION 15 OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION PRESENTS

SCHOOL BASED POLICE:
EVIDENCE AND ALTERNATIVES

WRITTEN BY HANNAH CARSON BAGGETT & CAREY E. ANDRZEJEWSKI, AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Police presence in U.S. public schools started in the mid-50s during school desegregation and steadily increased with the onset of the War on Drugs in the 70s and 80s, the implementation of zero tolerance policies in the 90s, and the subsequent Columbine, Sandy Hook, and Parkland school shootings.[1,2,3,4] The National Association of School Resource Officers reports policing in schools is growing faster than any other segment of law enforcement.[5] There are estimated to be over 40,000 police in U.S. public schools,[6] with 58% of public schools reporting weekly police presence.[7] The shooting at Robb Elementary has centered our attention once again on issues of school safety, with policymakers and politicians once again calling for more police in schools. But, what do police in schools really do? Who do they protect? What are the costs of their constant presence to students?

What we know from research about School Resource Officers (SROs) and School Safety Officers (SSOs) is that school-based policing has not reduced school crime or violence.[8,9] Many student incidents, such as talking back to a teacher, cell phone use, skipping class, or dress-code violations that would once have been handled via classroom management strategies[10] emphasizing relationships[11] are now often handled by SROs.[12,13,14,15] Students, even those

in elementary grades,[16] now face consequences that may involve arrest at school and introduction to the juvenile justice system for behaviors once framed by educators as developmentally appropriate and merely a part of growing up. Further, racialized stereotypes and "implicit bias" about people of Color, and Black people in particular, are well-documented in both policing and teaching.[17] Stereotypes and bias shape police and teacher interpretations of behaviors in schools, leading to the "overrepresentation" of students of Color, and particularly Black students in disciplinary referrals and consequences.[18,19] In addition, youth involvement with police, suspensions, expulsions, placement in alternative schools, and even non-criminal interactions outside of school all contribute to "risk assessments" made about youth by adults in schools and communities.[20] Risk assessments often consider, for example, how many times a young person has moved, their family's work history, documented mental health issues, in addition to disciplinary consequences and interaction with police. Labeling some students with degrees of "riskiness" may in turn position them as more deserving of control and punishment, pushing them towards criminal justice systems and away from social and educational supports and resources.[21]

Research suggests that the presence of SROs results in increased student referrals to law enforcement for less serious crimes.[22] Schools with SROs report up to 3.5 times as many arrests as schools without police,[23] a pattern that is evidenced even in some elementary and middle schools.[24] SROs also increase the risk that students will be given exclusionary consequences (e.g., suspension and expulsion from school).[25] When SROs arrest students, they potentially introduce students to the juvenile and sometimes criminal justice systems and impact student trajectories to adulthood, including decreased likelihood of college admission.[26] Further, evidence suggests that SROs focus on and surveil Black and Brown students.[27] Data from the Office of Civil Rights[28] indicate that Black students are 2.1 times more likely to receive a referral to law enforcement and 2.9 times more likely to be subject to a school-related arrest as white students.

We note here that though educators and law enforcement personnel often label and stereotype Black students as criminals and/or as behaviorally challenged, race is not a statistically significant predictor of insubordination or violence.[29]

There is considerable money wrapped up in school-based policing and surveillance. Recent estimates total federal support for school-based policing at over a billion dollars since 1999.[30] Additionally, states fund SROs to the tune of tens of millions of dollars annually, and, in Florida, for example, $400 million since 2018.[31] Increasingly, school systems across the country have developed their own police forces, like the school district in Uvalde where Robb

Elementary is located. These investments in school-based policing are often responses to school shootings despite analyses that suggest police presence rarely prevents active shooters, and the presence of armed officers during an active shooter event is correlated with more fatalities.[32] Furthermore, more money directed towards policing efforts in schools means less funding to support students, families, teachers, and schools. Thus, movements to defund policing prompt us to think about how to meaningfully reinvest in community support.

It is important to note also that SROs have the potential to violate students' and families' privacy rights and those liberties granted by the 4th and 5th amendments.[33,34] In many states, SROs can arrest, detain, and interrogate students at school without their family's knowledge or consent and without legal representation present.[35]

While many school systems around the country have, or are in the process of, scaling back SRO programs,[36] other systems are scaling them up.[37] What we do not yet know are the impacts when SROs are removed from schools and other surveillance or support measures are introduced. For example, some school systems that have removed SROs from school buildings have instead stationed them outside[38] or have introduced plainclothes officers or privately employed SSOs that are independent from public law enforcement agencies. In other places, some SRO funding has been diverted to instead fund counselors, social workers, and restorative justice programs, and student feedback is encouraging.[39]

Scholars in the field of educational psychology have long asserted the importance of individual relationships[40] and school belonging[41] to academic achievement and success. Recent scholarship has focused specifically on the importance of Black student belonging in schools.[42,43] Police presence, however, disrupts relationships between and among youth, teachers, and schools. For example, research suggests that SRO presence diminishes students' sense of connectedness, or "school bonding," which includes students' sense of attachment, feelings of belongingness, trust of school-based personnel, and judgments about school rules and climate.[44] Further, students may interpret SROs and security measures as symbols of exclusion.[45] SRO presence leads to increased rates of school-based referrals to law enforcement, arrest, and other forms of exclusionary discipline such as suspension and expulsion,[46] which in turn impacts academic achievement.[47] Higher rates of exclusionary discipline have negative consequences for all students; even students who are not excluded via disciplinary measures experience diminished achievement and increased anxiety in punitive school climates.[48,49,50,51] These negative consequences of school-based policing are heightened for Black and Brown students and students with disabilities.[52,53,54]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Public school students', teachers', and educational scholars' calls for the removal of SROs are increasingly urgent following high-profile police murders and school-based incidents where SROs have assaulted youth.[55] Potential solutions include teacher education and professional development for school-based personnel to understand how school discipline is connected to larger systems of criminalization of communities of Color.[56] What is commonly understood as student "misbehavior" is laden with deeply rooted stereotypes about students of Color and Black students in particular. School-based practitioners who reframe student behavior as communication about and resistance to unjust and inequitable learning environments may be more likely to invest in relationships with students and respond to their needs with more relevant curricula and practices.[57] When conflicts do arise, school communities benefit from transformative and restorative justice programs[58] rather than relying on punitive disciplinary measures that include SROs, exclusion, arrests, and charges. Lastly, divestment in policing and reinvestment in school counselors, nurses, social workers, and community programming provides support for social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs of youth and school-based personnel alike.[59]

Here, we echo the recommendations put forth by groups like *The Advancement Project* and *The Alliance for Educational Justice*, based on interdisciplinary research across the U.S. about policing in schools.[60]

Federal and State Policymakers should focus on removing weapons from school and disarming school personnel, be they educators or law enforcement officers. They should also reallocate the millions spent on school policing and surveillance technologies to fund high-quality schools for all students, including higher teacher pay, sustained professional development for teachers, mental health and counseling resources, wellness and nursing resources, nutritional resources, and high quality curricular and instructional resources.

School Board Members should reconsider their reliance on school-based police. Members should create opportunities to hear and respond to testimonies and accounts from students and families about the effects of police in schools, including testimonies about the burdens families face when their children are introduced to juvenile and criminal justice systems. They should revise existing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between law enforcement agencies and school systems so that officers are not a ubiquitous presence in school buildings.

Principals and Superintendents should actively work against the criminalization of student behavior. Instead of relying on sanctions and consequences that mirror those in the criminal justice system, they should shift the philosophy of school discipline and safety away from carcerality and punishment toward developmentally and culturally responsive, educative, and restorative approaches. They should also provide opportunities for teacher professional development to interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions about student behavior and make anti-racist commitments in their professional practices.

Educators are often the first point of contact with SROs and SSOs. Educators should focus on relationship-building and repair instead of relying on SROs to intervene with students. Educators should rely on their training and preparation to work with children and adolescents, including what they have learned about what developmentally appropriate behavior looks like, how racial and gendered frames shape interpretations of behavior, and what students might be trying to communicate and resist with their behavior.

Community members should request and use data, such as the data collected by the *Office of Civil Rights* and the *American Civil Liberties Union* that illustrate that policing and safety are not synonymous. Community members should share stories and file complaints to hold police accountable. Community members can explore how to rely on other community members and mutual aid to keep one another safe.

Educational psychologists and researchers should engage in participatory research with young people and activists on the front lines of the #policefreeschools movement to center and amplify stories and voices about the effects of school-based policing. They should also support educators and communities in implementing the aforementioned recommendations by providing expertise related to student motivation, achievement, and development; teacher-student relationship quality; school belonging, climate, and culture; transformative and restorative approaches to discipline; and antiracist pedagogy and policy.

SELECTED REFERENCES

Addington, L. A. (2019). Black girls doing time for white boys' crime? Considering Columbine's security legacy through an intersectional lens. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 35*(3), 296-314.

Advancement Project & Alliance for Educational Justice (2015). https://policefreeschools.org/
Advancement Project & Alliance for Educational Justice (2021). We came to learn: A call to action for police-free schools. https://policefreeschools.org/resources/we-came-to-learn-a-call-to-action-for-police-free-schools-2/

Allen, K. A., Gray, D. L., Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (2022). The need to belong: A deep dive into the origins, implications, and future of a foundational construct. *Educational Psychology Review, 34*(2), 1133-1156.

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) (August 24, 2021). Schools without police are better schools. Retrieved from https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-schools-without-police-are-better-schools

Baggett, H. C., & Andrzejewski, C. E. (2021). *The grammar of school discipline: Removal, resistance, and reform in Alabama.* Lexington Books, Race in Education Series.

Bracy, N. L. (2010). Circumventing the law: Students' rights in schools with police. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 26*(3), 294-315.

Bradshaw, C. P., Mitchell, M. M., O'Brennan, L. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Multilevel exploration of factors contributing to the overrepresentation of black students in office disciplinary referrals. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 102* (2), p. 508.

Brezicha, K. F., & Miranda, C. P. (2022). Actions speak louder than words: Examining school practices that support immigrant students' feelings of belonging. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 1-15.

Chang, M. L., & Davis, H. A. (2009). Understanding the role of teacher appraisals in shaping the dynamics of their relationships with students: Deconstructing teachers' judgments of disruptive behavior/students. In P. Schutz & M. Zembylas (Eds.). *Advances in teacher emotion research: The impact on teachers' lives* (pp. 95-127). Springer.

Connery, C. (2020). The prevalence and the price of police in schools. UConn Center for Education Policy Analysis (CEPA) Issue Brief. Retrieved from https://education.uconn.edu/2020/10/27/the-prevalence-and-the-price-of-police-in-schools/

Davis, H. A. (2003). Conceptualizing the role and influence of student-teacher relationships on children's social and cognitive development. *Educational Psychologist, 38*(4), 207-234.

Davis, H. A., Summers, J. J., & Miller, L. M. (2012). *An interpersonal approach to classroom management: Strategies for improving student engagement.* Corwin Press.

DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., & Bindra, V. G. (2022). How does teacher bias influence students?: An introduction to the special issue on teachers' implicit attitudes, instructional practices, and student outcomes. *Learning and Instruction, 78*, 101523.

Fisher, B. W., & Hennessy, E. A. (2016). School resource officers and exclusionary discipline in U.S. high schools: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Adolescent Research Review, 1*(3), 217-233.

Gomez, W. (2021). 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.* https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/abolishing-school-resource-officers-amidst-black-lives-matter-movement-history-and-case-study

Gray, D. L., Hope, E. C., & Byrd, C. M. (2020). Why black adolescents are vulnerable at school and how schools can provide opportunities to belong to fix it. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 7*(1), 3-9.

Gray, D. L., Hope, E. C., & Matthews, J. S. (2018). Black and belonging at school: A case for interpersonal, instructional, and institutional opportunity structures. *Educational Psychologist, 53*(2), 97-113.

Gregory, A., & Evans, K. R. (2020). The starts and stumbles of restorative justice in education: Where do we go from here? *National Education Policy Center.* Retrieved from: https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/restorative-justice

Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher, 39*(1), 59–68.

Hacker, C., Zalani, A., Sanchez, J., & Stock, S. (2022, November 18). Handcuffs in hallways: Hundreds of elementary students arrested at U.S. schools, *CBS News.* https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hundreds-of-elementary-students-arrested-at-us-schools/

Hirschfield, P. J. (2008). Preparing for prison? The criminalization of school discipline in the U.S.A. *Theoretical Criminology, 12*(1), 79-101.

Hirschfield, P. J., & Celinska, K. (2011). Beyond fear: Sociological perspectives on the criminalization of school discipline. *Sociology Compass, 5*(1), 1-12.

Irby, D. J. (2013). Net-deepening of school discipline. *The Urban Review, 45*(2), 197-219.

Javdani, S. (2019). Policing education: An empirical review of the challenges and impact of the work of school police officers. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 63*(3-4), 253-269.

Kirk, D. S., & Sampson, R. J. (2013). Juvenile arrest and collateral educational damage in the transition to adulthood. *Sociology of education, 86*(1), 36-62.

Kupchik, A. (2010). *Homeroom security: School discipline in an age of fear.* New York University Press.

Kupchik, A. (2016). *The real school safety problem: The long-term consequences of harsh school punishment.* Oakland, CA: University of California Press

Merkwae, A. (2015). Schooling the police: Race, disability, and the conduct of school resource officers. *Michigan Journal of Race & Law, 21,* 147-181.

Mitchell, M. M., Armstrong, G., & Armstrong, T. (2020). Disproportionate school disciplinary responses: An exploration of prisonization and minority threat hypothesis among black, Hispanic, and Native American students. *Criminal Justice Policy Review, 31*(1), 80-102.

Morris, E. W., & Perry, B. L. (2016). The punishment gap: School suspension and racial disparities in achievement. *Social Problems, 63*(1), 68-86.

Morton, M., et al. (2020). The cost of school policing. ACLU Florida. Retrieved from:https://www.aclufl.org/en/publications/cost-school-policing#jump

Na, C., & Gottfredson, D. 2013. Police officers in schools: Effects on school crime and the processing of offending behaviors. *Justice Quarterly, 30*(4): 619-650.

National Association of School Resource Officers [NASRO]. (n.d.). Frequently asked questions. Retrieved from https://nasro.org/frequently-asked-questions/

Nolan, K. (2011). *Police in the hallways: Discipline in an urban school.* University of Minnesota Press.

Office of Civil Rights 2021. Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Biennial Civil Rights Data Collection project. Retrieved from:https://ocrdata.ed.gov/Page?t=d&eid=32217&syk=8&pid=2278

Perry, B. L., & Morris, E. W. (2014). Suspending progress: Collateral consequences of exclusionary punishment in public schools. *American Sociological Review, 79*(6), 1067-1087.

Peterson, J., Densely, J., & Erickson, G. (2021, February 16). Presence of armed school officials and fatal and nonfatal gunshot injuries during mass school shootings, United States, 1980-2019. *JAMA Network Open.* https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2776515?utm_source=For_The_Media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_term=021621

Pfister, T. (2021) Racial disproportionality in school discipline. Division 15 of the American Psychological Association. Policy Brief Vol. 1, No. 3 Retrieved from: https://apadiv15.org/racial-disproportionality-in-school-discipline/

Reilly, K. (2022, June 22). Schools are putting more cops on campus—Despite the 'abject failure' in Uvalde. *Time.* https://time.com/6190182/school-resource-officers-uvalde/

Resendes, W. (2020). *Police in schools continue to target Black, Brown, and Indigenous students with disabilities.* Retrieved from: https://www.aclu.org/news

Sabati, S., Pour-Khorshid, F., Meiners, E. R., & Hernandez, C. A. (2022). Dismantle, change, build: Lessons for growing abolition in teacher education. *Teachers College Record, 124*(3), 177–206

Schwartz, S., Sawchuk, S., Pendharkar, E., & Najarro, I. (2021, June 4). These districts defunded their school police. What happened next. *Education Week.* https://www.edweek.org/leadership/these-districts-defunded-their-school-police-what-happened-next/2021/06

Selman, K. J., Myers, R., & Goddard, T. (2019). Young people, shadow carceral innovations, and the reproduction of inequality. *Critical Criminology, 27*(4), 527-542.

Tanner-Smith, E. E., Fisher, B. W., Addington, L. A., & Gardella, J. H. (2018). Adding security, but subtracting safety? Exploring schools' use of multiple visible security measures. *American journal of criminal justice, 43*(1), 102-119.

Thurau, L. H. & Or, L. W. (2019). *Two billion dollars later.* Retrieved from: https://strategiesforyouth.org/sitefiles/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SFY-Two-Billion-Dollars-Later-Report-Oct2019.pdf

Theriot, M. T. (2009). School resource officers and the criminalization of student behavior. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 37*(3), 280-287.

Theriot, M. T. (2016). The impact of school resource officer interaction on students' feelings about school and school police. *Crime & Delinquency, 62*(4), 446-469.

Theriot, M. T., & Cuellar, M. J. (2016). School resource officers and students' rights. *Contemporary justice review, 19*(3), 363-379.

Triplett, N. P., Allen, A., & Lewis, C. W. (2014). Zero tolerance, school shootings, and the post-Brown quest for equity in discipline policy: An examination of how urban minorities are punished for white suburban violence. *The Journal of Negro Education, 83*(3), 352-370.

Turner, E. O., & Beneke, A. J. (2020). 'Softening' school resource officers: the extension of police presence in schools in an era of Black Lives Matter, school shootings, and rising inequality. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 23*(2), 221-240.

U.S. Department of Education. (2021). Supporting child and student social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs. Retrieved from: https://www2.ed.gov/documents/students/supporting-child-student-social-emotional-behavioral-mental-health.pdf

Weiler, S., & Cray, M. (2011). Police at school: A brief history and current status of school resource officers. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas, 84*(4), 160-163.

Werth, R. (2019). Risk and punishment: The recent history and uncertain future of actuarial, algorithmic, and "evidence-based" penal techniques. *Sociology Compass, 13*, e12659.

Whitaker, A., Torres-Gullien, S., Morton, M., Jordan, H., Coyle, S., Mann, A., & Sun, W. L. (2019). *Cops and no counselors: How the lack of school mental health staff is harming students.* Retrieved from: https://www.aclu.org/report/cops-and-no-counselors

Wilson, A. (2021, November 10). Rochester School District stations police outside schools. *The Imprint: Youth and Family News.* https://imprintnews.org/top-stories/rochester-school-district-stations-police-outside-schools/60332

Wilson, T. (2020). At what cost? A review of school police funding and accountability across the U.S. South. Retrieved from: https://www.idra.org/resource-center/at-what-cost-a-review-of-school-police-funding-and-accountability-across-the-u-s-south/

Zirkel, P. A. (2019). School resource officers and students with disabilities: A disproportional connection? *Exceptionality, 27*(4), 299-314.

IN-TEXT CITATIONS

[1] Addington, 2019
[2] Gomez, 2021
[3] Kupchick, 2010
[4] Weiler & Cray, 2011
[5] NASRO, n.d.
[6] ACLU, 2021
[7] Connery, 2020
[8] Tanner-Smith et al., 2018
[9] Theriot, 2016
[10] Davis et al., 2012
[11] Chang & Davis, 2009
[12] Fisher & Hennesy, 2016
[13] Irby, 2013
[14] Kupchik, 2010
[15] Na & Gottfredson, 2013
[16] Hacker et al, 2022
[17] DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2022
[18] Bradshaw et al, 2010
[19] Pfister, 2021
[20] Werth, 2019
[21] Selman et al., 2019
[22] Na & Gottfredson, 2013
[23] Whitaker et al., 2019
[24] Morton et al., 2020
[25] Javdani, 2019
[26] Kirk & Sampson, 2013
[27] Resendes, 2020
[28] OCR, 2021

[29]Triplett et al., 2014
[30]Thurau & Or, 2019
[31]Wilson, 2020
[32]Peterson et al, 2021
[33]Theriot & Cuellar, 2016
[34]Bracy, 2010
[35]Connery, 2020
[36]Schwartz et al., 2021
[37]Reilly, 2022
[38]Watson, 2021
[39]Schwartz et al, 2021
[40]Davis, 2003
[41]Allen et al., 2022
[42]Gray et al., 2018
[43]Gray et al., 2020
[44]Theriot, 2016

[45]Brezicha & Patton Miranda, 2022
[46]Javdani, 2019
[47]Gregory et al., 2010
[48]Kupchik, 2010
[49]Morris & Perry, 2016
[50]Nolan, 2011
[51]Perry & Morris, 2014
[52]Merkwae, 2015
[53]Mitchell et al., 2021
[54]Zirkel, 2019
[55]Advancement Project and Alliance for Educational Justice, 2015
[56]Sabati et al., 2022
[57]Baggett & Andrzejewski, 2021
[58]Gregory & Evans, 2020
[59]U.S. Department of Education, 2021
[60]Advancement Project and Alliance for Educational Justice, 2021

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

HANNAH CARSON BAGGETT

is associate professor of educational research in the College of Education at Auburn University. Her scholarship and teaching focus on issues of race and racism in education, educator beliefs and social justice education, and qualitative methods.

CAREY E. ANDRZEJEWSKI

is Emily R. and Gerald S. Leischuck Endowed Professor of educational foundations and research in the College of Education at Auburn University. Her scholarship and research focus on qualitative methods, research ethics, anti-racism, and educator beliefs about equity and justice.