HIGH SCHOOL

Arrested Learning

A survey of youth experiences of police and security at school

April 2021

YOUTH MANDATE FOR EDUCATION AND LIBERATION

CU Engage
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MAKE THE ROAD NEVADA

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Urban Youth Collaborative

LATINOS UNIDOS SIEMPRE

THE CENTER FOR POPULAR DEMOCRACY

Acknowledgements

The Center for Popular Democracy

The Center for Popular Democracy is a nonprofit organization that promotes equity, opportunity, and a dynamic democracy in partnership with innovative base building organizations, organizing networks and alliances, and progressive unions across the country.

www.populardemocracy.org

The Research Hub for Youth Organizing at the University of Colorado Boulder

The Research Hub for Youth Organizing supports young people's capacity to claim power and create more just communities through field-driven research. They advance youth participation and leadership by co-creating and sharing research and curriculum with youth organizers, teachers, education leaders and policy makers. Taphy T, Kathryn Wiley, Daniel Garzón, Joanna Mendy, and Ben Kirshner contributed significant research and writing to this report.

www.colorado.edu/education-research-hub

Make the Road Nevada

Make the Road Nevada (MRNV) builds the power of Latinx and working-class communities of color to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, and transformative education. MRNV's vision for Nevada begins with building a strong grassroots foundation in Las Vegas. It ends with elevating the power of working-class immigrant communities in every community around the state. They organize in Latinx and immigrant communities, and develop leaders who advocate for their families, their neighborhoods, and beyond.

www.maketheroadnv.org

The Urban Youth Collaborative

Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) is a coalition of students from across New York City fighting for transformative education reform that puts students first, with a focus on replacing harmful policing in schools with restorative justice and trauma-informed care. The UYC coalition is made up of members from the Future of Tomorrow of Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, Make the Road New York, and Sistas and Brothas United of the Northwest Bronx.

www.urbanyouthcollaborative.org

Latinos Unidos Siempre

The mission of Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS) is to work towards the educational, cultural, social and political development of youth of color, by empowering youth to take leadership roles in the community, advocating for social and political change and other forms of systemic and institutional oppression through grassroots organizing.

Make the Road New Jersey

Founded in November 2014 in Elizabeth, Make the Road New Jersey (MRNJ) builds the power of immigrant, working-class and Latinx communities to achieve dignity and respect through community organizing, legal, policy innovation and transformative education. Every week, hundreds of immigrant families - young people and adults - come together to fight for dignity and respect in their communities.

www.maketheroadnj.org

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The school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline refers to the policies and practices that punish, isolate, marginalize, and deny access to supportive learning environments for Black, Brown, Latinx, Indigenous, immigrant, and LGBTQIA+ youth, as well as young people with disabilities, instead funneling them into the criminal legal system. For years, Black and Brown youth, parents, educators, and communities have organized to dismantle this system, and to remove police and security from their schools.

To uncover critical information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school, four community-based organizations across the country fielded in-depth surveys of their youth membership: Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS), Make the Road Nevada (MRNV), Make the Road New Jersey (MRNJ), and the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC). The results of this national survey, which reached 630 young people in Nevada, New Jersey, New York, and Oregon, clearly reinforce what young people have already made known: police and security at school do not make them safe. The survey also explored young people's vision for supportive and well-resourced schools.
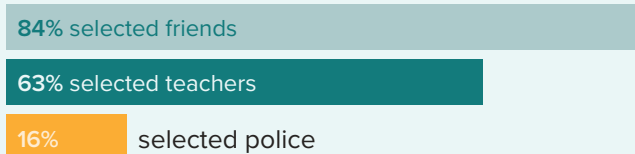
National survey findings include the following:

Respondents (with police at school) have experienced a pattern of disturbing behavior in which school police:*

- **Bully, abuse, and traumatize young people:** For example, one in five respondents reported police verbally harass or make fun of students **(20%)**.
- **Prevent young people from learning while at school:** For example, half of respondents reported police taking students out of the classroom **(50%)**.
- **Force young people into the criminal legal system and advance punitive techniques:** For example, more than a quarter of respondents reported arrests at school **(26%)**.
- **Sexually harass young people:** In three out of four jurisdictions, young people experienced or knew someone who experienced sexual harassment at the hands of police at school.
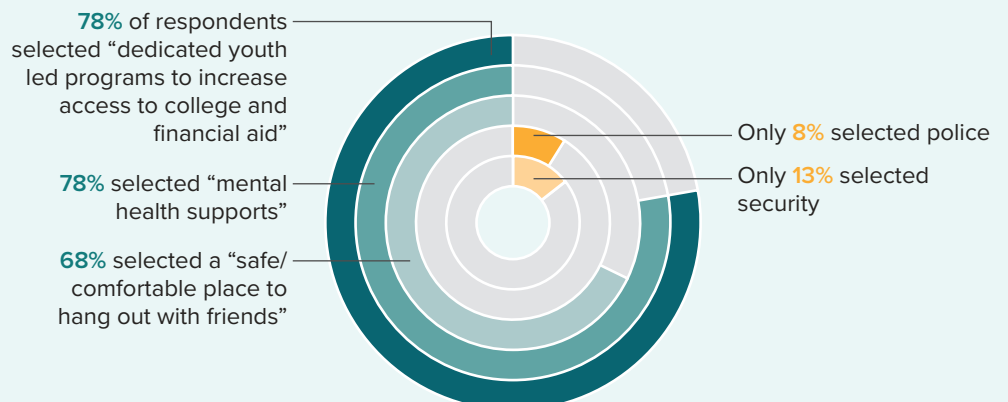
Police and security at school do not make students feel safe, especially compared to other people students interact with at school, like teachers and friends.

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),
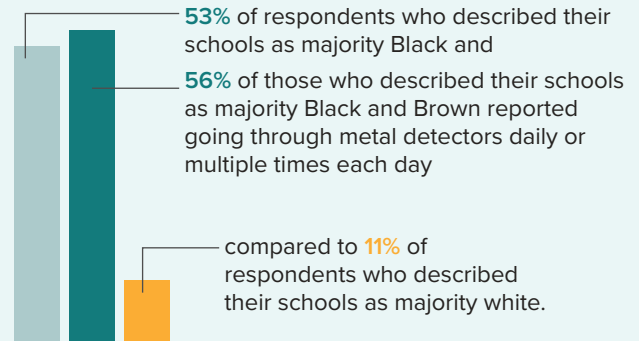
- **84%** selected friends
- **63%** selected teachers
- **16%** selected police

Students at majority Black and majority Black and Brown schools were more likely to go through metal detectors than students at majority white schools.

- **53%** of respondents who described their schools as majority Black and
- **56%** of those who described their schools as majority Black and Brown reported going through metal detectors daily or multiple times each day
- compared to **11%** of respondents who described their schools as majority white.

Additionally, Black and Latinx respondents were often more likely to be targeted with metal detectors than white respondents. Of those with metal detectors at school:

34% of Black respondents have had their belongings taken, compared to **14%** of white respondents

| 34% | 14% |

19% of Black respondents have been yelled at, compared to **8%** of white respondents

| 19% | 8% |

34% of Black respondents and **22%** of Latinx respondents have been made to take off their shoes, versus **7%** of white respondents.

| 34% | 63% | 7% |

When asked what they would like to see more or better quality of at school, students overwhelmingly selected resources, programs, and supports—not police or security.

- **78%** of respondents selected "dedicated youth led programs to increase access to college and financial aid"
- **78%** selected "mental health supports"
- **68%** selected a "safe/comfortable place to hang out with friends"
- Only **8%** selected police
- Only **13%** selected security

* Percentages refer to respondents who reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, negative interactions with school police.

Introduction

For more than three decades, Black and Brown youth, parents, educators, and communities have organized to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline—one of the most egregious examples of systemic racism and state sanctioned violence in our country. The school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline refers to the policies and practices that punish, isolate, marginalize, and deny access to supportive learning environments for Black, Brown, Latinx, Indigenous, immigrant, and LGBTQIA+ youth, as well as young people with disabilities, instead funneling them into the criminal legal system.

There is no substantial evidence that such practices make schools any safer.[1] However, there is evidence that placing law enforcement in schools increases referrals to the criminal legal system. Studies show that students are more likely to be arrested and referred to the criminal legal system when school police are present.[2] The presence of law enforcement makes it more likely that students of color will be arrested for low-level offenses,[3] with Black students facing the highest rates of arrest when police are present in schools.[4]

The presence of law enforcement at school also increases the formal processing of offenses and exclusionary disciplinary responses (e.g. suspensions and expulsions).[5] Black and Latinx students, as well as students from low-income families experience the largest increases in discipline when police are in their school.[6] The kinds of incidents that result in white students being referred to a principal or counselor end in Black students being referred to the police and prosecutors, despite no difference in behavior.[7] These policies have an especially harsh impact on immigrant and undocumented students, who can face detention and deportation for even low-level offenses.[8] Not only are police more likely to target Black and Latinx students, but they are also more likely to be deployed to schools with higher percentages of students of color.[9]

No amount of public money should go to funding a set of policies so sweeping in both their failure and harmful impact, yet the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline costs billions of taxpayer dollars each year.[10] Despite the lack of evidence to support policing in schools, school districts—aided by states and the federal government—continue to funnel millions of dollars each year into policing and the criminalization of Black and Brown young people, while underinvesting in the very resources and supports that truly keep them safe. School surveillance is now a $3 billion a year industry, which means that each year billions of taxpayer dollars are going to private companies for technologies and equipment used to "harden schools."[11]

> **"** There's something that I think is so deeply wrong about the fact that a person on campus gets to just walk around with a gun on them. From the past year you can obviously see that cops have a power dynamic issue and I don't feel comfortable with cops on campus having a gun and being able to use it.

Federal agencies such as the Department of Education and Department of Justice (DOJ) have provided some school districts with military grade weapons[12] and have established grant programs contributing over $1 billion to "school safety" funding which subsidizes more than 7,240 school resource officers (SROs).[13] SROs are sworn law enforcement officers deployed to schools.[14] Exposure to a three-year federal grant for school police is associated with a **2.5%** decrease in high school graduation rates, a **4%** decrease in college enrollment rates, and a **6%** increase in middle school discipline rate.[15]

State and local funding for school police has increased in recent years as well. Several state legislatures have recently passed legislation enabling the funding of school police and security equipment.[16] Local school district budgets also continue to funnel millions of dollars towards school police, surveillance equipment, and other criminalizing infrastructure.[17]

Meanwhile, schools face a chronic underinvestment in guidance counselors, teachers, and school nurses, as well as mental health supports, restorative justice, and culturally responsive learning materials and education.[18]

To uncover critical information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school, four community-based organizations fielded in-depth surveys of their youth membership: Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS), Make the Road Nevada (MRNV), Make the Road New Jersey (MRNJ), and the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC). The results of this national survey, which reached 630 young people in Nevada, New Jersey, New York, and Oregon, clearly reinforce what young people have already made known: police and security at school do not make them safe. Findings reveal that respondents often feel targeted by police; that respondents have regular, negative interactions with police and security; and that they overwhelmingly favor

> " I've seen incidents where police have been called in for mental health crises, and it hurts because the way they handle us is not right. Why do they feel it is necessary to handle us this way?

additional resources and supports (like mental health resources, more teachers, and dedicated youth programs to increase college access) over increased funding for police and security.

Young people's vision for police-free schools is possible, and support for this call is growing. In 2020, rooted in the history of many longstanding campaigns led by young people of color, the country saw unprecedented progress towards police-free schools. As just a few examples, Oakland, California, voted to dismantle its school police department,[19] and places like Milwaukee,[20] Minneapolis,[21] Portland,[22] and Madison,[23] all ended school district contracts with local police departments. In total, nearly 40 school districts have taken some action towards removing police from schools.[24] **Now is the time to remove police and security from all schools, investing instead in support for young people's education, creativity, and joy.**

Youth Survey Overview

Four community-based organizations who are fighting to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline in their states—Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS) in Salem and Keizer, Oregon; Make the Road Nevada (MRNV) in Clark County, Nevada; Make the Road New Jersey (MRNJ) in Elizabeth, New Jersey; and the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) in New York City—fielded in-depth surveys with 630 young people between November 2020 and January 2021. The survey was designed to uncover critical information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school. The survey also explored young people's vision for supportive and well-resourced schools.

Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS)

In recent years, LUS has been calling on Salem-Keizer School District leadership to end the presence of police in schools as the first step to dismantling the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline. LUS is also organizing against systemic racism and organized white supremacy in their community. LUS organizers have attended and testified at school board hearings, have hosted marches and demonstrations, and are actively working with the community and local organizations to dismantle and abolish the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline.

Make the Road New Jersey (MRNJ)

MRNJ's Youth Power Project (YPP) has launched a campaign to remove all law enforcement personnel from New Jersey public schools and to redistribute funds to restorative justice practices and student services. This campaign is led by members of the YPP—young people of color whose lives have been impacted by the carceral state, either through direct involvement with the juvenile justice system, school discipline or arrest, or a parent's incarceration or deportation. MRNJ's YPP has convened a table of partners (state-wide and local teacher groups, advocacy groups, and youth groups) to take action that involves providing testimony at local school board and/or state budget meetings, hosting Facebook and Instagram livestreams to educate peers, creating a TikTok series, and direct action and mobilization through COVID-safe marches and rallies.

Make the Road Nevada (MRNV)

MRNV and its members have been active in the fight to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline. Their Youth Power Project (YPP) Youth Council was formed in 2019 by young people who wanted to create more opportunities for youth leaders to engage in local grassroots organizing and fight for issues that build the power of Latinx and working class communities of color. Their goal is to achieve dignity and justice through policy innovation and transformative education. In 2020, the YPP Youth Council decided to launch a campaign for police-free schools in Clark County. They proposed a school board resolution, testified at school board meetings, and have worked to implement critical legislation at the statewide level, all developed and led by their youth leaders.

Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC)

Founded in 2004, UYC is a citywide coalition of youth organizations. In recent years, UYC has won city-wide reforms to address the full consequences of the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline in New York City. They have had many victories over the years. In just the past two years, UYC's work with local allies resulted in a reduction of the maximum number of days a young person could be forced out of school for a suspension from 180 to 20, the hiring of more student support staff, citywide restorative practices, and changes to school police policies which limited the use of handcuffs. Their long term impact is also reflected in the data in which (while acknowledging the impact of COVID-19) showed an 82% reduction in the number of arrests and an 84% reduction in the number of court summons issued in schools between the 2016-2017 and 2019-2020 school years.[25]

Youth Survey Findings

1 **Police and security at school do not make students feel safe.**

Police and security at school do not make students feel safe, especially compared to other people they interact with at school, like teachers and friends.

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),

84% selected friends

63% selected teachers

16% selected police

23% selected security guards
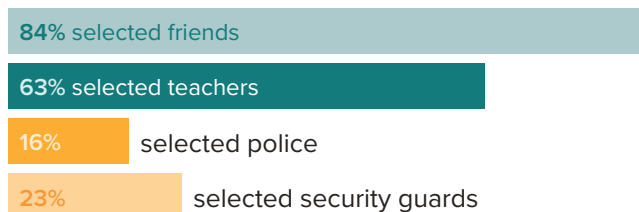
The percentage of Black respondents who selected police and security was even lower: Only **14%** of Black respondents selected police and **19%** selected security guards.
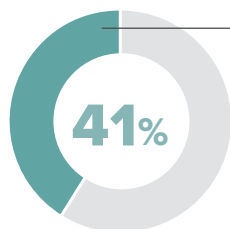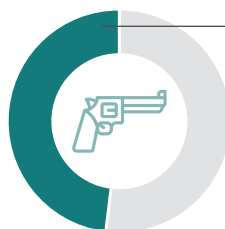
41% Of respondents with police at school, **41%** said they feel **unsafe** or **very unsafe** when they see police at school.

> " I feel traumatized by them and purposely avoid seeing them or interacting with them.

A third of respondents have felt targeted by police based on an aspect of their identity.

33% of respondents have felt targeted by police based on race, primary language, sexual orientation, or gender identity, including identity as transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex.

Of respondents with police at school, nearly half (48%) reported that police are armed with guns.

> " I do not feel safe because I've witnessed their abuse of power and refusal to help me when I asked. . .because they did not take me seriously. They also ridicule the students and try to make them feel small.

> " I believe security guards in my school do not contribute to students' safety and education. [They] interrupt my class. . .to take people's hoodies and harass students. . .

2 Interactions with and sightings of school police and security guards are common, frequent, and often harmful.

Of respondents with police at school, nearly two thirds (64%) reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, at least one type of negative interaction with school police.

The share of Black and Latinx respondents who reported having or knowing someone who had one of the below experiences was even higher: **73%** of Latinx respondents and **74%** of Black respondents.
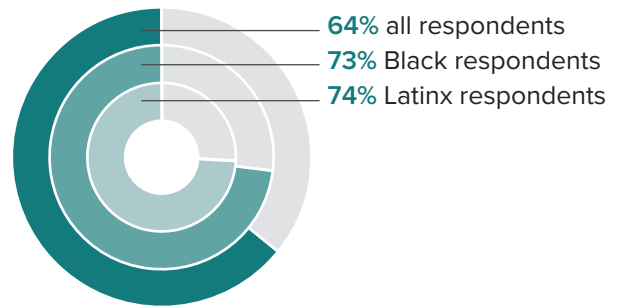
64% all respondents
73% Black respondents
74% Latinx respondents

Respondents (with police at school) have experienced a pattern of disturbing behavior in which school police:*

Sexually harass young people:

- In **three of the four jurisdictions** young people experienced or knew someone who experienced sexual harassment at the hands of school police.

Bully, abuse, and traumatize young people, for example by:

- Verbally harassing or making fun of students (reported by **one in five** respondents)
- Physically assaulting students **(10%)**
- Pepper spraying students **(10%)**
- Responding to a mental health crisis **(13%)**

Prevent young people from learning while at school, for example by:

- Taking students out of a classroom **(50%)**

Invade young people's physical autonomy, for example by:

- Physically searching students (other than walking through a metal detector) **(34%)**
- Restraining students **(25%)**

Force young people into the criminal legal system and advance punitive techniques, for example by:

- Arresting students (**one in four** respondents)
- Having police respond when a student misses school **(19%)**
- Issuing juvenile reports **(18%)**
- Issuing tickets to go to court **(16%)**

> " Students have been handcuffed and treated poorly by the officers. It's a shame our school has more officers than mental health resources.

> " A police officer at school once told me that he was gonna lock me and my friends up in juvenile, that he was just waiting for the perfect time to do it.

* Percentages refer to respondents who reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, negative interactions with school police.

These types of interactions can have devastating impacts for young people. One study found that experiencing an arrest for the first time in high school nearly doubles the odds of a student dropping out, and a court appearance nearly quadruples the odds of a student dropping out.[26] Students who were first arrested during the 9th or 10th grade were six to eight times more likely to drop out of school than students who were not arrested.[27] Rather than reduce school violence, scholars have found that the presence of police merely criminalizes typical adolescent behavior, such as disorderly conduct, even among similarly situated schools.[28]

> Police were trying to break up a fight and suddenly used mace on a large crowd of students (including those who were spectating), resulting in a lot of students waiting outside the nurse's office to receive help for their eyes.

> I was in school for not even 30 minutes when I got called out of my credit recovery class. I got sent to the behavior specialist and was called a gang banger because of my belt. I got racially profiled for how I dressed while the white girls in my school would wear blue bandanas and nothing would happen to them.

> Once this security guard was harassing me and [had] mistaken me for another student named Juan. This was extremely racist, he kept insisting that I was that student and was asking me why I was lying when I wasn't.

Students see police at school regularly, including nearly two thirds who see police at school on at least a daily basis.

Of respondents with police at school, **65%** saw police in and around school at least once a day in an average month.

Of these, **14%** saw police 6–10 times daily, and **16%** saw police more than *10 times per day.*

Young people who attend predominantly Black and Brown schools are constantly surrounded by police.

Respondents who said they attend schools that are majority Black or majority Black and Brown were more likely to report high numbers of police sightings: **37%** of respondents attending majority Black schools and **28%** of respondents attending majority Black and Brown schools saw police more than 6 times a day, compared to **16%** of respondents attending majority white schools.

Sightings and interactions with school security guards are also common and frequent.

Of students with security guards at school, **72%** reported at least monthly interactions with security guards (in an average month), with **22%** reporting daily interactions.
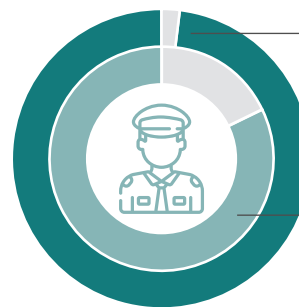
98% of respondents saw security guards in and around their schools at least once in an average month.

84% report at least daily sightings.

Of these, **23%** of reported seeing security 6–10 times a day and **21%** reported seeing security more than *10 times per day*.

Research has shown that over time, the **mere presence** of police may have psychological effects on students' "nervous and immune systems that may result in anxiety, restlessness, lack of motivation, inability to focus, social withdrawal, and aggressive behaviors."[29]

Community studies suggest these adverse consequences are compounded when a person perceives that the negative interaction is motivated by race. Racial discrimination can lead to generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health issues.[30] Racial disparities within disciplinary practices also have broader psychological repercussions for communities of color. A series of recent studies revealed that biased treatment caused youth of color to lose more trust for school officials compared with their white peers, which was further correlated with reduced college attendance.[31]

3 Students go through metal detectors regularly, and many have negative experiences with them.

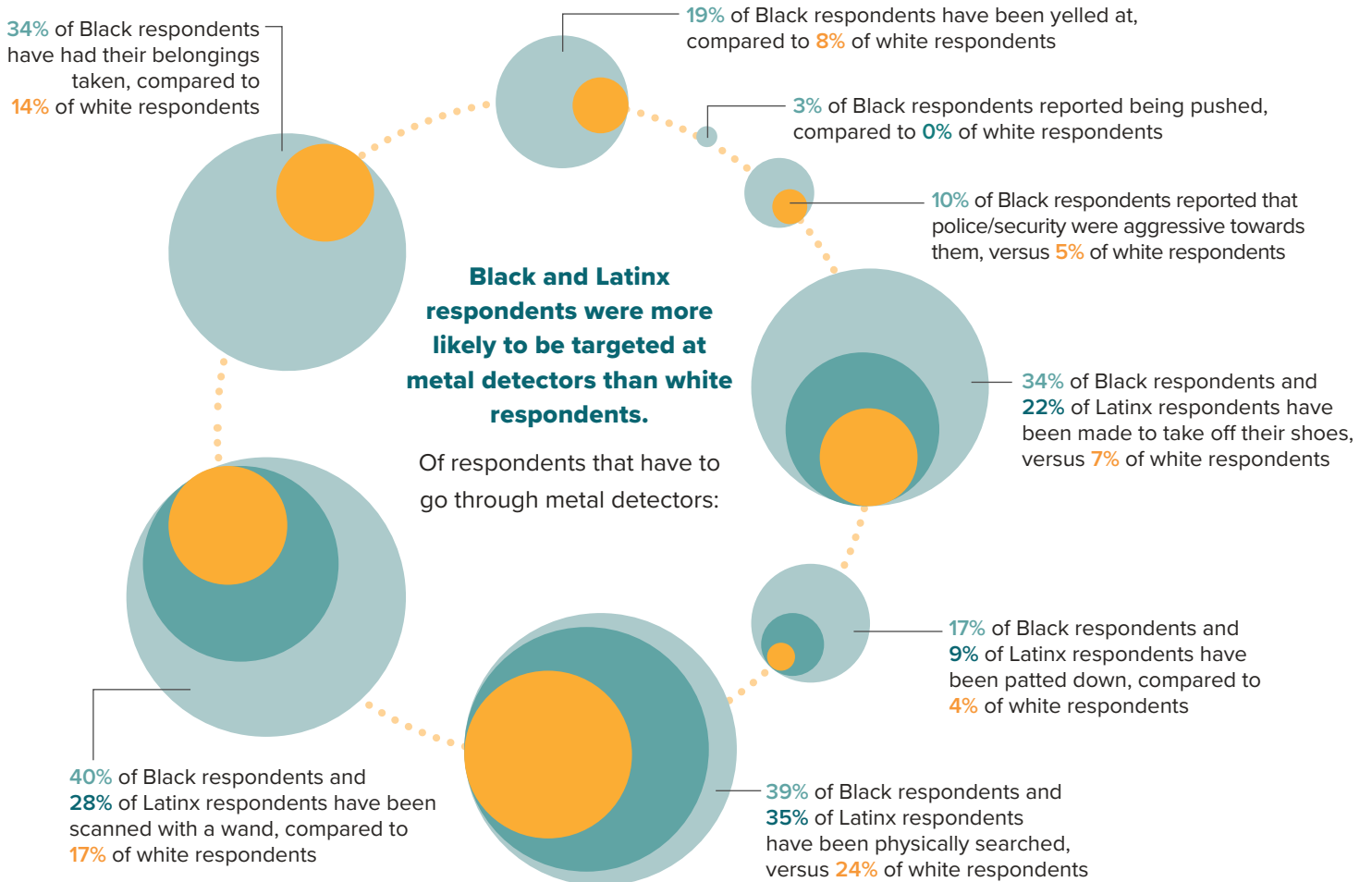**Trends in responses reveal that the placement and use of metal detectors is racist.**

Respondents who described their schools as majority Black and majority Black and Brown were more likely to go through metal detectors daily or multiple times daily, compared to respondents who described their schools as majority white.

53% of respondents who described their schools as majority Black, and

56% of those who described their schools as majority Black and Brown reported going through metal detectors daily or multiple times each day,

compared to **11%** of respondents who described their schools as majority white.
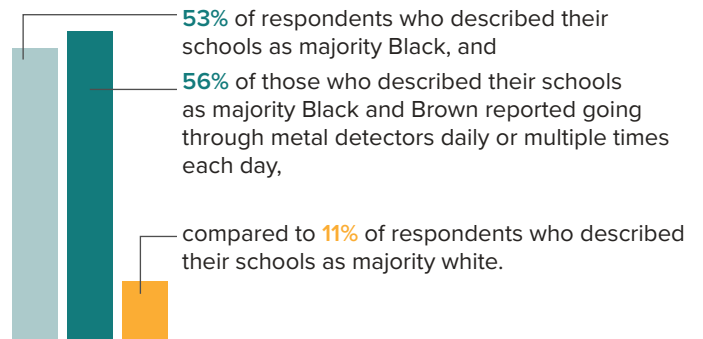
> " I don't enjoy going through the metal detectors. It takes a lot of time [in] the morning. It makes me nervous and causes anxiety… for me… because I don't know what they will take and if they will take my markers or belongings. It affects my grades and relationships with teachers by making me late in the mornings. I don't like it.

34% of Black respondents have had their belongings taken, compared to **14%** of white respondents

19% of Black respondents have been yelled at, compared to **8%** of white respondents

3% of Black respondents reported being pushed, compared to **0%** of white respondents

10% of Black respondents reported that police/security were aggressive towards them, versus **5%** of white respondents

Black and Latinx respondents were more likely to be targeted at metal detectors than white respondents.

Of respondents that have to go through metal detectors:

34% of Black respondents and **22%** of Latinx respondents have been made to take off their shoes, versus **7%** of white respondents

17% of Black respondents and **9%** of Latinx respondents have been patted down, compared to **4%** of white respondents

40% of Black respondents and **28%** of Latinx respondents have been scanned with a wand, compared to **17%** of white respondents

39% of Black respondents and **35%** of Latinx respondents have been physically searched, versus **24%** of white respondents

More than half of respondents reported being subjected to metal detectors, and most go through metal detectors at least once a day.

55% of all respondents reported having to go through metal detectors.

Of these respondents, **40%** reported going through metal detectors at least once a day.

Nearly all respondents reported that students are required to go through metal detectors, but that teachers and other staff are less likely to face the same requirement.

Of those who are required to go through metal detectors,

96% reported that students are required to go through metal detectors

96%

26% reported that teachers, and **22%** who reported that school staff, have to go through metal detectors

26%	22%

14% reported that police, and **15%** who reported that security guards, have to go through metal detectors.

14%	15%

Going through metal detectors is experienced as an invasive process for respondents.

For example, of those who go through metal detectors,

59% of respondents reported that their bags have been physically searched;

51% have been scanned with a wand;

40% have been made to take off their shoes, belt, jewelry, or other articles of clothing; and

38% have had their belongings taken.

" One time, police wanded me and asked me to pull my shirt up, and it was very uncomfortable for me because they were treating me as if I was stealing something.

" [Metal detectors] hold up students from getting to class on time. You could arrive at 7:40AM with enough time to make it to class if not for the extensive line at the metal detectors. When we're late to school, we get detention.

4 Overwhelmingly, students value more support and resources over police and security.

Studies show that investments in counselors,[32] mental health resources,[33] and restorative justice[34] contribute to school safety, yet there is no substantial evidentiary support for the proposition that police presence in schools and zero-tolerance policies (like suspensions) create safe learning environments.[35]

More than two thirds of students think police should be removed from schools.
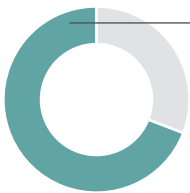
Of those with police at school, **69% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed** with the statement: "Police should be removed from my school and my school should have more support and resources for students (for example, up to date books, more teachers, academic services, counseling, health, restorative practices, etc.)"
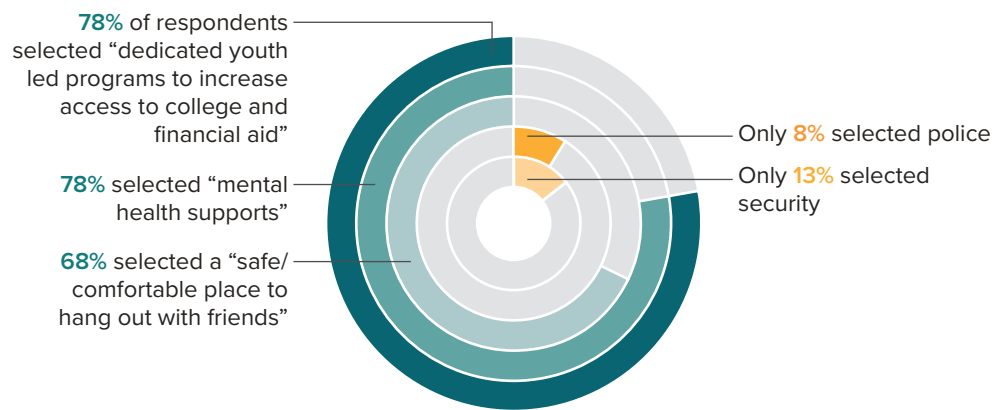
Students would rather increase funding for resources like teachers, nurses, social workers, and mental health supports over police.

When asked to rank investments in order of priority, **most students ranked teachers and mental health supports as the highest priorities** (33% and 44% ranking these options as #1, respectively).

By contrast, more than three fourths of respondents **ranked police as the lowest priority** (77%).

When asked what they would like to see more or better quality of at school, students overwhelmingly selected resources, programs, and supports— not police or security.

78% of respondents selected "dedicated youth led programs to increase access to college and financial aid"

78% selected "mental health supports"

68% selected a "safe/ comfortable place to hang out with friends"

Only **8%** selected police

Only **13%** selected security

> " I just feel like things would be way better in schools if cops weren't there - it would be a better experience for students of color. We already have to worry about other [stuff] outside of school, we shouldn't have to deal with racist cops in a building where we need [to] be learning, not being policed.

Although the majority of respondents value other school personnel over police, most students think there are more police at school than nurses and guidance counselors.

Of respondents with police at school, half **(50%)** said they think their school has **more police than guidance counselors.**

82% of respondents said they think their school has **more police than school nurses.**

Respondents who described their student body as **majority Black or majority Black and Brown reported that there are more police at their schools than guidance counselors at higher rates** than respondents who described their student body as majority white. (68% and 50% respectively, versus 43%).

" I want to see my school and other schools in my city reconsidering their security measures more closely and invest in another type of security for their students which is about their health and success, what actually matters; when we get hurt we need more nurses, when we get hurt emotionally or have problems at home/friends, we need psychologists, when we want to improve our academic chances to get into a good college, we need counselors.

Conclusion

Whether in New York City; Elizabeth, New Jersey; Clark County, Nevada; or Salem or Keizer, Oregon, the data makes clear that the presence of police does not support students' learning. When asked what makes them feel safe, the vast majority of respondents named teachers and friends—not police and security— as the people at school who make them feel safe. Instead of more police and security, they envisioned dedicated youth programs to help with college application and safe spaces to hang out with friends. Overwhelmingly, they ranked teachers and mental health supports as funding priorities over police and security.

Now is the moment to support and invest in young people's vision for police-free schools.

At every level of government, elected officials must follow the vision of young people. **Black and Brown young people all across the country believe in police-free schools. To achieve police-free schools, every level of government must, to the fullest extent of their power, dismantle school policing infrastructure, culture, and practice; end school militarization and surveillance; and build a new liberatory education system.**[36] To accomplish this we must dismantle the power that police have over Black youth, youth of color, immigrant youth, youth with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ youth. We must return power and control over schools and safety to communities, and build a liberatory education system that reflects the society we want to create.[37]

Youth Mandate
Guidelines for All Levels of Government

These demands, released as part of the Youth Mandate for Education and Liberation (youthmandate.com), were developed by the organizations who participated in this survey as well as other organizations across the country. The demands emanate from years of local fights to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline. This mandate outlines transformative, anti-racist policies to guide the nation and school districts across the country towards building supportive and inclusive learning environments for all students and families, and seeks to redress the harm created by past policies. It has been endorsed by more than 150 youth-led organizations and allies across the country.

I Fund education not incarceration

A Remove police from schools and divest all funds from police and criminalizing infrastructure in schools.

B End surveillance of young people including by removing metal detectors, surveillance cameras, banning facial recognition software, prohibiting social media tracking, and ending all other forms of invasive surveillance.

C Invest in effective non-punitive culturally responsive school climate strategies like restorative justice, mental health supports, and hiring counselors and social workers.

D Fully and equitably fund public schools, including programs for students with disabilities and schools in low-income communities.

E Support a pipeline to college, including by providing free access to college and universities and eliminate barriers to entering higher education.

II Restore and strengthen the civil rights of young people in education

A Provide maximum local democratic control of the education system. Support youth suffrage, especially on elections impacting their education.

B Ensure that Black and Brown young people have meaningful input into the process to select educational leaders who have a proven track record of working to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline.

C Fully fund and staff civil rights and equity offices.

D Ensure that all school policies are inclusive, non-punitive, and trauma-informed, including ones related to school discipline, immigrant students, LGBTQIA+ students, and students with disabilities, among others.

III Uplift public education; end the private takeover of schools

A End state and tax-payer funding for charter schools and voucher programs.

B Implement a moratorium on the expansion of charter schools.

C Fund the Sustainable Community Schools model.

For this mandate to be realized, local, state, and federal elected officials must take decisive action now.

Clark County School District

Nevada

Clark County, Nevada

Recent survey data has demonstrated that the Clark County School District (CCSD) subjects Black and Brown young people to unrelenting racist and abusive policing at school. Young people experience a traumatizing environment in which:

- **50%** of Black students surveyed felt unsafe seeing police at school;
- **More than a quarter** of students surveyed have, or personally know someone who has, been pepper sprayed by school police—an act that would be considered a war crime in other circumstances;[1] and,
- School police constitute the second greatest source of referrals to the Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice Services, making the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline strikingly clear.[2]

CCSD has its own school district police force, which is both large and expensive. The current "command staff" in schools includes 16 sergeants, four lieutenants, two captains, and a chief of police.[3] Students report that this police force is armed with guns. The most recently available district budget reports approximately 220 officers overall.[4] CCSD funnels millions of dollars into school police each year: In 2018-2019, CCSD spent more than $18.4 million on annual salaries and benefits for members of the district's police department, an expenditure that has steadily increased in recent years.[5] The district also uses federal funds to further entrench policing in schools.[6]

To uncover information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school, Make the Road Nevada (MNRV) fielded in-depth surveys with 138 young people during the end of 2020 and early 2021.

Survey findings in Clark County reveal that:

Police and security at school do not make students feel safe.

For example, when asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),

88% selected friends

56% selected teachers

12% selected security guards

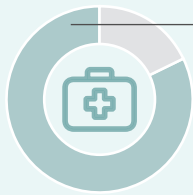## Overwhelmingly, students value more support and resources over police.

When asked to rank investments in order of priority, **most respondents ranked teachers and mental health supports as the highest priorities** (51% and 30% ranking these options as #1, respectively).

By contrast, more than three fourths of respondents **ranked police as the lowest priority** (75%).

Although the majority of respondents value other school personnel over police, **83%** of respondents (with police at school) reported that there are **more police at school than school nurses.**

Interactions with and sightings of school police are common, frequent, and often harmful.
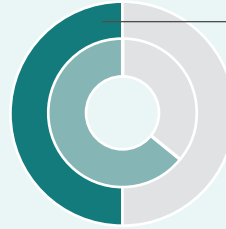
More than **half** of respondents who have police stationed at school reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, at least one type of negative interaction with school police.

Among those with police at school, **61%** saw police at least once per day.

Respondents (with police at school) have experienced a pattern of disturbing behavior in which police:*

- **Prevent young people from learning**, for example by taking students out of a classroom **(37%)**
- **Bully, abuse, and traumatize young people**, for example by:
    - Pepper spraying students **(29%)**
    - Verbally harassing or making fun of students **(10%)**
    - Physically assaulting students **(8%)**
- **Force young people into the criminal legal system and advance punitive techniques**, for example by arresting students **(29%)**
- **Invade young people's physical autonomy**, for example by restraining students **(23%)**
- **Sexually harass students (2%)**

> " There's something that I think is so deeply wrong about the fact that a person on campus gets to just walk around with a gun on them. From the past year you can obviously see that cops have a power dynamic issue and I don't feel comfortable with cops on campus having a gun and being able to use it.

* Percentages refer to respondents who reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, negative interactions with school police.

Background

District Demographics

Clark County School District (CCSD) is the fifth largest school district in the US, accounting for approximately **75%** of all students in the state of Nevada.[7] CCSD serves 323,787 students across 387 schools. As of 2019, the student body is **47%** Latinx, **24%** white, **15%** Black, and **6%** AAPI.[8]

Policing in Clark County

The issue of policing in schools exists within the broader context of police abuse in the community. Law enforcement in the Clark County area is conducted by the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD), the City of North Las Vegas Police Department, the City of Henderson Police Department, and the Boulder City Police Department.[9] In recent years, the LVMPD has killed several community members and been involved in multiple wrongful death lawsuits.[10] In 2011, Rafael Olivas was killed by the LVMPD after a 911 call made by his mother, after which the officers received paid administrative leave.[11] In 2017, Tashii Farmer was killed by the LVMPD when police purportedly thought he was attempting to steal a vehicle.[12] In September 2019, Byron Williams was arrested for riding his bicycle without a safety light and killed while in LVMPD custody.[13]

Tensions around racial discrimination and police violence erupted in May 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, when a number of protestors in the Las Vegas area filed a lawsuit against the LVMPD on the basis of excessive force, violations of constitutional rights, negligent officer training, and emotional distress.[14]

For Black and Brown young people, there is no escape from police abuse, whether in their communities or at school. Youth see no difference between the police who harass, oppress, and surveil them in the streets from those doing so at school.
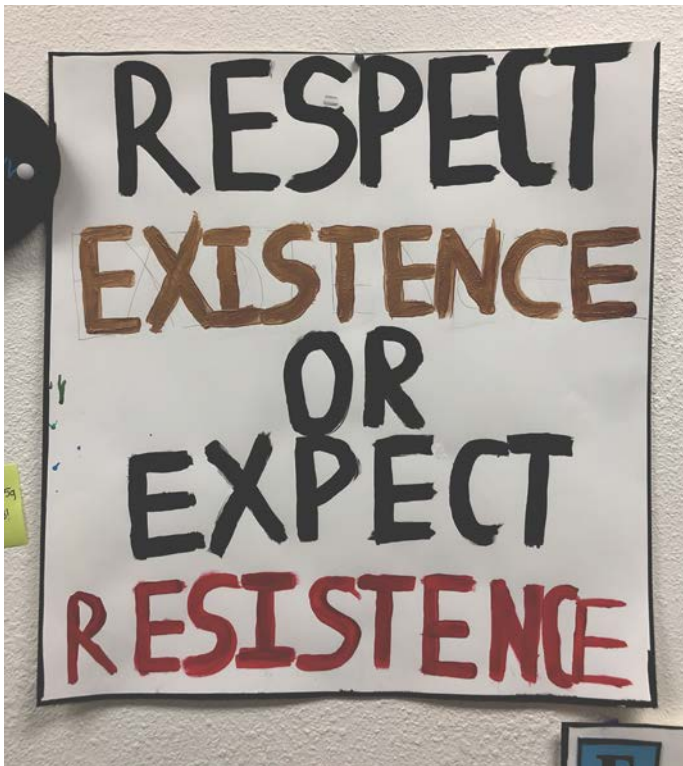
Policing in CCSD

Police Presence in CCSD

CCSD has had a dedicated police force in some form since the 1960s,[15] a period in which many districts began school policing as a backlash to desegregation efforts and student organizing.[16] The current Clark County School District Police Department (CCSDPD) command staff includes 16 sergeants, four lieutenants, two captains, and a chief of police.[17] The 2018–2019 budget reports 220 CCSDPD personnel overall. According to the district, the CCSDPD

> is divided into eight police Area Commands with two police officers assigned to every high school and patrol officers assigned to patrol each command area, primed to respond to the needs of all District elementary, middle, and high schools. In addition, CCSDPD police officers patrol 24/7 covering all property and buildings belonging to the School District. The CCSDPD also has a Detective Bureau, a Training Bureau, and a Communications Bureau consisting of a Fingerprint Unit, a Records Unit, and a Dispatch Center composed of 24 civilian employees.[18]

The most recent Annual Statistical Report released by the Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice Services shows that the CCSDPD was the second highest referrer of all juvenile cases. The CCSDPD referred more than 3,782 cases to the Department of Juvenile Justice Services in just one year, accounting for nearly one third of all referrals in 2019.[19]

Between 2012 and 2020, CCSDPD pepper sprayed young people in schools nearly 180 times.[20] The two schools with the most incidents of pepper spray had over **90%** students of color.[21] According to CCSD records, pepper spray has been used against children of all ages, with pepper spray used in elementary schools annually for the past eight school years. Pepper spray can cause coughing, gagging, blistering or scarring of the eyes, persistent and debilitating pain around the eyes, chemical burns, lung inflammation, and severe asthma attacks.[22] For children with asthma or a similar underlying health condition, the use of pepper spray could quickly become fatal. Asphyxiating and poisonous gasses are prohibited under the law of war,[23] and at least 35 states have banned the use of pepper spray on young people due to their toxicity.[24] What is considered inhumane and illegal in war is certainly inhumane to use against young people in schools.

The Criminalization of Black and Brown Young People in CCSD

CCSD police referrals reveal strikingly different treatment between students of color and white students by the district police force. In 2019, **Black students were 5.7 times more likely than white students to be referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice Services, and Latinx students were 1.4 times more likely.**[25] According to data from the Clark County School Justice Partnership, Black students also accounted for "about 46 percent of students committed to long-term detention facilities from 2017 to 2019, while white students accounted for 12 percent."[26]

Based on the most recently available data, **Black young people represented 18% of students with disabilities, but were 62% of students with disabilities referred to law enforcement.**[27] In contrast, white young people represented **29%** of students with disabilities, but were **12%** of students with disabilities referred to law enforcement.[28]

At a 2019 school board meeting it was revealed that in one month (May 2019), CCSD police referred 257 students to the criminal legal system. Of those students, 215 (or 84%) were Black or Latinx.[29] The vast majority of these referrals were dismissed. In discussing these cases, the District Attorney's office (DA) said, "most of these cases are for marijuana or fighting"—offenses that were not serious enough for the DA to pursue charges.[30]

While the district has started a "School Justice Partnership"—a partnership between CCSD, the Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice Services, and the District Attorney's Office[31]—this effort revolves around a critical and incorrect assumption that police are needed for safety. Since the inception of the program, the district has seen modest reductions in referrals to court.[32] However, thousands of young people each year are still funneled directly from schools into the criminal legal system.[33] For immigrant and undocumented young people, school push-out (punitive discipline practices that push young people out of school) and interactions with police can result in detention and deportation.[34]

Money Spent on Policing in CCSD

The latest available budget data shows that CCSD spent $18.4 million on salaries and benefits for members of the district's police department in 2018–2019.[35] While the district has 161 sworn law enforcement officers and 41 civilian officers, they are vastly under-staffed when it comes to nurses, social workers, psychologists, and school counselors.

Support personnel	#	Recommended Ratio	Current estimated student ratio
Nurses	180[36]	1:750 for a healthy student population; 1:225 for student populations requiring daily service; 1:125 for student population with complex needs; 1:1 for students that require daily, continuous care[37]	Approximately one per 1,778 students[38] At a minimum, this is less than half as many nurses as are necessary.
Social workers	200[39]	1:400[40]	Approximately one per 1,600 students.[41] This represents four times the recommended ratio.
School psychologists	145[42]	1: 500-700[43]	Approximately one for every 2,200 students.[44] The district would need, at a minimum three times the number of psychologists to reach the recommended ratio.
School counselors	800[45]	1:100[46] for high-needs districts 1:250 for general education students	Counselors are budgeted to each high school on the basis of one counselor for each 400 students; in elementary and middle schools it is one counselor for every 500 students.[47] The district should be budgeting for 1.6 to 4 times as many counselors.

Source: Conducted by the Research Hub for Youth Organizing at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Policing expenditures have risen steadily over the last five years, increasing by 9.3% from 2015 to 2019.[48] In addition to salary and benefit costs coming out of the school district's general operating fund, CCSD also spends an unspecified amount of money on policing equipment (e.g., vehicles, technology, firearms, and K9 officers), and holds additional contracts with law enforcement agencies to provide patrols and support for schools in rural communities.[49]

CCSD also reports that it receives federal funding from the Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) to "prevent terrorism and other catastrophic events and to prepare the communities for the threats and hazards that pose the greatest risk to the security of the United States."[50] These funds are used to "establish an interoperable communication system that connects every school directly to CCSD Police Department, first responders, and other schools."[51]

Another stream of federal funding comes from the Department of Justice's Bulletproof Vest Partnership program, which is used by CCSDPD for "advancing the safety of officers through purchasing bulletproof vests."[52]

Community Organizing Context

MRNV is a membership-led and membership-driven organization whose membership reflects Black and Brown young people directly impacted by the presence of school resource officers (SROs) in the Clark County School District. MRNV and its members have been in the fight to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline. The Youth Power Project (YPP) Youth Council was formed in 2019 by young people who wanted to create more opportunities for youth leaders to engage in local grassroots organizing. The YPP Youth Council fights for issues that build the power of Latinx and working class communities of color to achieve dignity and justice through policy innovation and transformative education. In 2020, the YPP Youth Council decided to launch a campaign for police-free schools in Clark County. They proposed a school board resolution, testified at the school board, and have worked to implement critical state legislation.

MRNV fielded in-depth surveys with 138 young people between November 2020 and January 2021. The survey was designed to uncover information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school. Findings show that police and security guards at school do not make students feel safe; that interactions and sightings of school police and security guards are common, frequent, and often harmful; and that students would overwhelmingly favor additional supports and resources over police and security at school.

Youth Survey Results

1 Police and security at school do not make students feel safe.

Security guards at school do not make students feel safe, especially compared to other people they interact with at school, like teachers and friends.

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),

88% selected friends

**56%** selected teachers

12% selected security guards

Of respondents with police at school (**83%** of all survey respondents), **40% reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe when seeing police at school.**

The percentage of Black respondents who reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe was even higher **(50%).**

"I do not feel safe because I've witnessed their abuse of power and refusal to help me when I asked two times because they did not take me seriously. They also ridicule the students and try to make them feel small.

Both security guards and school police are often armed with guns.
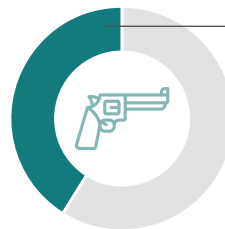
Of respondents with police at school, **39%** reported that police are armed with guns.

Of respondents with security guards at school, **29%** reported that security guards are armed with guns.

"The first thing I see entering school is police with weapons around their belt. I feel extremely uncomfortable when I enter because it almost seems as if they're looking for a problem or something wrong that I did. I get very anxious even though I know I haven't done anything. The intimidation tactics seem unnecessary. And I've seen them take violent actions on my peers.

Some students feel targeted by police based on an aspect of their identity.

Nearly a quarter of respondents (24%) have felt targeted by police based on race, primary language, sexual orientation, or gender identity, including identity as transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex.

19% of respondents have felt targeted based on race.

2 Interactions with and sightings of school police and security guards are common, frequent, and often harmful.

Of respondents with police at school, more than half (54%) reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, at least one type of negative interaction with school police.

The share of Black and Latinx respondents who reported having, or knowing someone who had, a negative experiences was even higher—roughly two thirds of both Latinx respondents and Black respondents.

> " The police make me uneasy and unsafe, as many of them are around before and after school. One time when I was attending school with some of my friends, during lunch in the quad, the police body slammed and pepper sprayed someone... Those practices shouldn't be used on students at all.

Respondents (with police at school) have experienced a pattern of disturbing behavior in which school police:*

Bully, abuse, and traumatize young people, for example by:

- Verbally harassing or making fun of students **(10%)**
- Physically assaulting students **(8%)**
- Pepper spraying students **(29%)**
- Responding to a mental health crisis **(6%)****

Prevent young people from learning while at school, for example by:

- Taking students out of a classroom **(37%)**

Invade young people's physical autonomy, for example by:

- Physically searching students (other than walking through a metal detector) **(23%)**
- Restraining students **(23%)**

Force young people into the criminal legal system and advance punitive techniques, for example by:

- Arresting students **(more than one in four respondents; 29%)**
- Responding when a student misses school **(11%)**
- Issuing juvenile reports **(13%)**[†]
- Issuing tickets to go to court **(8%)**

Sexually harass young people (2%)

These types of interactions can have devastating impacts for young people. One study found that experiencing an arrest for the first time in high school nearly doubles the odds of a student dropping out, and a court appearance nearly quadruples the odds of a student dropping out.[53] A series of recent studies reveal that biased treatment caused youth of color to lose more trust for school officials compared with their white peers, which was further correlated with reduced college attendance.[54]

* Percentages refer to respondents who reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, negative interactions with school police.

** We believe it is always inappropriate for school police to respond to mental health crises.

† In Nevada, a juvenile "report" likely refers to a juvenile "referral."

Students see police at school regularly, and the majority see police at school on a daily basis.

Of respondents with police at school, **99%** saw police at school at least once in an average month. Of these, **61%** saw police at least once daily.

Sightings and interactions with school security guards are also common and frequent.

Of respondents with security guards at school, over a third **(35%)** reported at least monthly interactions with security guards in an average month.
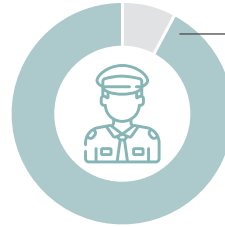
92% of respondents saw security guards in and around their schools at least once in an average month, with over a third of respondents **(37%)** reporting sightings multiple times per day.

Research shows that over time, the **mere presence** of police may have psychological effects on students' "nervous and immune systems that may result in anxiety, restlessness, lack of motivation, inability to focus, social withdrawal, and aggressive behaviors."[55] Community studies suggest these adverse consequences are compounded when a person perceives that the negative interaction is motivated by race.[56]

❝ There was an incident where a student was targeted at school by 5+ officers saying he looked like he had something on him. The student kept repeating that he didn't have anything on him. All 5+ officers used unnecessary force to search him down and he didn't have [anything]. Other students started to "boo" at the officers and that's when the officers decided to pepper spray the whole crowd of students nearby.

3 Overwhelmingly, students value more support and resources over police and security.

Students would rather increase funding for resources like teachers, nurses, social workers, and mental health supports over police.

When asked to rank investments in order of priority, most students ranked teachers and mental health supports as the highest priorities (51% and 30% ranking these options as #1, respectively).

By contrast, more than three fourths of respondents ranked police as the lowest priority (75%).
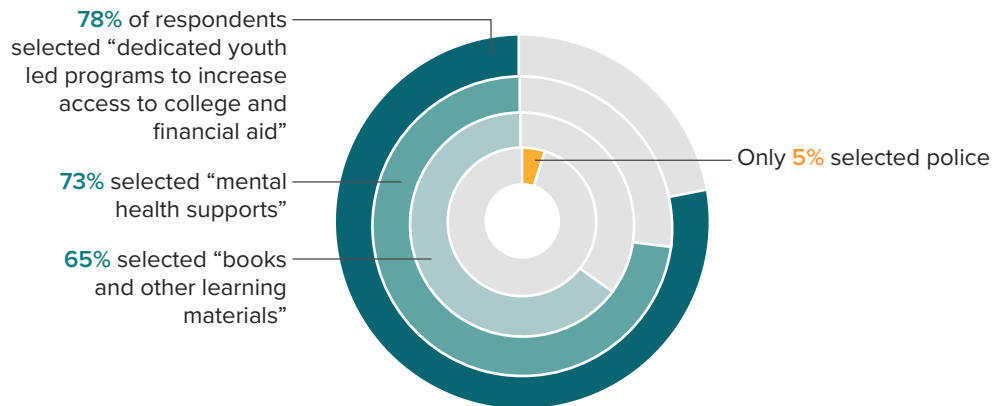
Although the majority of respondents value other school personnel over police, most respondents reported that there are more police at school than school nurses.

Of those with police at school, **83%** of respondents reported that there are more police at school than school nurses.

Studies show that investments in counselors,[57] mental health resources,[58] and restorative justice[59] contribute to school safety, yet there is no substantial evidentiary support for the proposition that police presence in schools and suspensions create safe learning environments.[60]

When asked what they would like to see more or better quality of at school, students overwhelmingly selected resources, programs, and supports—not police or security.

78% of respondents selected "dedicated youth led programs to increase access to college and financial aid"

73% selected "mental health supports"

65% selected "books and other learning materials"

Only **5%** selected police

> " The first thing I see entering school is police with weapons around their belt. I feel extremely uncomfortable when I enter because it almost seems as if they're looking for a problem or something wrong that I did. I get very anxious even though I know I haven't done anything. The intimidation tactics seem unnecessary. And I've seen them take violent actions on my peers.

Recommendations

The young people who are the most at risk of harm due to harsh policing policies are uniquely situated to re-imagine school environments. This report highlights the vision for safe, supportive, and inclusive schools developed by youth leaders with MRNV.

This is Our Youth Mandate: Fund Education, Not Incarceration

I   Divest from criminalization:

A Immediately remove all police from schools and close the Clark County School Police Department. Do not expand in any way the security force in CCSD.

B Terminate all contracts with the local police and sheriff's departments that police in and around Clark County Schools.

C Immediately end the use of pepper spray and other chemical agents against young people.

D Remove CCSDPD from responding to mental health crises in schools and from entering schools for any school related matters.

E End surveillance of young people including by removing metal detectors, surveillance cameras, banning facial recognition software, prohibiting social media tracking, and ending all other forms of invasive surveillance.

F Stop soliciting federal and state funds used to police, surveille, and criminalize young people. Seek waivers to redirect funds from the federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office, Department of Homeland Security or similar federal or state programs to be used on support services instead of policing and criminalizing infrastructure in schools.

G Fully implement AB490, which requires public schools to collect and report on data on the discipline of all students in Nevada that the State Board of Education will analyze.

H Direct all schools in the district to not call police into schools unless there is an extreme emergency that threatens the life or safety of other students.

I End all zero tolerance policies and practices in policing and discipline. End all arrests or citations in schools. Expunge students' discipline records.

II   Invest in Our Education

A Fully fund and implement restorative justice practices at all schools.

B Fully fund and increase culturally competent school support staff, including teachers, guidance counselors, nurses, social workers, restorative justice coordinators, and academic and social support staff.

C Ensure all students have access to College Access supports, including Student Success Centers.

D CCSD must build an anti-racist district by creating a committee of parents, students, educators, union leaders, youth development experts, administrators, and community leaders to evaluate CCSD's educators training, curriculum and district practices to ensure they are anti-racist, anti-adultist, and trauma informed best practices.

E Create a culturally relevant curriculum.

F Fully and equitably fund public schools, including programs for students with disabilities and schools in low-income communities.

G Support a pipeline to college, including by providing free access to college and universities and eliminate barriers to entering higher education.

III Restore and strengthen the civil rights of young people in education

A Provide maximum local democratic control of the education system. Support youth suffrage, especially on elections impacting their education.

B Ensure that Black and Brown young people have meaningful input into the process to select educational leaders who have a proven track record of working to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline.

C Fully fund and staff civil rights and equity offices.

D Ensure that all school policies are inclusive, non-punitive, and trauma-informed, including ones related to school discipline, immigrant students, LGBTQIA+ students, and students with disabilities, among others.

IV Uplift public education; end the private takeover of schools

A End state and tax-payer funding for charter schools and voucher programs.

B Implement a moratorium on the expansion of charter schools.

C Fund the Sustainable Community Schools model.

Storybook

General Feelings about Police and Security

As a Black man, we all feel a tension living in America and every time I see a police officer all I can think is how can I make sure that I don't look suspicious or intimidating, a sad reality.

I feel unsafe because even though I have done nothing wrong, I feel as though they would target me for no reason at all.

Seeing police [is] associated with crime and it doesn't feel good having to see cops everywhere. It feels like I'm somewhere I wouldn't want to be. Not a good burden on the environment.

I feel like something bad will happen when there [are] police there.

Typically when I see a police officer or a security guard at school I do not feel very safe.

Police have always made me uncomfortable because I am a minority.

I feel like they are more likely to cause trouble and are very aggressive towards students.

As a Black student who sees the prejudice in [the] media and has been educated [about] the school-to-prison-pipeline, I know that police are only holding [back] my community and are not contributing to the success of Black students.

I feel very threatened and as if I'm always doing something wrong when I see police. It feels like it makes school a hostile environment rather than a safe place. I've seen the way students have been treated at the hands of police and it's something that truly disgusts me.

They just make me feel uneasy because I don't really know what they are there for.

The first thing I see entering school is police with weapons around their belt. I feel extremely uncomfortable when I enter because it almost seems as if they're looking for a problem or something wrong that I did. I get very anxious even though I know I haven't done anything. The intimidation tactics seem unnecessary. And I've seen them take violent actions on my peers.

I went to a predominantly Black and Brown school and felt that I was being watched by police daily. I also had seen my friends searched and heard stories of them being physically assaulted by the police at school. I personally never had any harsh interactions directed at me, but I was very uncomfortable with their presence.

I do not feel safe because I've witnessed their abuse of power and refusal to help me when I asked…because they did not take me seriously. They also ridicule the students and try to make them feel small.

There's something that I think is so deeply wrong about the fact that a person on campus gets to just walk around with a gun on them. From the past year you can obviously see that cops have a power dynamic issue and I don't feel comfortable with cops on campus having a gun and being able to use it.

I noticed how uncomfortable other students were and I also noticed they had at least three dogs with them on every floor. It felt less like school and more like being monitored.

When I see police at school it makes me feel unsafe because it makes me think of how at any moment they could pepper spray us or it makes me think our school is unsafe.

The police at my school are white males at a predominantly Black/Brown and other BIPOC school and they make sure to intimidate us every chance they get.

I am uncomfortable around police… I have seen them wrongly accuse classmates.

…I'm Black and they target Black people.

Personally I've experienced some biasness due to the color of my skin during times when the police have been involved in something that happened to my friend and someone else. I was barely present when the incident happened and only arrived after it, with no connection whatsoever yet the police continuously asked me questions as if I was…

They once carried big guns and I felt uncomfortable that they brought that to a school full of kids.

Sometimes I do feel unsafe because of an incident resulting in students getting pepper sprayed because of a fight that occurred. There wasn't a need to endanger everyone's health, but because they had access to it they abused their power.

Their tendency [is] to inflict harm. I feel like there is a power imbalance and I feel afraid that I might be doing something wrong that I'm unaware of, and then get physically assaulted for it.

The police officers have a tendency to be aggressive or stand-off-ish which gives me the feeling that they are waiting to catch one of us doing something wrong.

I do not feel safe because I've witnessed their abuse of power and refusal to help me when I asked two times ever because they did not take me seriously. They also ridicule the students and try to make them feel small.

Police always target the Black and Brown students at my school … having them pepper spray and handcuff and watch over them all the time is unnecessary and racist.

The police are an intimidating force and I've seen their interactions with other students, I avoid them as best as I can.

As a white, cis woman, I don't feel targeted by police. However, I don't feel that they will protect others who are unlike me.

Rather than responding to specific incidents or "protecting" students, they feel like the intimidating force. Additionally, rather than making the students feel safe they just harass people in the parking lot, which is already very poorly designed.

I feel unsafe around police at my school because they have weapons such as guns [and] pepper spray.

They had guns bigger than their torso.

Negative Interactions with Police and Security

I have seen a video of a police officer at my school body slam another student, who was not visibly fighting back. Additionally, the police are allowed to pepper spray students, which can be a health issue for those with asthma. I have seen this happen in a crowded area, exposing it to multiple students.

…They stormed into the classroom I was in during a hard lockdown and it was scary.

Police were trying to break up a fight and suddenly used mace on a large crowd of students (including those who were spectating), resulting in a lot of students waiting outside the nurse's office to receive help for their eyes.

The police make me uneasy and unsafe, as many of them are around before and after school. One time when I was attending school with some of my friends, during lunch in the quad, the police body slammed and pepper sprayed someone… Those practices shouldn't be used on students at all.

I've seen officers using unnecessary force in certain situations.

Students have been handcuffed and treated poorly by the officers and it's a shame our school has more officers than mental health resources.

There have been times where students have been tackled and pepper sprayed on multiple occasions as the police's way of diffusing a situation.

There was a time last school year when some kids got into a fight and the campus police pepper sprayed them and you could smell the pepper spray throughout the campus.

There was an incident where a student was targeted at school by 5+ officers saying he looked like he had something on him. The student kept repeating that he didn't have anything on him. All 5+ officers used unnecessary force to search him down and he didn't have [anything]. Other students started to "boo" at the officers and that's when the officers decided to pepper spray the whole crowd of students nearby.

I heard a story about a cop going undercover in schools to arrest kids doing drugs. In the end, she intimidated a kid (who would not have done it otherwise) to do it, ruining his life. I think that cops hurt students more than they help us because they only know how to respond with violence, and when it comes to kids with drugs, all they can do is arrest them, which only makes things worse.

In one fight between two students of color, the Black female in the dispute was body slammed by a police officer. In another fight tear gas was used to "deescalate" the situation and many student and faculty bystanders were affected. Police officers at schools do not work to discourage students to get into physical altercations and therefore it is necessary for schools to consider implementing restorative justice practices.

In the 7 something fights that did happen in my 3 years of being in that school, I always end up hearing about innocent students who were standing by getting pepper sprayed. I also have seen two Black students get body slammed by police…. one is from I think last year of a boy who I think was in a fight. People had recording of it on their phones, mostly Snapchat. Last I recalled both students were disobeying rules but that does not justify such violence. I saw two white boys get in a fight and I didn't see them get body slammed. I'm really not sure of this but it seems as if people of color more specifically Black students tend to get bigger punishment for the same actions as their peer counterparts.

I saw multiple male cops come into a female locker room and man handling a 14-year-old girl who had just been jumped. We were all crying and extremely infuriated.

Students are met with physical restraint, pepper spray, body slammed, etc., when there's an issue which is unnecessary. It's traumatizing.

When I was in high school, I really never had an interaction with a School Police Officer, but I always saw how wrong they would treat other students. The way they would talk in the school offices. They would use a lot of inappropriate words that no one should use in front of students.

New York City Public Schools

New York

New York City,
New York
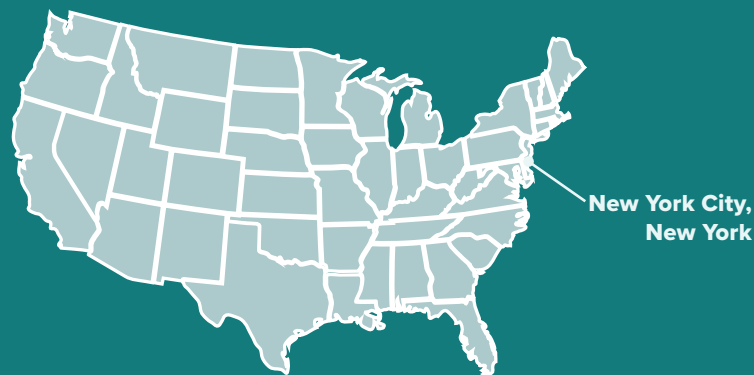
Recent survey data has demonstrated that New York City public schools subject Black and Brown young people to unrelenting racist and abusive policing at school. Young people experience a traumatizing environment, in which:

- **91%** of all arrests at school are of Black and Latinx young people,[1] despite these students being only **66%** of the enrolled population;[2]
- Survey data shows that police verbally, physically, and sexually harass students and push them into the criminal legal system at shocking rates; and,
- **More than two thirds** of students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that police should be **removed** from schools.

> **They make me feel uncomfortable and they right away assume that I did something wrong.**

> **Students should not fear...we should not [be] worried about officers. We should have peace and freedom.**

This system is discriminatory and costly. New York City funnels hundreds of millions of dollars into the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline each year. In 2021, the NYPD School Safety Division (SSD), which employs school police known as "School Safety Agents," was allocated **$451.9 million**—an increase of nearly $70 million over the previous five years.[3] The overrepresentation of Black students in incidents with school police is staggering: Black students make up **26%** of enrollment but **59%** of arrests, while white students are vastly underrepresented in every type of interaction with school police.[4]

To uncover information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police at school, the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) fielded in-depth surveys with 174 young people at the end of 2020 and early 2021.

Survey findings in New York City Public Schools reveal that:

Interactions with school police are common and often harmful.

Of those with police at school, **60%** of respondents reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, **at least one type of negative interaction with school police.**

The share of Black respondents who reported having or knowing someone who had a negative interaction was even higher **(78%).**

More than a quarter of respondents have experienced feeling targeted by police based on an aspect of their identity.

28% of respondents have felt targeted by police based on race, primary language, sexual orientation, or gender identity, including identity as transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex.

Respondents (with police at school) have experienced a pattern of disturbing behavior in which school police:*

- **Prevent young people from learning while at school**, for example by taking students out of a classroom **(44%)**
- **Bully, abuse, and traumatize young people**, for example by:
  – Verbally harassing or making fun of students **(17%)**
  – Physically assaulting students **(7%)**
- **Invade young people's physical autonomy**, for example by:
  – Physically searching students (other than walking through a metal detector) **(33%)**
  – Restraining students **(21%)**
- **Force young people into the criminal legal system and advance punitive techniques**, for example by:
  – Arresting students **(18%)**
  – Responding to a mental health crisis **(18%)****
  – Issuing tickets to go to court **(12%)**
  – Responding when a student misses school **(14%)**
  – Issuing juvenile reports **(9%)**
- **Sexually harass young people (3%)**

Overwhelmingly, students value more support and resources over police.

When asked what they would like to see more or better quality of at school, students overwhelmingly selected resources, programs, and supports—not police.

76% of respondents selected "dedicated youth led programs to increase access to college and financial aid"

75% selected "mental health supports"

72% selected "safe/comfortable place to hang out with friends"

Only **10%** selected police

Strong relationships with peers and educators make youth feel safe at school.

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school), **82%** selected friends and **69%** selected teachers.

* Percentages refer to respondents who reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, negative interactions with school police.

** We believe it is always inappropriate for school police to respond to mental health crises.

Background

District Demographics

Serving 1,126,501 students across 1,866 schools, the NYC school system is the largest school system in the United States.[5] The student body is: Latinx **(41%)**, Black **(25%)**, AAPI **(16%)** and white **(15%)**.[6] **13%** of students are English Language Learners, **20%** are students with disabilities, and **73%** are "economically disadvantaged."[7]

Policing in New York City

The issue of policing in schools exists within the broader context of police abuse in the community. The New York City Police Department (NYPD) employs approximately 36,000 officers and 19,000 civilian employees.[8] Organizers have long highlighted the devastating impact of the NYPD's history of discriminatory policing practices that target low-income communities of color, youth, members of the LGBTQ community, the unhoused, people with mental health issues, street vendors, and sex workers.[9]

In the summer of 2020, following the murder of George Floyd when thousands of New Yorkers took to the streets in protest, the New York state legislature passed the historic repeal of 50-a, which had "served to hide police misconduct and discipline from the public."[10] This victory was built on years of organizing by a statewide coalition led by Communities United for Police Reform. In response to widespread calls to defund the NYPD and to remove "school safety agents" from schools, Mayor de Blasio claimed that he cut $1 billion from the police department for the 2021 budget. However, after the final budget was made public it was revealed that much of the supposed cuts were not in the approved budget. For example, Mayor de Blasio claimed to cut over $300 million by transferring school safety agents from the Police Department to the Department of Education (DOE). This would have been meaningless in practice because it maintains the current system of police in schools, but it also never happened.[11] The mayor, along with some city council members, again proposed a transfer of school safety agents from the NYPD to DOE in the 2022 budget—a move opposed by NYC groups fighting for police-free schools.[12]

For Black and Brown young people, there is no escape from police abuse, whether in their communities or at school. Youth see no difference between the police who harass, oppress, and surveil them in the streets from those doing so at school.

Policing in NYC Public Schools

Police Presence in NYC Public Schools

The intentional embedding of the NYPD in school discipline in NYC can be traced back to 1998 when then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani moved responsibility for school security from the then-Board of Education to the NYPD as part of his broader "law and order" campaign. This invasion of police into public schools continued in 2003 when then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg's administration promised to bring down the full force of the NYPD on schoolchildren through enhancing invasive security measures, increasing the presence of NYPD School Safety Agents, doubling the number of permanently assigned uniformed and armed police officers in certain schools, and policing common youthful behaviors such as cursing. This approach explicitly brought "broken windows" policing—a form of policing which prioritizes criminal punishment for low-level infractions—from the streets into the classroom.[13]
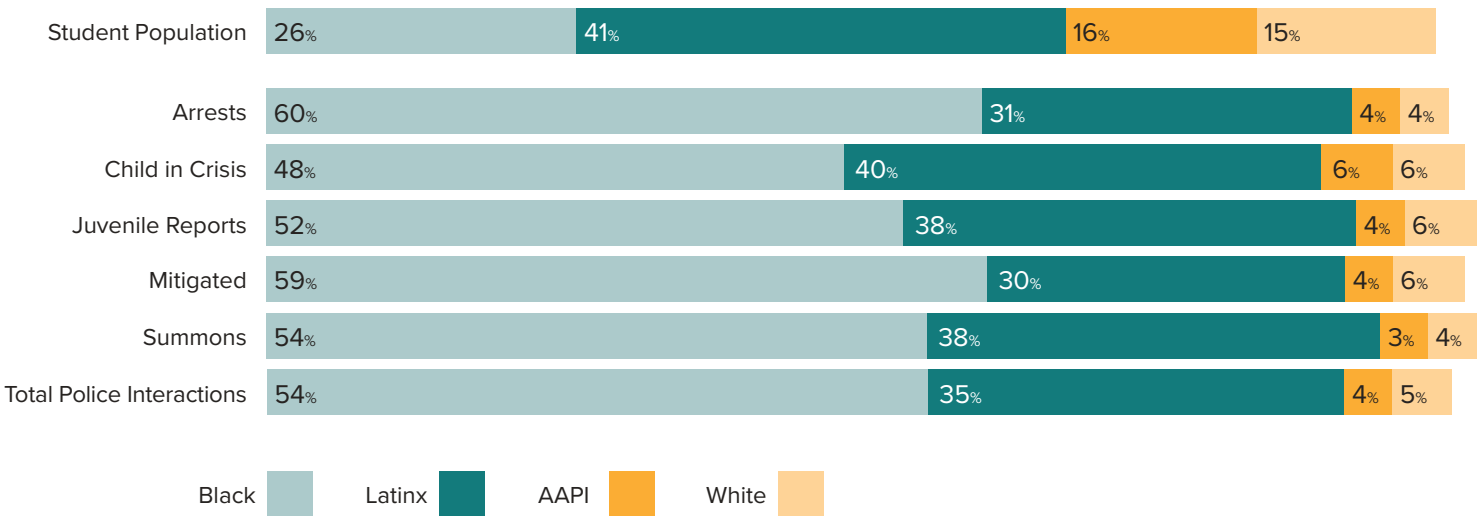
Today, the NYPD employs 5,511 staff[14] in schools across the city.[15] The DOE provides funding to the NYPD to employ school safety agents, and the vast majority of funding for the SSD is dedicated to the personnel costs of these agents.[16]

The Criminalization of Black and Brown Young People

The overall number of incidents involving school police increased steadily from 9,385 incidents in 2016 to 11,179 in 2019.[17] Data on police interactions shows a **disproportionate number of incidents between police and Black and Latinx students across every category,** though there is no evidence to suggest that young people of different races behave differently.[18] For example, Black students make up **26%** of enrollment in NYC schools, but account for **59%** of arrests. White students comprise **15%** of enrollment but are vastly underrepresented in every type of interaction.[19]

Mean Percentage of Each Racial/Ethnic Group for Each Interaction Over Time, 2016–20

	Black	Latinx	AAPI	White
Student Population	26%	41%	16%	15%
Arrests	60%	31%	4%	4%
Child in Crisis	48%	40%	6%	6%
Juvenile Reports	52%	38%	4%	6%
Mitigated	59%	30%	4%	6%
Summons	54%	38%	3%	4%
Total Police Interactions	54%	35%	4%	5%

Legend: Black, Latinx, AAPI, White

Money Spent on Policing in NYC Public Schools

In 2021, the city allocated $451.9 million to the SSD. This budget has grown steadily over the past five years—an increase of nearly $70 million from 2017 to 2021.[20] Compared to the 5,511 NYPD SSD personnel, there are only 1,434 nurses, 1,804 social workers, and 2,952 guidance counselors in the 2022 preliminary budget.[21]

NYC Adopted Budgets to Fund Police in New York City Schools (In Millions of Dollars)[22]

Year	Budget
FY17	$382.7m
FY18	$382.8m
FY19	$389.1m
FY20	$425.6m
FY21	$451.9m
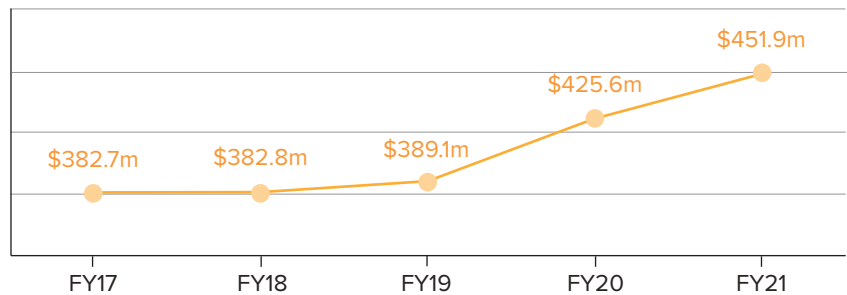
Community Organizing Context

One of the organizations leading the fight for police-free schools in NYC is the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC), led by young people and whose membership reflects Black and Brown students directly impacted by the presence of police in schools. In recent years, UYC has won citywide reforms to address the full consequences of the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline in NYC. Since 2019, UYC's work with local allies has resulted in a reduction of the maximum number of days given in suspensions from 180 to 20, the hiring of more student support staff, citywide restorative justice practices, and changing school police policies to limit the use of handcuffs.[23] The long-term impact of their work is also reflected in the data in which (while acknowledging the impact of COVID-19) showed an 82% reduction in the number of arrests and an 84% reduction in the number of court summons issued in schools between the 2016–17 and 2019–20 school years.[24]

UYC fielded in-depth surveys with 174 young people between December 2020 and January 2021. The survey was designed to uncover information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school. Findings show that police at school do not make students feel safe; that interactions and sightings of school police are common, frequent, and often harmful; that students go through metal detectors regularly, and many have negative experiences with them; and that students overwhelmingly favor additional supports and resources over more police.

Youth Survey Findings

1 Police at school do not make students feel safe.

Police at school do not make students feel safe, especially compared to other people they interact with at school, like teachers and friends.

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),

82% selected friends

**69%** selected teachers

24% selected police

The percentage of Latinx and Black respondents who selected police was even lower **(20% and 22%, respectively)**.

More than a quarter of respondents have experienced feeling targeted by police based on an aspect of their identity.

28% of respondents have felt targeted by police based on race, primary language, sexual orientation, or gender identity, including identity as transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex. **20%** of respondents felt targeted based on race.
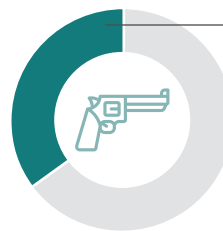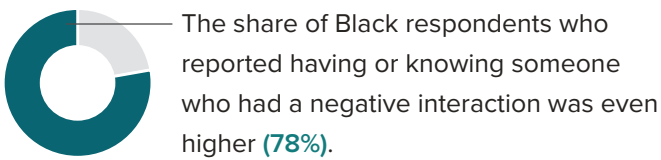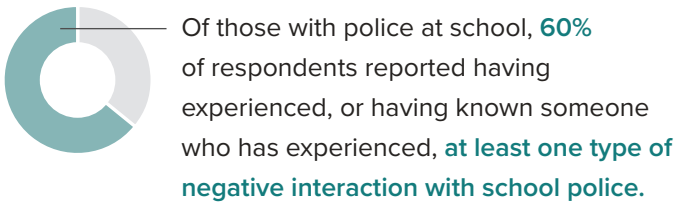
Of respondents with police at school, more than a third (35%) are armed with guns.
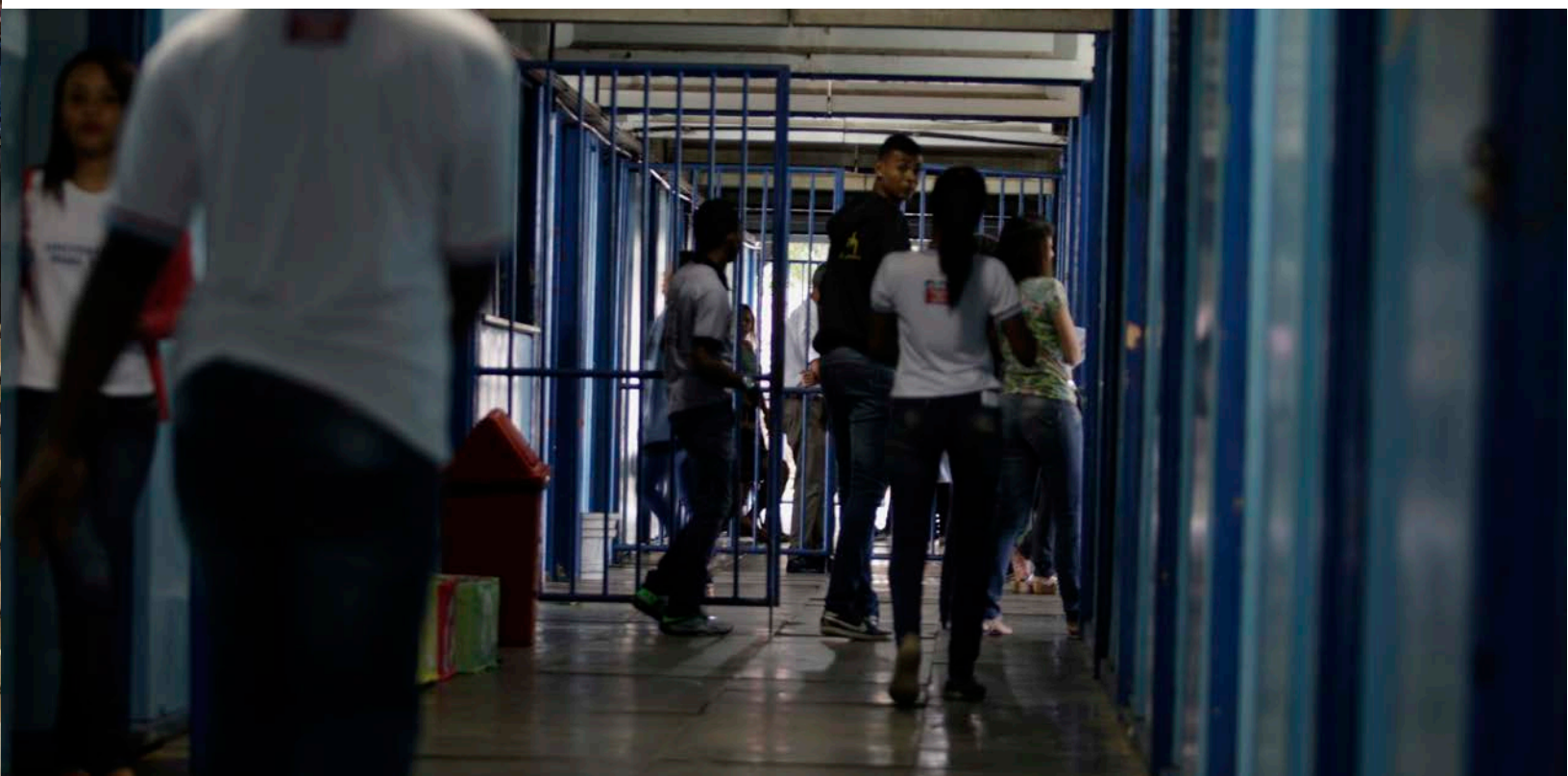
2 Interactions with and sightings of school police are common, frequent, and often harmful.

Most respondents reported having experienced, or having known someone who experienced, at least one type of negative interaction with school police.

Of those with police at school, **60%** of respondents reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, **at least one type of negative interaction with school police.**

The share of Black respondents who reported having or knowing someone who had a negative interaction was even higher **(78%)**.

> " I've seen incidents where police have been called in for mental health crises, and it hurts because the way they handle us is not right. Why do they feel it is necessary to handle us this way?

Respondents (with police at school) have experienced a pattern of disturbing behavior in which school police:*

Prevent young people from learning while at school, for example by
- Taking students out of a classroom **(44%)**

Bully, abuse, and traumatize young people, for example by:
- Verbally harassing or making fun of students **(17%)**
- Physically assaulting students **(7%)**

Invade young people's physical autonomy, for example by:
- Physically searching students (other than walking through a metal detector) **(33%)**
- Restraining students **(21%)**

Sexually harass young people (3%)

Force young people into the criminal legal system and advance punitive techniques, for example by:
- Arresting students **(18%)**
- Responding to a mental health crisis **(18%)****
- Issuing tickets to go to court **(12%)**
- Responding when a student misses school **(14%)**
- Issuing juvenile reports **(9%)**

These types of interactions can have devastating impacts for young people. One study found that experiencing an arrest for the first time in high school nearly doubles the odds of a student dropping out, and a court appearance nearly quadruples the odds of a student dropping out.[25] A series of recent studies reveal that biased treatment caused youth of color to lose more trust for school officials compared to their white peers, which was further correlated with reduced college attendance.[26]

* Percentages refer to respondents who reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, negative interactions with school police.
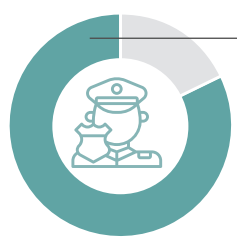
** We believe it is always inappropriate for school police to respond to mental health crises.

The majority of respondents see police on at least a daily basis.

Of respondents with police at school, **81%** saw police at school at least once daily.

More respondents have daily interactions with police than they do with guidance counselors, social workers, and school nurses.


Of respondents with police at school, **7%** reported daily interactions with school nurses, social workers, and guidance counselors, compared to **22%** of respondents who interact daily with police.

Research shows that over time, the **mere presence** of police may have psychological effects on students' "nervous and immune systems that may result in anxiety, restlessness, lack of motivation, inability to focus, social withdrawal, and aggressive behaviors."[27] Community studies suggest these adverse consequences are compounded when a person perceives that the negative interaction is motivated by race.[28]

3 Students go through metal detectors regularly, and many have negative experiences with them.
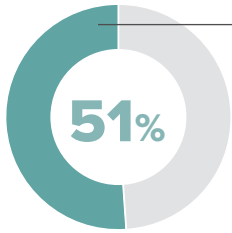
Half of all respondents (51%) report going through metal detectors at least daily.

51%

Of those required to go through metal detectors, nearly all respondents reported that students are required to go through metal detectors, but that teachers and other staff are less likely to face the same requirement.

Of those who are required to go through metal detectors,

99% reported that students are required to go through metal detectors

99%

14% reported that teachers, and **11%** who reported that school staff, have to go through metal detectors

14%	11%

2% reported that police have to go through metal detectors.

Going through metal detectors is experienced as an invasive process for respondents.

For example, of those who go through metal detectors,

63% have been made to take off their shoes, belt, jewelry, or other articles of clothing;

56% have been scanned with a wand;

53% have been physically searched; and

42% have had their belongings taken.

> It's annoying and very aggressive for no reason especially folks who wear hijabs are forced to remove them.

> The hand wand or metal detector sometimes goes off and they still have to pat you down. Sometimes the police are aggressive at the metal detectors especially when the students like me don't understand English. Students are the only ones that need to go through the metal detectors. And the cops don't want people lingering around the metal detectors once you pass through them and they yell to get people away.

4 Overwhelmingly, students value more support and resources over police and security.

Studies show that investments in counselors,[29] mental health resources,[30] and restorative justice[31] contribute to school safety, yet there is no substantial evidentiary support for the proposition that police presence in schools and suspensions create safe learning environments.[32]

The majority of students think police should be removed from schools.
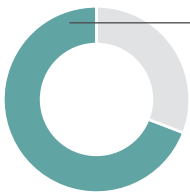
Of those with police at school, **68%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Police should be removed from my school and my school should have more support and resources for students (for example up to date books, more teachers, academic services, counseling, health, restorative practices, etc.)"

Students would rather increase funding for resources like teachers, nurses, social workers, and mental health supports over police.

When asked to rank investments in order of priority, **most students ranked teachers and mental health supports as the highest priorities** (22% and 49% ranking these options as #1, respectively).

By contrast, **76%** of respondents **ranked police as the lowest priority**.

Although the majority of respondents value other school personnel over police, most students think there are more police at school than nurses or guidance counselors.

Of those with police at school, **74%** of respondents said they think their school has **more police than guidance counselors**

86% of respondents said they think their school has **more police than school nurses.**

> " Police don't have to be at the school, I don't feel like they serve any actual purpose...

When asked what they would like to see more or better quality of at school, students overwhelmingly selected resources, programs, and supports— not police.

76% of respondents selected "dedicated youth led programs to increase access to college and financial aid"

75% selected "mental health supports"

72% selected "safe/ comfortable place to hang out with friends"
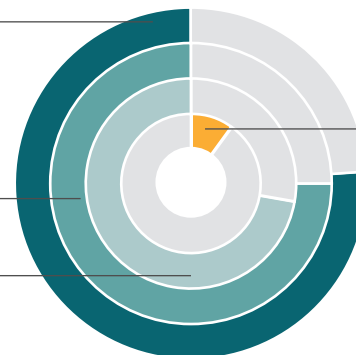
Only **10%** selected police

Recommendations

The young people who are most at risk of harm due to harsh policing policies are uniquely situated to re-imagine school environments. This report highlights the vision for safe, supportive, and inclusive schools developed by youth leaders with UYC.

This is Our Youth Mandate:

I   Divest from Youth Criminalization

A Remove all police personnel from New York City public schools. Do not transfer their supervision to the Department of Education.

B Remove all metal detectors, scanners, and invasive security measures from New York City public schools.

C Remove NYPD from responding to mental health crises in schools and from entering schools for any school related matters.

D End all zero tolerance policies and practices, and prohibit arrest, summons, and juvenile reports non-criminal violations and misdemeanors, which disproportionately impacts Black and Brown young people.

II   Invest in Youth Care

A Fully fund and implement restorative practices at all schools by 2022.

B Fully fund and increase school support staff, including guidance counselors, nurses, social workers, restorative justice coordinators, and academic and social support staff.

C Establish a system wide mental health continuum and increase funding for mental health supports for all students.

D Ensure all students have access to:

- Culturally responsive education;
- High-quality and comprehensive selection of sports, arts, and elective courses; and,
- College Access supports, including Student Success Centers.

Storybook

General Feelings about Police and Security

The [police] are so loud and are constantly yelling in our faces, which doesn't feel safe to me.

I feel unsafe because they scare me a lot. They look really mean, which is concerning.

Students should not fear... We should not [be] worried about officers. We should have peace and freedom.

Clearly, if there are police in school it sends a message that kids can't be trusted.

They make me feel uncomfortable, and they right away assume that I did something wrong.

Some police in the schools are really rude to students, and they don't make students feel welcome.

Police judge the actions of students based on what other students have done.

I believe police don't make us feel comfortable in our schools. They are only there to police us and white neighborhoods don't get the same treatment which makes me feel like they only hurt POC.

I feel unsafe because of the idea of having someone with handcuffs interacting [with] youth and making them seem like trouble makers. It intimates youth. If I joke or talk about police, they will confront the idea like "I'm the police, you are the student," you know? They humiliate people, what they call "protocol" is unacceptable for students, especially around mental health and it instills fear.

Negative Interactions with Police and Security

I've seen incidents where police have been called in for mental health crises, and it hurts because the way they handle us is not right. Why do they feel it is necessary to handle us this way?

[My current] school. . . is not filled with police or heavily rely on calling them, but before I attended that school, I attended a school in the Bronx and it was completely different, more police than guidance counselors, the cops were called for a lot. I was suspended for more than 30 days because I supposedly assaulted a cop who was called to stand guard at a door as me and my mom were arguing over a cell phone the school took from me. I walked out of the room and the cop stood right in front of the door so when the door shut it closed in her face, nobody hit her, the door didn't hit her but I was grabbed and suspended for assault.

While I don't experience police harassment because I'm white passing, my peers have. My friends who are Black have experienced being stopped and questioned on their way back to school from lunch while the rest of us don't.

I felt unsafe because they had too many police officers in my school and there were also two police precincts near our school. They also had metal on the windows and the school does not look like an educational building from the inside. Officers will always walk around hallways and interrupt classrooms as if they were looking for something.

There was this one time when [I] was in 7th grade, our book bags were checked by police and teachers in our school. We had to line up outside.

I think some like to act tough sometimes, to make others feel intimidated. When I get out of a class and if [I'm] 10 minutes late they start to ask questions—"What is it that you are doing here?"—very loudly.

There was this incident where there was a fight and the security guard choked a girl out and they had to navigate the court system. The whole school was aware.

[I] feel like there are a lot of police, sometimes [I] cannot eat because they are there watching. People say they are there to protect students but they are targeting students. They also have weapons and we cannot do anything if they do something to us with the guns.

Experiences with Metal Detectors

I am upset that one time walking through a metal detector, they took away my art supplies and perfume and it took me 2–3 days to get it back. I had a Spanish project the same day they took my items away and I couldn't do the project. Luckily, my teacher spent money out of pocket on arts supplies for the students and I was able to still do my project.

They take forever and they make me late to class.

It was an unnecessary process and invasion of peoples' privacy. My scissors were taken from me and they were for school.

The metal detector process has a heavy presence of police. I felt they were very mean and aggressive.

The process doesn't make me feel good.

One time, my friend and I were trying to go through the metal detectors and my friend had a glass yogurt and the cops at the metal detectors got aggressive and mean, all to tell her to throw it out. This really upset my friend and she felt less than for the rest of the day.

In my opinion the metal detectors are unjust because only the students and visitors have to go through them. . . it does not make me feel safe, it only makes me feel discriminated against.

It's weird that only the students need to go through the metal detector.

One time, police wanded me and asked me to pull my shirt up, and it was very uncomfortable for me because they were treating me as if I was stealing something.

I really do not like the hassle that it takes to go through the metal detectors every day. It is really useless and stops high schoolers from simply being ourselves.

When people are late to school it is so confusing and they give you attitude and ask you questions and we have to give our phones and it makes me uncomfortable because what if they lose it? They once almost did... I remember someone brought a Snapple and it broke and they were being mean to her and it's just humiliating. I fear that I can't bring my personal belongings to school because I may never get it back. There is a store that we have to pay a dollar every day because of scanners so that they can hold our phones that we need.

I feel like they pick and choose who they want to search more.

The lines are crazy in the morning and often make me late for class.

Any little thing sets off the metal detectors and [I] often have to go through the metal detectors several times, which make me late for class. Nothing can go through the metal detectors because everything sets it off.

I don't enjoy going through the metal detectors. It takes a lot of time through the morning. It makes me nervous and causes anxiety and for me to be late because I don't know what they will take and if they will take my markers or belongings. It affects my grades and relationships with teachers by making me late in the mornings. I don't like it.

I feel like it's traumatizing not just for me but for others. I had to experience that in middle school, like why did we have to experience this every day? I feel like it is unnecessary and does not have to happen.

The process of going [through] metal detectors makes me feel that I didn't have a say and I feel I was forced to go through them just for me to go to my class and learn.

They keep us outside in the freezing cold, snow storms and all. The metal doctor process is really traumatizing and disgusting.

It was very uncomfortable and frustrating that as a student I had to go through that process

Metal detectors scared me because they will discriminate [against] us, especially people of color.

Metal detectors make me feel really uncomfortable, [especially] to girls. There was one day that one of my friends was carrying women's products for her period and she got ashamed in front of others [when] going through the metal detectors.

Metal detectors are so annoying because they will make students be late to class or even miss periods and during cold weather [it] is annoying to wait or make the line outside the school building just to go in.

It takes way too long. . . It is absolutely ridiculous to me and should be taken away.

I feel that metal detectors criminalize students and they try to put us down.

Metal detectors make me feel that we [are] untrusted because they think we are going to commit a crime.

Metal detectors would go off for any metal object and that would be an excuse for them to treat me as a criminal.

Some students get patted down often. It is not clear why but they are the same group of students.

It's annoying and very aggressive for no reason especially folks who wear hijabs are forced to remove them.

They sometimes double check even if it seems like you really have nothing in your belongings. If something shows up, they will look through to make sure. My school did not allow [us] to bring reusable bottles or any bottled water if it was open.

It's not fair that staff and teachers don't have to go through like students.

They checked my guitar bag to see if I had a gun.

Going through metal detectors makes me feel uncomfortable, especially because I often have to go through the metal detector several times because everything sets it off and in the end [they] pass the wand to not find anything, which just takes up my breakfast time.

When the metal detectors keep going off on one student they are pulled to the side and have to be wanded/patted down. I have had a friend who had to wait to be wanded down for 30+ minutes.

The fact that students have to go through the metal detectors every day, yet staff and teachers can just walk right by doesn't make the school safer but does the exact opposite.

The hand wand or metal detector sometimes goes off and they still have to pat you down. Sometimes the police are aggressive at the metal detectors especially when the students like me don't understand English. Students are the only ones that need to go through the metal detectors. And the cops don't want people lingering around the metal detectors once you pass through them and they yell to get people away.

Other people have been patted down. When you go through scanners you have to take off your belt and it is the first thing you hear.

The metal detectors don't feel normal, they feel like high level technology that is not meant for us because we are kids.

Salem-Keizer Public Schools

Oregon

Salem and Keizer, Oregon

On March 9, 2021 the superintendent of Salem-Keizer Public Schools (SKPS) announced that she would not renew contracts for School Resource Officers (SROs). This change is a direct result of the many years of Black and Brown young people fighting for safe and supportive schools free of police presence. Despite this victory, the superintendent went on to explain that there may be a "formal relationship with law enforcement or a contract with law enforcement moving forward."[1] In fact, there is at least one current contract between police and the school district that was signed in February 2021.[2]

Recent survey data has demonstrated that police have no rightful place in SKPS and that their presence, in any form, subjects Black and Brown young people to an unrelenting racist and abusive system of policing and police culture. In addition to school police, the use of security guards to control young people, coupled with the lack of investment in support services, perpetuates the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline.

The school district has an opportunity to act now to truly re-imagine school safety. To do so, it must eliminate all policing of young people in schools, dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline, and invest in education services and supports that meet the real needs of SKPS students.

To uncover information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school, Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS) fielded in-depth surveys with 150 young people at the end of 2020 and early 2021.

" I just feel like things would be way better in schools if cops weren't there—it would be a better experience for students of color. We already have to worry about other [stuff] outside of school, we shouldn't have to deal with racist cops in a building where we need to be learning, not being policed.

Survey findings in Salem-Keizer Public Schools reveal that:

## Overwhelmingly, students value more support and resources over police and security.

When asked to rank investments in order of priority, most students ranked teachers and mental health supports as the highest priorities (33% and 48% ranking these options as #1, respectively).

By contrast, 92% of respondents ranked police as the lowest priority.

The vast majority of respondents think police should be removed from schools.
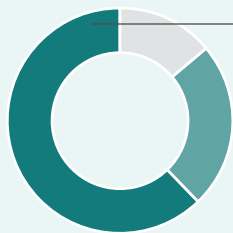
Of those with police at school, 86% of respondents agreed (24%) or strongly agreed (62%) with the statement: "Police should be removed from my school and my school should have more support and resources for students."*

Interactions with school police and security are common, frequent, and often harmful.

Of those with police at school, 88% of respondents reported having had or knowing someone who has had at least one type of negative interaction with school police—for example, being taken out of a classroom, being arrested, or being given a ticket to go to court.

Of those with security at school, 87% of respondents reported interactions with security guards (other than just seeing them in or around the school) at least once in an average month.

* This question was not limited to just those police called School Resource Officers.

Police and security at school do not make students feel safe.

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),

- **85%** selected friends
- **53%** selected teachers
- **3%** selected police
- **16%** selected security guards

The majority of respondents have been targeted by police based on an aspect of their identity.

63% of respondents have felt targeted by police based on race, primary language, sexual orientation, or gender identity, including identity as transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex.

> " Police appear randomly at my school. It is a majority white school. I am the only Black student in my grade. I don't feel safe with police in school because it seems that they like to intimidate me more than they do my peers. I feel like an easy target. When they make eye contact with my friends, they smile. When they make eye contact with me, it seems more scary. My friends mostly feel safe with police but I don't.

Background

District Demographics

The Salem-Keizer school system is made up of two cities: Salem and Keizer. Salem-Keizer Public Schools (SKPS) is the second-largest school district in Oregon, serving 40,438 students across 65 schools.[3] The student body is majority people of color—white students represent **43%** of the student body. Latinx students represent the largest group of students **(44%)**.[4] Seventeen percent of students are English language learners and **70%** of students are considered to be "economically disadvantaged."[5]

Policing in Salem and Keizer

The issue of policing in schools exists within the broader context of police abuse in the community. Salem's Black residents have experienced harassment by the Salem Police Department (SPD) for years.[6] A recent report found that Black residents were overrepresented in police stops—at a rate that was double their share of the total population.[7] In the spring and summer of 2020, thousands took to the streets in protest against police brutality after the murder of George Floyd,[8] generating even broader public awareness of the department's racist culture. During the protests, Salem police used tear gas against protesters.[9] In addition, substantial media attention was directed to a video of a street protest in which a Salem police officer discretely warned armed white men to vacate sidewalks before police began more harshly enforcing the curfew for protestors.[10] Despite data and community testimonials about racist policing, the SPD lacks public accountability: a recent report found that the Salem Community Police Board, set up to review civilian complaints, has not completed a case since 2015, in which the officer involved was cleared of wrongdoing.[11]

For Black and Brown young people, there is no escape from police abuse, whether in their communities or at school. Youth see no difference between the police who harass, oppress, and surveil them in the streets, and those doing so at school.

> **"** I feel traumatized by them and purposely avoid seeing them or interacting with them.

Policing in SKPS

Police and Security Presence in SKPS

Police presence in SKPS was first established in 1968. It began with one part-time officer, and expanded steadily through the 1970s. Many districts began school policing around this same time as a backlash to desegregation efforts and student organizing during the Civil Rights Movement.[12] In 1980, the school district began to pay for two sheriff's deputies assigned to schools in the district, and more federal funding became available for additional officers.[13] In the 1990s, as more Latinx families moved into the area, the district pushed through gang intervention policies which played on a racist trope that Latinx young people are in gangs. For example, a school district gang intervention manual included descriptions of clothing, slang, and symbols that they claimed were associated with gangs, which included many common Spanish words and Mexican cultural symbols.[14] At this time, Latinx communities began organizing to remove police from schools.[15]

The SKPS SRO program, which was finally ended in March 2021,[16] relied on contracts with the SPD and the Keizer Police Department (KPD) to station 11 police officers (known as SROs) within the district's schools. Six of these officers were based at each of the district's six high schools, while the other five were assigned to two local middle schools.[17] Additional enforcement for SKPS was provided by the Marion County Sheriff's Office, the county in which both Salem and Keizer are located.[18] School board members have stated on record that SKPS spent $1 million annually on the SRO program.[19]

While ending the SRO contracts will significantly limit the presence of police in schools, this is not sufficient to end the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline. SKPS already has at least one other contract with police[20] and the superintendent indicated there may be additional contracts with police departments forthcoming.[21]

In addition to SROs, SKPS employs security officers who make up the rest of the school district's security and enforcement personnel infrastructure.[22] The district does not provide information on how much it spends on school security guards or surveillance equipment.

Marion County Juvenile Department

When youth are arrested on school grounds they are sent to the Marion County Juvenile Department (MCJD), making it a key institution in the SKPS school-to-prison pipeline. Youth of color make up **48%** of those who have contact with MCJD.[23] According to the Marion County Juvenile Justice Information System, **53%** of all admissions to juvenile detention are due to probation violations.[24]

MCJD provides juvenile support programming on a range of issues including family support, skilled work "opportunities," substance abuse treatment and recovery, and shelter through the Guaranteed Attendance Program.[25] In order for youth to receive services through these programs they must be under the supervision of the MCJD and must agree to a strict set of conditions.[26] This places them at greater risk of criminalization and incarceration if they fail to meet the conditions, potentially limiting enrollment and access to these programs.

The Criminalization of Black and Brown Young People

In Marion County, Latinx young people consistently face harsher consequences in the criminal legal system than their white peers.[27] Their cases involve secure detention more frequently, they have charges filed against them at higher rates, and they are diverted from the criminal legal system at lower rates than their white peers.[28] Native American and Black young people are referred to juvenile court at startlingly higher rates than their white peers (3.9 and 2.2 times more often, respectively).[29]

The public has been afforded a few glimpses into school-specific policing data that provide additional confirmation of these biased trends, even though no data has been made publicly available by the school district. A deputy police chief recently provided Salem city councilors a summary of student arrests at schools from January 2017 to December 2018. News reports concluded that the data shows, "nearly all arrests have been at McKay and North, the most racially diverse and poorest high schools in the district.... At McKay there were 25 arrests during that time period compared to one at Sprague [a majority-white school]."[30]

Further, the US Department of Education's civil rights data for SKPS shows that Latinx students comprise a disproportionate number of expulsions relative to their number in the overall student body: Latinx students make up **51%** of expulsions despite only accounting for **40%** of the school district's student population.[31]

Child Abuse and Sexual Violence Response

SKPS often cites the need for police to respond to child abuse cases as an argument for continuing police involvement with the school district.[32] This argument fails to acknowledge a few critical truths.

Police are often perpetrators of abuse.[33] Across the nation, "[a]fter excessive force, sexual misconduct is the second-most-common complaint against cops."[34] In fact, a 2015 study found that, "over a 10 year period, an officer was caught in a case of sexual misconduct every five days."[35] As the survey results reveal, this horrific dynamic exists within Salem-Keizer Public Schools as well. **One out of every 11 young people who responded to the survey had been sexually harassed by a school police officer or personally knew someone who had.** Of the four districts surveyed for this national report, SKPS had the highest rate of sexual violence at the hands of school police. In addition, nearly **40%** of respondents had been, or personally knew someone who had been, verbally harassed or made fun of by school police, and just over 1 in 6 respondents reported that school police had physically assaulted young people.

There are mountains of evidence that police and the criminal legal system are not effective in addressing cases of child abuse or sexual violence, let alone supporting survivors and their healing.[36] Instead, the methods used by community organizations are far more effective in supporting abuse survivors.[37] Community organizations that focus on supporting survivors of child abuse, sexual assault, and domestic violence can listen to what a survivor is seeking and match services to that need. Community organizations can support young people in navigating available resources, provide safe spaces for them to heal, and work to understand and respond in ways that are tailored to the individual circumstance.

Instead of funding police to respond to child abuse cases, the district should use those dollars to increase the number of school social workers, counselors, psychologists, and nurses trained to identify and support survivors of child abuse. They could also bring in qualified community organizations with expertise in child abuse issues. Both of these alternatives would prioritize the health and safety of young people rather than pushing them into a criminal legal system that is ill equipped to provide the support and healing they need.

Threat Assessments

Another reason often cited by the school district to justify their continued reliance on police is for "threat assessments,"[38] which "vary widely, but typically involve a small group of school personnel, including a school police officer, discussing a student whom someone has identified as a potential 'threat'" before a violent act occurs.[39] SKPS created a process for "threat assessments," which has been implemented by districts across the country.[40] These assessments often target Black and Brown young people.[41] Referrals for threat assessments trigger an intensive investigation into a student's life and can result in students being "ostracized, stigmatized and profiled without any explicit or believable threat."[42] In 2018 the Oregonian published the story of a high school boy on the autism spectrum who was targeted by the threat assessment investigation process, showing how misguided and harmful these threat assessments can be.[43] In this case, a casual non-threatening conversation with another student, the young person's clothing (including a heavy coat which helped with the symptoms of his autism), his lack of friends (likely the result of bias towards young people with disabilities), his demeanor, and his benign interest in weapons apparently caused his district to begin a threat assessment. The student did not communicate a threat to anyone. After the long and arduous investigation process—which apparently followed the "gold standard" of threat assessments in Oregon—the young person dropped out of school.[44]

Federal data also show a pattern of discrimination in the use of threat assessments. Schools with higher proportions of students of color were more likely than those with fewer students of color to report using threat assessment teams.[45] The federal government concluded in its 2002 report that there is "no accurate or useful 'profile' of students who engaged in targeted school violence."[46] Despite this finding, Black and Brown students are repeatedly targeted for these threat assessments. Currently available data indicates that Black students are disproportionately referred for threat assessments. Similarly, students with disabilities are substantially more likely to be referred than other students.[47]

> " [I] feel [I'm] in a box because [I have] a disability and always feel targeted.

> " I was in school for not even 30 minutes, I got called out of my credit recovery class and got sent to the behavior specialist and got called a gang banger because of my belt. I got racially profiled for how I dressed—while the white girls in my school would wear blue bandana and nothing would happen to them.
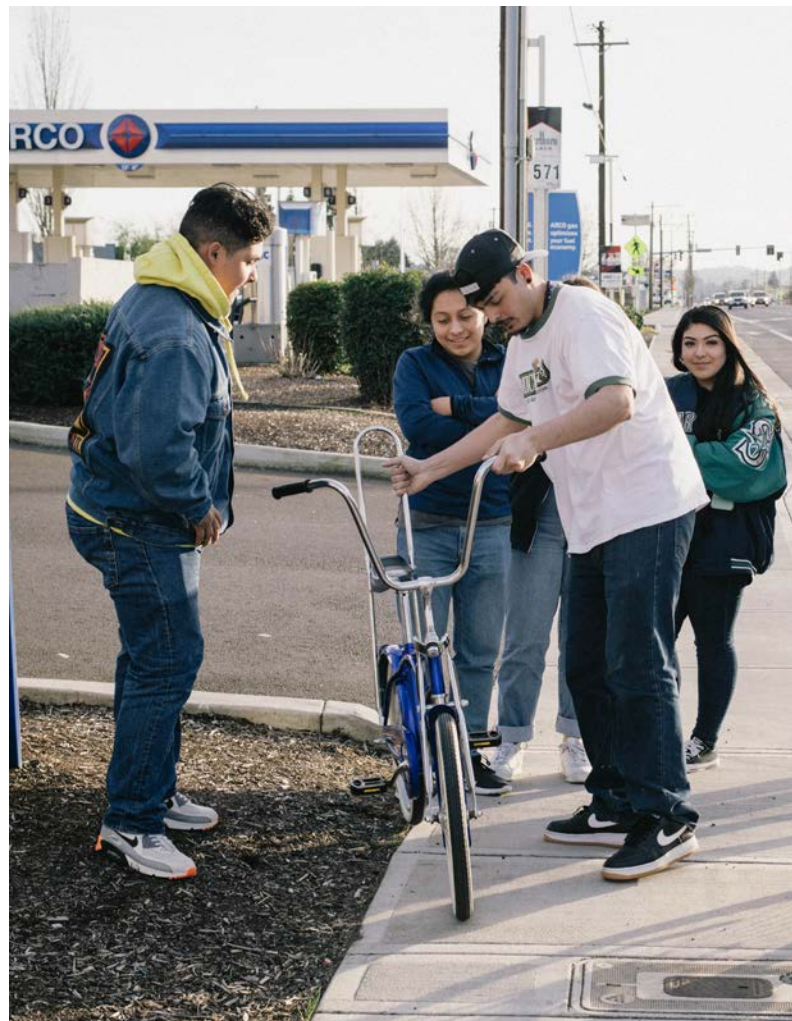
Community Organizing Context

One of the organizations fighting to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline in Salem is Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS), a community-based organization that is led by young people. LUS's membership consists of young people of color directly impacted by the presence of police and the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline in Salem-Keizer Public Schools. In recent years, LUS has been calling on SKPS leadership to end the presence of police in schools as the first step to dismantling the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline. LUS is also organizing against systemic racism and organized white supremacy in their community. LUS organizers have attended and testified at school board hearings, hosted marches and demonstrations, and are actively working with the community and local organizations to dismantle and abolish the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline.

LUS fielded in-depth surveys between December 2020 and January 2021 with 150 young people who attend Salem-Keizer Public Schools. The survey was designed to uncover information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school. Findings show that police and security at school do not make students feel safe; that interactions and sightings of security guards and school police are common, frequent, and often harmful; and that students overwhelmingly favor additional supports and resources over more police and security.
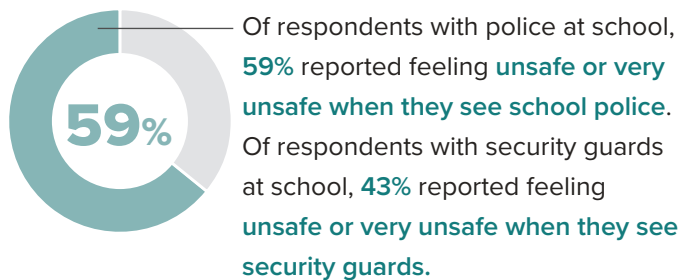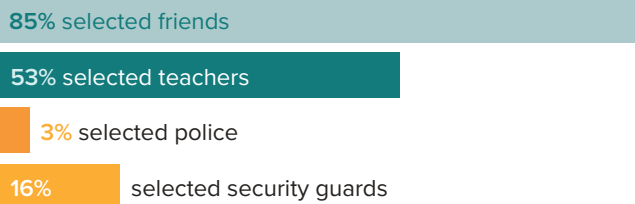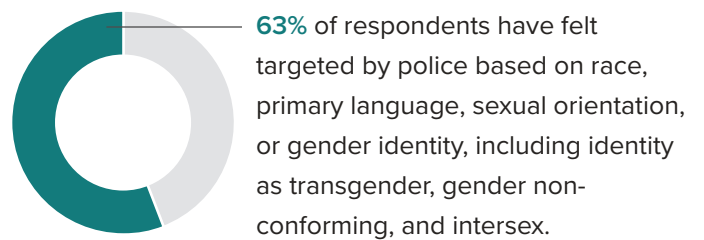
Youth Survey Results

1 Police and security at school do not make students feel safe.

Police and security at school do not make students feel safe, especially compared to other people they interact with at school, like teachers and friends.

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),

85% selected friends

53% selected teachers

3% selected police

16% selected security guards

59% Of respondents with police at school, **59%** reported feeling **unsafe or very unsafe when they see school police**. Of respondents with security guards at school, **43%** reported feeling **unsafe or very unsafe when they see security guards.**

Of those with police at school, more than two thirds (77%) report that the police are armed.

The majority of respondents feel targeted by police based on an aspect of their identity.

63% of respondents have felt targeted by police based on race, primary language, sexual orientation, or gender identity, including identity as transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex.

More than half of respondents **(54%)** have felt targeted based on race and more than a quarter felt targeted based on primary language **(28%)**.

" Because of [my] gender [I feel] that cops are staring at [me] all the time.

" Once this security was harassing me and was mistaking me for another student named Juan. This was extremely racist, he kept insisting that I was that student and was asking me why I was lying when I wasn't.

2 Interactions with and sightings of school police and security guards are common, frequent, and often harmful.

Sightings and interactions with school security guards are common and frequent.

Of those with security guards at school **87%** of respondents had interactions with security guards (other than just seeing them in or around the school) at least once in an average month. **75%** of respondents reported interactions at least a few times per month.
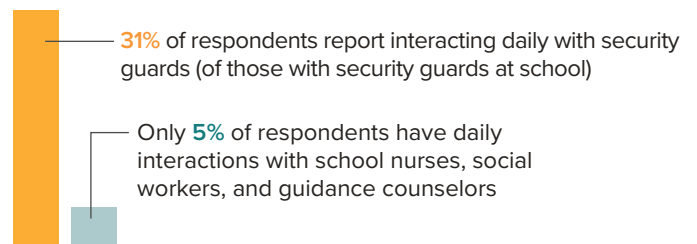
100% of respondents saw security guards in and around their schools at least once in an average month, with the majority of respondents reporting sightings multiple times each day.

(**20%** reported seeing security guards 2–5 times per day; **19%** reported seeing security guards 6–10 times per day, and **38%** reported seeing security guards *more than ten times per day*).

> "The presence of security guards is really heavy in my school. It's obvious that police and security guards are racist and it shows on who they target. In middle school I got in trouble for something that caused me to get in and out of school suspension and instead of offering ways to help they just thought of punishment and I only got less punishment because a teacher advocated for me.

> "This one time the security called me into the office and the searched my backpack without even telling me that they were going to search it because they thought I had weed on me. The security guard physically pulled me and forced me out of the room when I told them I wasn't gonna let them search me. That same security guard ended up getting fired later on. He always made false accusations against POC.

Respondents have more regular interactions with security guards than they do guidance counselors, social workers, and school nurses.

31% of respondents report interacting daily with security guards (of those with security guards at school)

Only **5%** of respondents have daily interactions with school nurses, social workers, and guidance counselors

40% of respondents have no interactions with school nurses, guidance counselors, or social workers in an average month.

Respondents (with police at school) have experienced a pattern of disturbing behavior in which school police:*

Sexually harass young people (9%)

Bully, abuse, and traumatize young people, for example by:
- Verbally harassing or making fun of students **(38%)**
- Physically assaulting students **(18%)**
- Pepper spraying students **(7%)**
- Responding to a mental health crisis **(16%)****

Prevent young people from learning while in schools, for example by
- Taking students out of a classroom **(78%)**

Invade young people's physical autonomy, for example by:
- Physically searching students (other than walking through a metal detector) **(51%)**
- Restraining students **(39%)**

Force young people into the criminal legal system and advance punitive techniques, for example by:
- Arresting students **(40%)**
- Responding when a student misses school **(36%)**
- Issuing juvenile reports **(35%)**
- Issuing tickets to go to court **(31%)**

" A police officer at school once told me that he was gonna lock me and my friends up in juvenile, that he was just waiting for the perfect time to do it.

" Security guards are very creepy. I have heard and seen them flirt with girls many times and it's disgusting!

" They are just creepy. I think one of them got fired for snapchatting girls at school.

Of those with police at school, most respondents (88%) reported having or knowing someone who has had at least one type of negative interaction with school police.

Students see police constantly, including two thirds of respondents who see police at school on at least a daily basis.

Of respondents with police at their school, **99%** of respondents saw police at school at least once a month in an average month. Of these, **67%** saw police at least once daily.

Research shows that over time, the **mere presence** of police may have psychological effects on students' "nervous and immune systems that may result in anxiety, restlessness, lack of motivation, inability to focus, social withdrawal, and aggressive behaviors."[48] Community studies suggest these adverse consequences are compounded when a person perceives that the negative interaction is motivated by race.[49]
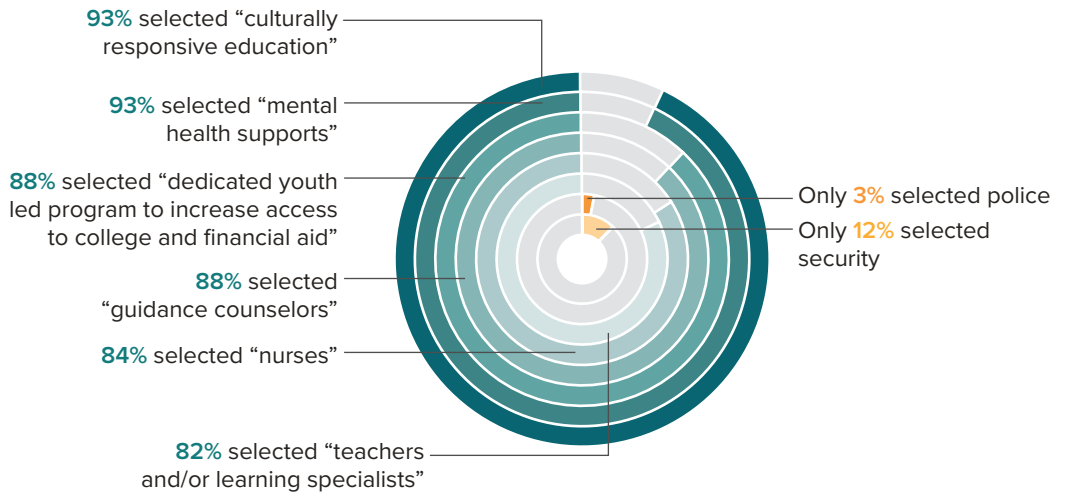
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* Percentages refer to respondents who reported having experienced, or knowing someone who has experienced, negative interactions with school police.

** We believe it is always inappropriate for school police to respond to mental health crises.

4 Overwhelmingly, students value more support and resources over police and security.

When asked what they would like to see more or better quality of at school, students overwhelmingly selected resources, programs, and supports—not police or security.

93% selected "culturally responsive education"

93% selected "mental health supports"

88% selected "dedicated youth led program to increase access to college and financial aid"

88% selected "guidance counselors"

84% selected "nurses"

82% selected "teachers and/or learning specialists"

Only **3%** selected police

Only **12%** selected security

The majority of students think police should be removed from schools.

Of those with police at school, **86%** of respondents agreed **(24%)** or strongly agreed **(62%)** with the statement: "Police should be removed from my school and my school should have more support and resources for students ."

Students would rather increase funding for resources like teachers, nurses, social workers, and mental health supports over police.

When asked to rank investments in order of priority, most students ranked teachers and mental health supports as the highest priorities (33% and 48% ranking these options as #1, respectively).

By contrast, **92%** of respondents ranked police as the lowest priority.

Although the majority of respondents value other school personnel over police, most students think there are more police at school than nurses.

Of those with police at school, **82%** of respondents said they think their school has more police than school nurses.

Recommendations

The young people who are most at risk of harm due to harsh policing policies are uniquely situated to re-imagine school environments. This report highlights the vision for safe, supportive, and inclusive schools developed by youth leaders with Latinos Unidos Siempre.

This is Our Youth Mandate: Fund Education, Not Incarceration

I   Divest from criminalization

A Indefinitely divest from police contracts, including SROs and all other relationships with the police, and reinvest those funds into the education of Black and Indigenous students, students of color, and students with disabilities.

- End zero-tolerance policies
- End the system of expulsions
- Reduce suspension rates
- Remove all dress code requirements that target students based on race and gender
- End criminalization and discipline based on school attendance and lateness

B End Day Time Curfew enforcement and contracts with police departments by ending criminal charges and fines for students who miss school.

II   Invest in Our Education

A Adopt restorative justice models throughout the school environment, including when addressing disciplinary issues within schools.

B Implement a Salem Keizer Student Equity Success Plan that addresses racial and disability disparities in Salem-Keizer Public Schools and expands from the Student Investment Account which would include:

- Implementing a community-led process for reinvestment that allows social justice advocates, students, educators and experts to lead and inform the reinvestment of funds that went to school police.
- Divesting all other funds that support systems and cultures of policing, and reinvesting these funds based on community priorities.
- Reinvesting School Resource Officer and school policing funding into addressing the educational gaps to support:

  – Culturally responsive in-school counseling and mental health services
  – Hiring more staff and educators of color
  – Hiring more nurses
  – Hiring more teachers and learning specialist
  – Ethnic studies programs for middle school and high schools
  – Arts and music education in predominantly Black and Brown schools
  – Culturally responsive after-school activities
  – Culturally responsive services for students with behavioral and physical disabilities
  – Creating programs and partnerships with community organizations led by Black and Indigenous people and people of color
  – Culturally responsive mentoring and tutoring programs for predominately Black and Brown schools
  – Expansion of college prep programs for predominantly Black and Brown schools
  – Better transportation services and choices for students
  – Culturally responsive healthcare services
  – Support for queer students of color
  – Gender neutral restrooms
  – In-school support services geared towards queer and trans students, including counseling and health services

C Implement a student bill of rights

- Constitutional rights would apply to students while inside school grounds, which means that even if police are called, they cannot interrogate a student without a parent or legal guardian present.
- Students will be taught "know your rights"
- The bill will include a system through which students can report hate crimes within school grounds in connection with the human rights commission

D Improve data transparency and reporting. SKPS, SPD, and KPS must improve their public accountability by publishing institutional data regarding interactions with young people, and relevant budget data which is currently unavailable. Each institution should publish a quarterly report that includes:

- Data disaggregated by race, age, gender, disability, school, who referred the young person, the charge for all disciplinary or police interactions, and the sanction imposed, including:
  - Referrals to police or school administrators
  - Suspensions
  - Expulsions
  - In-school arrests
- Tracking of hate crimes based on race, ability, sex, and gender within schools.

E Bargaining with the teachers' union contract using an equity lens.

F Hire, support, and invest in teachers, administrators, district leaders, and staff that reflect the racial and economic background of the students in the district.

Storybook

General Feelings about Police and Security

I felt unsafe because as a person of color I see what happens in the news and having cops in schools makes me feel unsafe. I see how racist they are and it worries me that they get to be in our schools

[Police/security guards] just pick on kids to get them in trouble and they just all seem racist.

[Police/security guards] were classist and racist. I saw that they were always targeting everyone. I'm half Arab and pretty white passing but I still felt scared.

Police don't belong in school. I get nervous when I see them because they've pulled my mom over and have been racist and rude. I don't get why they would be at school.

Security guards did not make me feel safe at all, because I didn't feel that there was a huge need for them...Security guards were often looking for things to punish students for. This made me feel less safe.

I don't feel safe with security or police, I felt intimidated [by] them and they didn't do anything good for students.

I have witnessed a lot of things being in an alternative school. A lot of police didn't understand the experiences of students that came from these schools. [There is] a lot of stigma and misperception.

[I] don't feel like police are there to help at all. I feel like they are there just to intimidate us.

I really don't feel safe around police because of historical racism towards people of color.

I don't feel safe with police and security. There have been stories where people have not been nice to students and I know a lot of who have bad experiences with them.

[I] feel [I'm] in a box because [I have] a disability and always feel targeted.

I always feel uncomfortable with [police/security guards] cause I feel like they harass people of color and I personally feel harassed based on my race.

I felt unsafe because police and security often just harass kids at school. I don't think they serve an actual purpose other than just making kids feel unsafe.

They are arrogant and there's a hierarchy. Cops are also very racist.

Security guards are often bullies to students and also criminalize us.

It's scary for them to have guns.

I feel unsafe when I see police and security because their interactions were unnecessary. They would pull people over in the parking lot and give them tickets. Before being in foster care, I had a lot of bad experiences with police and I have bad connotations with them.

I've just seen my BIPOC community get hurt and not [get] the support they are needing.

Police are often racist—more money for counselors.

I've never had positive interactions with them—they are not safe!

When I see police at my school I feel scared. It's always in the back of my mind that something bad is gonna happen with them there.

I've seen many of my friends and me get targeted by police for years. [My] school says that they want to make us feel safe but it doesn't feel like that until police are out of our schools!

I felt unsafe because they're mean and harass kids of color.

I don't feel safe with police because I've seen and heard about negative interactions with them and students, they felt unsafe, and I feel the same way with security.

The fact that they have weapons on them is intimidating and scary.

Too much money is put into their security systems.

[Police/security guards] always try to intimidate students, even though they are bigger built. They are typically there to escalate situations rather than deescalate the situation.

It looks like [police/security guards] just want to lock us up!

I definitely think more funding should be allocated to students instead of policing them.

I feel traumatized by them and purposely avoid seeing them or interacting with them.

Negative Interactions with Police and Security

Security guards are very creepy. I have heard and seen them flirt with girls many times and it's disgusting!

They are just creepy. I think one of them got fired for snapchatting girls at school.

Because of [my] gender [I feel] that cops are staring at [me] all the time.

I have been harassed by police [and] security from the age of 8. I have been arrested, pepper sprayed, searched, and neglected by the school.

I was in a situation where I was asked if I belonged in a school. I wouldn't have been asked that if I was white.

Once this security [guard] was harassing me and was mistaking me for another student named Juan. This was extremely racist. He kept insisting that I was that student and was asking me why I was lying when I wasn't.

I was in school for not even 30 minutes, I got called out of my credit recovery class and got sent to the behavior specialist and got called a gang banger because of my belt. I got racially profiled for how I dressed. The white girls in my school would wear blue bandana and nothing would happen to them.

A police at school once told me that he was gonna lock me and my friends up in juvenile, that he was just waiting for the perfect time to do it.

I was a sophomore in high school. I was on my way to the restroom and remember seeing a cop interacting with a low-income white student. This is a majority high and middle income white school, but this student was a low income. The student was being handcuffed by the cop and the cop was being very aggressive with him. The cop threw his backpack across the hallway. The cop was holding the student by the neck and led him out the school like this. The cop was over 5.9 feet and the student was much smaller. I didn't feel comfortable being around this situation.

I have been searched, because someone made up a rumor that I had a weapon. I was searched without the staff and cops calling my mom or anything.

This one time the security called me into the office and the searched my backpack without even telling me that they were gonna search it because they thought I had weed on me. The security guard physically pulled me and forced me out of the room when I told them I wasn't gonna let them search me. That same security guard ended up getting fired later on. He always made false accusations against POC.

One time in class, me and a friend were the only students of color. The class smelled like weed and when the class ended, we were asked to stay because we were the prime suspects. We were searched and patted and our lockers as well. Afterwards [we] were [driven] to a holding cell till my mom picked me up. We were not charged with any crime.

I don't feel safe with police at school. I don't think they are necessary. It seems like our district is just wasting resources. Whenever I needed support, SROs were never there to help, only to criminalize students. The only time I saw them was when they were intimidating us. Such as a time when students were walking from the building to an outdoor portable class and police parked inside unmarked black SUVs just to observe the students. Their presence was very intimidating. My school is majority Brown.

I just feel like things would be way better in schools if cops weren't there—it would be a better experience for students of color. We already have to worry about other [stuff] outside of school, we shouldn't have to deal with racist cops in a building where we need to be learning, not being policed.

Police do not belong at school. I know I went to a pretty white school but cops would always be classist and racist. They would "randomly" search cars for vapes and weed without a warrant. All the funding that is used for cops could also be more beneficial to go towards mental health- there is a huge suicide issue at my old high school.

The presence of security guards is really heavy in my school. It's obvious that police and security guards are racist and it shows on who they target. In middle school I got in trouble for something that caused me to get an out of school suspension and instead of offering ways to help they just thought of punishment and I only got less punished because a teacher advocated for me.

Police appear randomly at my school. It is a majority white school. I am the only Black student in my grade. I don't feel safe with police in school because it seems that they like to intimidate me more than they do my peers. I feel like an easy target. When they make eye contact with my friends, they smile. When they make eye contact with me, it seems more scary. My friends mostly feel safe with police but I don't.

While they haven't done anything to me personally I definitely noticed that they target my friends of color more than they target me and that makes me feel unsafe for me and my friends.

I always got harassed by school security because of the stuff I would wear.

Besides SRO's being racist towards Latinos and other POC I personally feel like they create a bad environment in general. Some parents do not feel safe taking their kids to school because cops are there.

When I see police at my school I feel scared. It's always in the back of my mind that something bad is gonna happen with them there.

I see police and security guard harass students of color and I see the district do nothing to stop it.

... A person got pushed in a locker by police and they got made fun of.

I have never had a positive experience with police. Every interaction I had they have been aggressive.

...When I think of police, they always racially profile and they should not be in spaces where POC students are. They are a threat to our safety.

...[I] felt unheard. [I] felt watched, uncomfortable and a cop ignored [me] when [I] asked for help.

They always discriminate [against] students [based] on how they look and dress.

When I got arrested they would racially profile me. They said I shouldn't act like that in the U.S.A. That they wouldn't let this stuff happen in the U.S.A.

Every time I interact with a security guard or police I end up suspended and they're really racist.

Police always treated us like animals.

When I was in high school, I was accused of stealing a phone, having weed on me. There was a constant violation of rights that now I understand was not ok. I also had a parole officer and that has really messed me up because I feel like that made me get into a cycle of just getting in trouble. In high school they also searched my locker and that made me feel paranoid and it was traumatic because I just didn't feel safe at school.

I attended an alternative school/program, which is for students who need to get their GED, or who have gotten expelled out of their school. Police often target students here because of the stigma, especially older students. [My school] is a majority Brown and Black school and students of low income.

My friends and I got searched by SRO's ... We were all minors at the time and no parents were present. They basically violated our rights. I would also always get in trouble by security in middle school for skipping, no resources were offered or anything I just got punished.

One time I was walking near the school field after a football game and this cop just pulled up and accused us of egging their car. It was really scary, they just pulled up behind us and started harassing us. In middle school I also heard a security guard say that he liked ruining kids' days.

Security guards were always policing students all the time, even for the little-est things. They would even police me where I would eat.

Elizabeth Public Schools

New Jersey
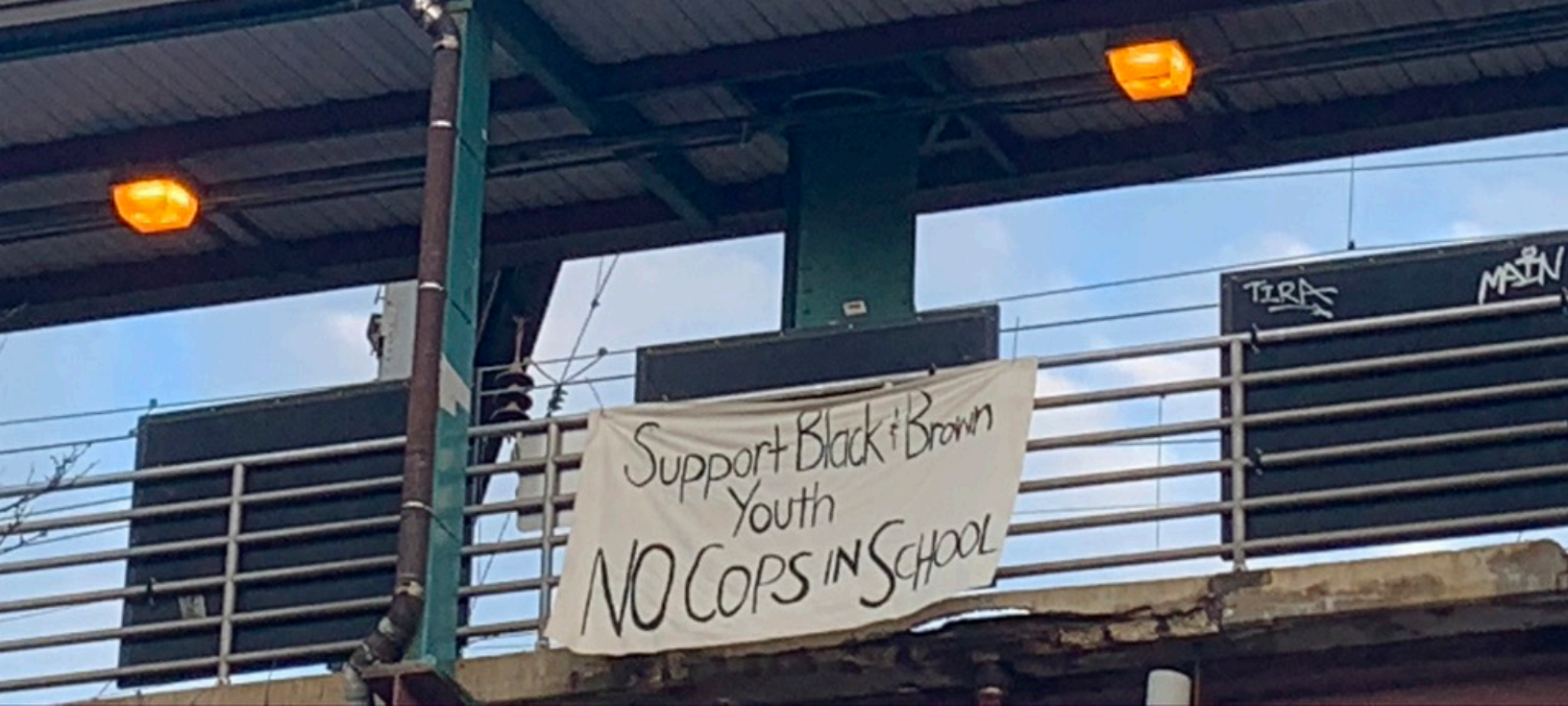
Elizabeth,
New Jersey

Recent survey data has demonstrated that Elizabeth Public Schools (EPS) punishes, marginalizes, and denies Black and Brown young people access to supportive learning environments, and instead subjects them to an abusive policing and security infrastructure in schools. Young people experience a traumatizing environment in which:

- Students are surrounded by police at school. EPS has the largest in-house security force in the State of New Jersey.[1] The estimated ratio of students to security guards is 169:1,[2] compared to a 513:1 student to nurse ratio and a 587:1 student to counselor ratio.[3]

- The district under-invests in critical support needs such as college services, counselors, nurses, and psychologists, while funneling millions of dollars into the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline each year. In 2018—2019, for example, the district spent $8.1 million on security, while spending only $3.7 million on health services and $2 million on "attendance and social work services."[4]

- Black students at Elizabeth public schools are more likely to be referred to law enforcement than white students: the U.S. Department of Education's civil rights data indicates that while Black students made up **18%** of total student enrollment, they were **32%** of the students subjected to referrals to law enforcement.[5]

To uncover information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school, Make the Road New Jersey fielded in-depth surveys with 166 young people at the end of 2020 and early 2021.

Survey findings in Elizabeth reveal that:

Security guards at school do not make students feel safe.

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),

81% selected friends

71% selected teachers

13% selected security police

Overwhelmingly, respondents value more support and resources for students over police.

When asked to rank investments in order of priority, **most students ranked teachers and mental health supports as the highest priorities** (28% and 46% ranking these options as #1, respectively).

By contrast, over two thirds of respondents (67%) **ranked police as the lowest priority.**

Interactions with and sightings of school police are common, frequent, and often harmful.
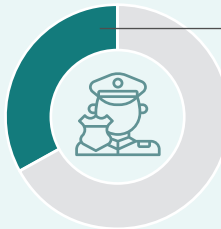
Nearly **a third** of respondents who have police stationed at school report having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, at least one type of interaction with school police—for example being taken out of a classroom, being arrested, or being given a ticket to go to court.

" I feel unsafe because… [the guards] make things worse, they make everything more complicated, they are ready to [use] more violence, they don't want to hear what people have to say.

Background

District Demographics

As of 2018–2019, the Elizabeth Public Schools served 28,195 students in 36 schools.[6] The student body is **73%** Latinx, **17%** Black, and **8%** white.[7] A fifth of students are English language learners **(20%)** and **76%** are low-income.[8] **12%** of students have disabilities.[9]

> **"** Freshman year… [I made] a lot of stupid mistakes, the more I think back on those times the more I realized if I had someone to talk to… I would have done better with grades and mental [health issues]… you throw a kid out it makes them angrier… They didn't make me feel safe…

Policing in Elizabeth

The issue of policing in schools exists within the broader context of police abuse in the community. The Elizabeth Police Department has been shrouded in scandal, with numerous investigations throughout the 1990's into a group of officers known as "the Family."[10] This secretive group of officers was accused of planting evidence on civilians, using racist language, and intimidating other officers.[11] The department has a history of excessive force and brutality, which has been met with a failure to investigate complaints.[12] For example, between 2016 and 2018, 21 people filed formal complaints of excessive force, 16 reported wrongful arrests, and an additional 10 accused police of various other crimes.[13] Of cases referred to internal investigators, not a single claim of serious police wrongdoing was substantiated by the police department.[14] In 2019, a police director resigned after officers reported to investigators that the director routinely used slurs to describe Black people and women.[15]

Elizabeth has a history of uprisings against anti-Black police brutality. In August 1964, after decades of police brutality and several incidents taking place over the summer, uprisings took root in a number of northeastern cities, including Elizabeth.[16] Over a three-day period, hundreds of Black residents took to the streets in protest of anti-Black police violence.[17] Nearly 60 years later in June 2020, hundreds again took to the streets in protest of systemic police brutality following the murder of George Floyd.[18]

For Black and Brown young people, there is no escape from police abuse, whether in their communities or at their schools. Youth see no difference between the police who harass, oppress, and surveil them in the streets from those doing so at school.

Policing and Security at EPS

Police and Security Presence at EPS

The use of police (known as School Resource Officers) in EPS dates back to at least 1998, when at least one municipal police department officer was assigned to schools on a regular basis.[19] Historically, there is a woeful lack of publicly available data on the use of school police in the district. Public data does not make clear whether school police are employed directly by the district, by the city police department, or some combination, nor does it offer up-to-date information on the number of school police currently used in EPS. The state of New Jersey also fails to require schools to report the scope of policing, security forces, use of metal detectors, or interactions with police.

A comment from the district Superintendent made during a 2019 board meeting indicated that EPS employed "167 security guards district wide," and additional "police officers in targeted locations."[20] Several years earlier, a school board member stated that the EPS had the "largest in-house security force in the State of New Jersey."[21] Based on the number of security guards, a local news outlet estimated the ratio of students to security guards to be 169:1.[22] Other current staff to student ratios include: 513:1 student to nurse ratio and a 587:1 student to counselor ratio.[23] These vastly different staffing ratios indicate how funding and resources for the criminalization and control of young people are prioritized over basic and critical resources like nurses and counselors.

Beyond security and law enforcement personnel, EPS relies on technology, surveillance equipment, and a web of law enforcement relationships as part of a punitive and criminalizing approach to "school safety." A description provided by the superintendent noted that the district employs "extensive security monitoring, metal detectors, and camera surveillance systems."[24] In 2019, the School Board President indicated the district has consulted with former law enforcement officers from juvenile investigations, SWAT, crisis negotiations, investigation, and accident investigations divisions.[25]

> " I believe security guards in my school do not contribute to students' safety and education...[they] interrupt my class to take people's hoodies and harass students...

The Criminalization of Black and Brown Young People in EPS*

EPS fails to accurately report on interactions that young people have with police, and has refused open records requests that could have provided more clarity. From the data available, the New Jersey Department of Education reported that across the state "during the 2017–2018 school year, school personnel reported incidents to the police on 7,449 occasions, [...] in addition, 1,385 student arrests occurred at school."[26] Experiencing an arrest for the first time in high school nearly doubles the odds of the student dropping out, and a court appearance nearly quadruples the odds of the student dropping out.[27] For immigrants and undocumented young people, school push-out can result in detention and deportation.[28]

The U.S. Department of Education's civil rights data indicates that Black students at Elizabeth Public Schools are more likely to be referred to law enforcement than white students. While Black students made up **18%** of total student enrollment, they were **32%** of the students subjected to referrals to law enforcement.[29]

Money Spent on Policing and Security in EPS

In 2018, the district spent $8.1 million on "security" (a broad category that was not disaggregated in the budget document).[30] In contrast, it spent $3.7 million on health services, $2 million on "attendance workers and social work services," and $1.2 million on "educational media services/school library."[31]

Elizabeth School District Budget Fiscal Year Ended June 30 2018, Actual Expenses[32]

	Total
Security	$8.1 million
Educational Media Services/ School Library	$1.2 million
Attendance and Social Work Services	$2 million
Health Services	$3.7 million

Again, EPS fails to provide data—and has refused information requests—on the costs of the police state in and around the schools. In addition to the personnel costs, there are many non-personnel capital costs associated with buying and maintaining surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and the web of "extensive security monitoring" as the district describes.[33]

Every level of government appears to contribute large sums of money to uphold the policing of mostly Black and Brown young people in Elizabeth's schools. Federally, support for these non-personnel surveillance expenditures may come in part from federal grants. In 2019, Elizabeth received a federal COPS School Violence Prevention program grant in the amount of $494,750.[34] Allowable program costs included coordination with law enforcement, motion detectors, x-rays, social media monitoring, violence prediction software, metal detectors, locks, lighting, technology, and training for law enforcement.[35] Also included in the COPS awards are consultant and civilian personnel costs and benefits, as well as sub-awards which can be made to other agencies.[36]

At the state level, school aid data shows that beginning in 2008–2009, New Jersey has been giving districts aid earmarked for school security, initially with a statewide allocation of nearly $224 million. Since then, the state has allocated $200 million or more each year (with the exception of 2010–2011 due to recessionary cuts).[37] Elizabeth is projected to receive **$12.2 million in school security aid in 2020–2021 alone**.[38]

* This analysis draws on federal OCR data and state DOE data. There are discrepancies between these data sources. For example, the New Jersey DOE reported 120 incidents of law enforcement referrals in 2017-2018, but federal data reported the number of students referred to law enforcement, (34 students over the same time period, and also possibly undercounting the total number of referrals if the same students are referred multiple times). While there are limitations to both, they do provide a picture of student contact with law enforcement.

Community Organizing Context

Make the Road New Jersey's Youth Power Project (YPP) has launched a campaign to remove all law enforcement personnel from the New Jersey public schools and to redistribute funds to restorative justice and student services. This campaign is led by members of YPP—young people of color whose lives have been impacted by the carceral state, either through direct involvement with the juvenile criminal legal system, school discipline or arrest, or a parent's incarceration or deportation. MRNJ's YPP has convened a table of partners (state-wide and local teacher groups, advocacy groups, and youth groups) to take action that involves 1) providing testimony at local school board and/or state budget meetings, 2) hosting Facebook and Instagram livestreams to educate peers, and creating TikTok series, and 3) direct action and mobilization through COVID-safe marches and rallies. In August 2020, as part of a national Day of Resistance calling for the safe, healthy and equitable reopening of schools, MRNJ organized an action at City Hall to protest the presence of police and security guards in schools.[39]

MRNJ fielded in-depth surveys with 166 young people between November 2020 and January 2021. The survey was designed to uncover information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at their schools. Findings show that police and security do not make students feel safe; that interactions and sightings of school police and security guards are common, frequent, and often harmful; that students go through metal detectors regularly, and many have negative experiences with them; and that students would overwhelmingly favor additional supports and resources over police and security.

Youth Survey Results

1 Police and security at school do not make students feel safe.

Police and security at school do not make students feel safe, especially compared to other people they interact with at school, like teachers and friends.*

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),

81% selected friends

71% selected teachers

13% selected security police

Of respondents with police at school, nearly a third reported that police are armed with guns (30%).

> " There's something that I think is so deeply wrong about the fact that a person on campus gets to just walk around with a gun on them. From the past year you can obviously see that cops have a power dynamic issue and I don't feel comfortable with cops on campus having a gun and being able to use it.

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* In Elizabeth public schools there are both security guards and police. Security guards are district employees, while police are employed by the police department. Responses are based on students' perception; it may be difficult at times to distinguish between the two.

** There were 60 respondents with police stationed at schools, or 36% of all respondents.

> **"** I normally don't like walking out in the hallway alone. . . I feel the security guards watching the girls and they call us these little pet names.

> **"** I was called down to be searched because of my skin tone—I did not give consent. My parents were not contacted and I was searched for drugs along with other kids.

> **"** I have been sexualized—they tried to calm me down by calling me pretty. I don't trust cops.

2 Interactions with and sightings of school police and security guards are common, frequent, and often harmful.

Of respondents with police at school, nearly a third (32%) report having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, at least one type of negative interaction with school police.

Respondents (with police at school) have experienced a pattern of disturbing behavior in which school police:*

Prevent young people from learning while at school, for example by taking students out of a classroom **(20%)**

Invade young people's physical autonomy, for example by:
- Physically searching students (other than walking through a metal detector) **(13%)**
- Restraining students **(7%)**

Force young people into the criminal legal system and advance punitive techniques, for example by:
- Arresting students **(8%)**
- Responding when a student misses school **(3%)**
- Issuing juvenile reports **(7%)**
- Issuing tickets to go to court **(8%)**

These types of interactions can have devastating impacts for young people. One study found that experiencing an arrest for the first time in high school nearly doubles the odds of a student dropping out, and a court appearance nearly quadruples the odds of a student dropping out.[40] A series of recent studies reveal that biased treatment causes youth of color to lose more trust for school officials compared with their white peers, which was further correlated with reduced college attendance.[41]

* Percentages refer to respondents who reported having experienced, or having known someone who has experienced, negative interactions with school police.

Students see police at schools regularly, including nearly a third who see police at their school on a daily basis.
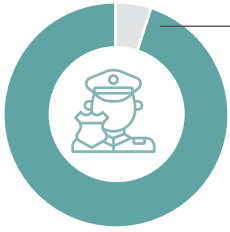
Of respondents with police at their schools, **95%** saw police at school at least once a month in an average month. Of these, **32%** saw police at least daily.

> 66 One of [the] security guards in my school is very biased… Like certain students can be out in the hallway talking to others but some students, security will spot and immediately go up and tell them to go to class.

Sightings and interactions with school security guards are also common and frequent.

Of those with security guards at school, **74%** of respondents had interactions with security guards (other than just seeing them in or around the school) at least once in an average month. Nearly a quarter of respondents **(23%)** had daily interactions. Black respondents reported daily interactions at an even higher rate **(30%)**.
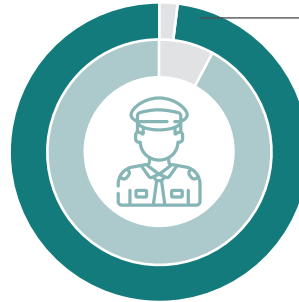
Nearly all respondents **(99%)** saw security guards at school at least once a month in an average month, with the vast majority of respondents reporting at least daily sightings **(93%)**.

33% reported seeing security guards 6-10 times a day, and **13%** reported seeing security guards more than ten times a day.

Research shows that over time, the **mere presence** of police may have psychological effects on students' "nervous and immune systems that may result in anxiety, restlessness, lack of motivation, inability to focus, social withdrawal, and aggressive behaviors."[42] Community studies suggest these adverse consequences are compounded when a person perceives that the negative interaction is motivated by race.[43]
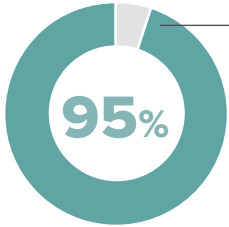
3 Students go through metal detectors regularly, and many have negative experiences with them.

The overwhelming majority of respondents go through metal detectors, and most go through metal detectors at least once a day.

95%

Of respondents who go through metal detectors, **95%** of respondents reported going through metal detectors at least once a day.

Nearly all respondents reported that students are required to go through metal detectors, but that teachers and other staff are less likely to face the same requirement.

Of those who are required to go through metal detectors,

97% reported that students are required to go through metal detectors

96%

36% reported that teachers have to go through metal detectors

36%

24% reported that police, and **26%** reported that security guards, have to go through metal detectors.

24%	26%

66 It holds up students from getting to class on time. You could arrive at 7:40AM with enough time to make it to class if not for the extensive line at the metal detectors. When we're late to school, we get detention.

Going through metal detectors is experienced as an invasive process for respondents.

For example, of those who go through metal detectors,

68% of respondents reported that their bags have been physically searched;

50% have been scanned with a wand;

25% have been made to take off their shoes, belt, jewelry, or other articles of clothing;

38% have had their belongings taken; and

22% have been yelled at.

66 It makes me feel like they want me to feel dangerous like I'm going to do something.
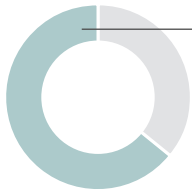
66 They don't check the teachers. They beep and they let them go. If we beep they check our bags and stop us and it's embarrassing.

66 It's sooo backed up, especially now with COVID it's a hazard.

4 Overwhelmingly, students value more support and resources over police and security.

The majority of students think police should be removed from schools.

Of those with police at school, **63%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Police should be removed from my school and my school should have more support and resources for students (for example up to date books, more teachers, academic services, counseling, health, restorative practices, etc.)"

Students would rather increase funding for resources like teachers, nurses, social workers, and mental health supports over police.

When asked to rank investments in order of priority, **most students ranked teachers and mental health supports as the highest priorities** (28% and 46% ranking these options as #1, respectively).

By contrast, over two thirds of respondents (67%) **ranked police as the lowest priority**.

Although the majority of respondents value other school personnel over police, most students think there are more police in their school than nurses and guidance counselors.
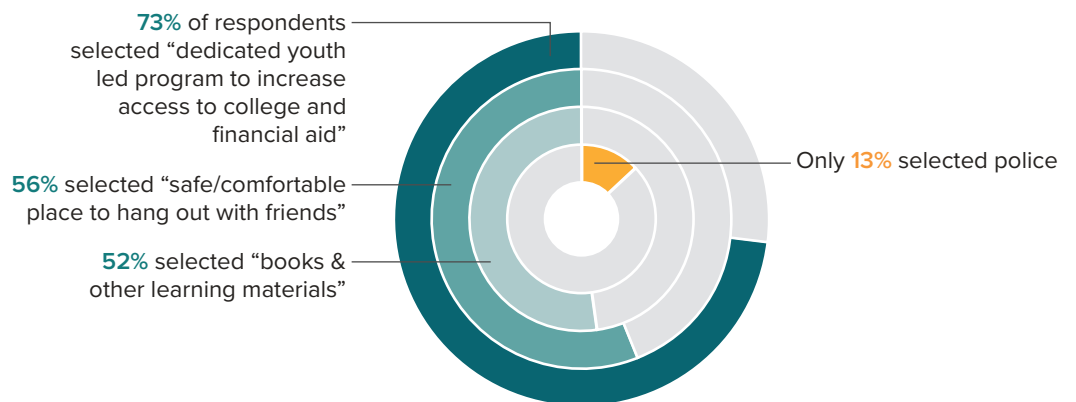
Of those with police at school, **nearly half of respondents (47%)** said they think their school has **more police than guidance counselors.**

Nearly three fourths **(73%)** of respondents said they think their school has **more police than school nurses.**

Studies show that investments in counselors,[44] mental health resources,[45] and restorative justice[46] contribute to school safety, yet there is no substantial evidentiary support for the proposition that police presence in schools and suspensions create safe learning environments.[47]

When asked what they would like to see more or better quality of at school, students overwhelmingly selected resources, programs, and supports—not police or security.

73% of respondents selected "dedicated youth led program to increase access to college and financial aid"

56% selected "safe/comfortable place to hang out with friends"

52% selected "books & other learning materials"

Only **13%** selected police

"Police-free schools isn't about just removing security guards or cops out of the building; it's about redirecting police funding into academic and mental health resources for students. Police in school is also seen by the use of metal detectors, school fencing, and other so- called "security measures." These things cost a lot of money and personally I think they are not as effective as they are meant to be. I live in Elizabeth, NJ, a predominantly Black and Brown city, and I had many instances where these policing methods affected my day-to-day school life. I get late to class because of the long lines to check our backpacks… I want to study during lunch on the hallway tables but security guards get upset at me and kick me out, I want to get something from my locker and I'm screamed at for no reason. They are everywhere just to pinpoint small little things you do to get you in trouble… What's most interesting about this is that I have asked my friends from other schools in NJ [that] are predominantly white, and they tell me they have never been in situations like mine, that they didn't even have metal detectors in their schools! So this tells me that this isn't about security but about fear and seeing Black and Brown students as a threat…. I want to see my school and others schools in my city reconsidering their security measures more closely and invest in another type of security for their students which is about their health and success, what actually matters; when we get hurt, we need more nurses, when we get hurt emotionally or have problems at home/friends, we need psychologists, when we want to improve our chances to get into a good college, we need counselors.

Recommendations

The young people who are most at risk of harm due to harsh policing policies are uniquely situated to re-imagine school environments. This report highlights the vision for safe, supportive, and inclusive schools developed by youth leaders with MRNJ.

This is Our Youth Mandate: Fund Education, Not Incarceration

I   Divest from criminalization

A   Immediately remove all police from in and around schools.

B   Terminate all contracts with the local police and sheriff's departments that police in and around Elizabeth public schools.

C   Remove school security guards from schools.

D   End surveillance of young people including by removing metal detectors, surveillance cameras, banning facial recognition software, prohibiting social media tracking, and ending all other forms of invasive surveillance.

E   Stop soliciting federal and state funds used to police, surveille, and criminalize young people. Seek waivers to redirect funds from the federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office, Department of Homeland Security or similar federal or state programs to be used on support services instead of policing and criminalizing infrastructure in schools.

F   Direct all school personnel in the district to not call the Police Department into schools unless there is an extreme emergency that threatens the life or safety of other students.

G   Collect and publish accurate data regarding all forms of discipline and policing. Elizabeth Public Schools must accurately collect information about discipline and police interactions, disaggregated by race, age, gender, disability, school, charge, sanction imposed, and type of interaction.

H   End all arrests or citations in schools.

I   Expunge students' discipline records.

II   Invest in our education

A   Ensure all students have access to College Access and Career Readiness supports, including Student Success Centers, Advanced Placement and Honors classes, college trips and scholarships. Support a pipeline to college and career, including by providing free access to college and universities, paid internships, and eliminate barriers to entering higher education.

B   Fully fund and increase culturally competent school support staff, including teachers, mental health programming, guidance counselors, nurses, social workers, restorative justice coordinators, and academic and social support staff.

C   Fully fund and implement restorative practices at all schools.

D   Create a culturally relevant curriculum.

E   Fully and equitably fund public schools, including programs for students with disabilities and schools in low-income communities.

F   Invest in schools to make them welcoming places including by having more clubs and field trips; improve school lunches, and make urgent structural improvements, including installing air conditioners.

III   Restore and strengthen the civil rights of young people in education

A   Provide maximum local democratic control of the education system. Support youth suffrage, especially on elections impacting their education.

B   Ensure that Black and Brown young people have meaningful input into the process to select educational leaders who have a proven track record of working to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline.

C   Ensure that all school policies are inclusive, non-punitive, and trauma-informed, including ones related to school discipline, immigrant students, LGBTQIA+ students, and students with disabilities, among others.

Storybook

General Feelings about Police and Security

Police and security guards represent a criminal state... [Police/security guards] are abusive and talk mean to students.

When I interact with [security guards/police], I start to think, what did I do wrong? Or, what's about to happen?

I felt unsafe because [security guards/police] were able to target anyone because they have the authority to. I've seen people get hurt while they abused their power. I felt unsafe as I knew anything could happen.

I feel unsafe because [security guards/police] make things worse... They are ready to [use] more violence, they don't want to hear what people have to say.

I don't feel safe with cops with guns being in or in front of my school.

Freshman year... [I made] a lot of stupid mistakes, the more I think back on those times the more I realized if I had someone to talk to... I would have done better with grades and mental [health issues]... you throw a kid out it makes them angrier... They didn't make me feel safe...

[Security guards/police] should ... not patrol whether a student is in uniform. Sometimes they yell at students for sitting in the hallway too long, they yell at students for using a cellphone.

[Security guards and police] don't make us safer... [S]ome of them are very racist. [T]hey always pick favorites... if they keep doing this less and less kids will come to school.

[Security guards/police] would follow us and make us feel miserable, we couldn't do anything without being suspected of doing something wrong.

I know my peers have that fear of being targeted—I know that's a legit fear in nearly every school. If there is a situation, [security guards/police] would target a Black/Brown student before a white student.

I believe security guards in my school do not contribute to students' safety and education... They interrupt ... class to take people's hoodies and harass students...

I... take issue with allocating too many resources in security personnel and not enough towards mental health support, guidance counselors, and social workers.

Negative Interactions with Police and Security

Security guards are always known to cause problems and harass students over their uniform, disrupting class time to do it, too.

There have been situations where a security has called me out over nothing and have made me feel unconformable...

One of [the] security guards in my school is very biased... Like certain students can be out in the hallway talking to others but some students, security will spot and immediately go up and tell them to go to class.

Any interaction with security was always negative.

[The security guards/police] didn't care, they would fight with students, one was a pedophile.

[The] things they do, like patting [students] down—I don't think that should be happening.

Sometimes they would look at me funny and I think they are suspicious of me so I'm scared.

My friend of color got handcuffed, patted down, and taken out of school... The SROs have favorite students.

I normally don't like walking out in the hallway alone... I feel the security guards watching the girls and they call us these little pet names.

I was called down to be searched because of my skin tone—I did not give consent. My parents were not contacted and I was searched for drugs along with other kids.

Security was really disrespectful and a lot of interactions felt like a power trip—like the power to bully.

Sometimes when they take away stuff they don't tell you to come back and get it so students sometimes forget things that are important.

The security guards always have a nasty attitude towards the students and would even yell at us. The security guards have favoritism with the students they interact with.

It's time to prepare students for the real world—monitoring students 24/7 is not the best way. We need to teach peers how to interact with each other—not that privilege determines how far you get in school or how obedient you are will determine how far you get. That's not cool.

This one time it smelled like weed… They let my white friend and the girl go by but they went through all the Black guy's stuff. They all got suspended but my Black friend had more time and they were trying to charge him. White friend went to rehab.

My friend [was] taken out of class with excessive force.

Every day the security guards would walk into class to check if everyone was following the dress code, which would disrupt class time.

I was yelled at because I did not have a hallway pass when I actually did.

They take away sharpeners sometimes which is annoying so sometimes we don't have pencils to write with—so we have to ask other people.

Experiences with Metal Detectors

They don't check the teachers. They beep and they let them go. If we beep they check our bags and stop us and it's embarrassing.

Oftentimes I would be late to class even if I got there on time because I would have to explain a half-opened water bottle in my backpack and the lines were sooo long.

Only students have to go through them [as] opposed to everyone else. I think it presents a bias that students are the danger entering the school and staff is clear since they work there.

They've taken things out of my bag to search it and there have been many instances where staff/teachers would avoid the detectors completely.

[The metal detector process] is so long and when you're late to class, you get in trouble for it even if it was the metal detectors holding you up. So you still get a tardy.

[The metal detector process] is systemic racism.

Security guards take what they think is bad. I brought a playing game into school that my English teacher gave me to use and we were allowed to use them in class but security snatched it because they deemed it wasn't for school and I had to get my teacher to take it back from security.

Every safety measure felt artificial.

It is very annoying because [security guards and police] have bias towards students and focus on those students.

[Metal detectors are] not needed—it takes a lot and they can take things out of our bags without us being able to say anything back.

The [metal detector] process would make it hard to get to class on time and it would make students late since it would create huge crowds of students waiting. I would try to get to school on time, but I'd end up late to class. Instead of wasting their money on that, I think they could spend on more resources like books (etc.) for students because it's more necessary for their futures.

Only students have to go through the metal detectors every day in the morning, and it is mandatory. Students also have to give up belongings so the guards can search it, and they are wanded as well.

It makes me feel like they want me to feel dangerous like I'm going to do something. When I hear other people's experiences in other schools, it makes me… jealous.

We would have to line up outside of school to go through the metal detector and it would cause us to be late to class.

[The metal detectors] would take away from class time because everyone was waiting at the metal detector.

I feel like I'm being accused of doing something wrong right when I walk into school. There is a sense of fear attached to multiple security guards and metal detectors present.

Methodology and Survey Sample

National

Survey findings were the result of a 55-question survey conducted by staff and youth leaders from Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS), Make the Road New Jersey (MRNJ), Make the Road Nevada (MRNV), and Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) from November 2020 to January 2021. The survey sample included 630 young people living in Salem and Keizer, Oregon; Elizabeth, New Jersey; Clark County, Nevada; and New York City. To take the survey, respondents had to be 21 years old or younger and have attended public school within the last year and a half. Incomplete responses were removed from the sample, except responses that were complete except for the demographic questions (16 respondents).

Respondents were asked to answer questions based on their experiences prior to COVID-19 school closures.

Student Demographics

Respondents identified as: Latinx (63%), Black (21%), white (12%), Asian or Pacific Islander (9%), Native American (1%), and other (5%). (Note: respondents were able to "check all that apply.")

Respondents' most commonly spoken languages were English and Spanish. For the majority of students, Spanish was the primary language spoken at home (47% of respondents), followed by English (44%).

Respondents identified as female (63%), male (34%), non-binary/gender non-confirming (3%) and transgender (0.7%).

Respondents were in 6—12th grade or currently not in school (but had attended school within the last year and a half). The majority of respondents were in 10th, 11th, or 12th grade (13%, 26%, and 33% of respondents, respectively). 17% of respondents were not currently in school.

School Demographics

36% of respondents characterized their schools as having an "equal mix of students of color and white students," 31% as having "majority Black and Brown students," 14% as having "majority Brown students," 12% as having "majority white students," 3% as having "majority Black students," and 5% as "other." 49% characterized their schools as having an "approximately equal mix of students from households with low, middle, and high incomes." 41% of respondents characterized their schools as having a "majority of students from homes with low incomes," and 10% as having a "majority of students from households with middle and high incomes."

This data reflects respondents' assessment of their schools. The report authors did not validate this with demographic data provided by schools or the district.

Clark County School District

Survey findings were the result of a 55-question survey conducted by MRNV staff from November 2020 to January 2021. The survey sample included 138 young people living in Henderson and Las Vegas, Nevada. To take the survey, respondents had to be 21 years old or younger and have attended public school within the last year and a half. Incomplete responses were removed from the sample, except responses that were complete except for the demographic questions (12 respondents).

Respondents were asked to answer questions based on their experiences prior to COVID-19 school closures.

Student Demographics

Respondents identified as: Latinx (40%), white (26%), Asian or Pacific Islander (26%), Black (22%), Native American (2%), and other (2%). (Note: respondents were able to "check all that apply.")

Respondents' most commonly spoken languages were English and Spanish. For the majority of respondents English was their primary language spoken at home (63%), followed by Spanish (27%).

Respondents identified as female (71%), male (28%), non-binary/gender non-confirming (3%), and transgender (2%).

Respondents were in 6—12th grade or currently not in school (but had attended school within the last year and a half). The majority of respondents were in 11th or 12th grade (37% and 39% of respondents, respectively).

School Demographics

43% characterized their schools as having an "equal mix of students of color and white students," 25% of respondents characterized their schools as having "majority Black and Brown students," 14% as having "majority Brown students," 13% as having "majority white students," less than 1 percent as having "majority Black students," and 4% as "other." 54% of respondents characterized their schools as having an "approximately equal mix of students from households with low, middle, and high incomes" and 47% of respondents characterized their schools as having a "majority of students from homes with low incomes."

This data reflects respondents' assessment of their schools. The report authors did not validate this with demographic data provided by schools or the district.

New York City Public Schools

Survey findings were the result of a 55-question survey conducted by UYC staff and youth leaders from November 2020 to January 2021. The survey sample included 174 young people living in New York City. To take the survey, respondents had to be 21 years old or younger and have attended public school within the last year and a half. Incomplete responses were removed from the sample, except responses that were complete except for the demographic questions (one respondent).

Respondents were asked to answer questions based on their experiences prior to COVID-19 school closures.

Note: In New York City, all security personnel are hired and trained by the police department, so if in NYC, respondents were prompted by the survey to indicate "no" to whether they had security. A total of 148 respondents answered questions about police. 40 respondents answered that they had security at school despite the prompt—the responses about questions to security were omitted for the purpose of this analysis.

Student Demographics

Respondents identified as: Latinx (57%), Black (35%), Asian or Pacific Islander (6%), white (3%), Native American (0.6%), and other (6%). (Note: respondents were able to "check all that apply.")

Respondents' most commonly spoken languages were English and Spanish. For the majority of students, Spanish was their primary language spoken at home (45% of respondents), followed by English (42%).

Respondents identified as female (58%), male (38%), non-binary/gender non-confirming (6%) and transgender (0.6%).

Respondents were in 7—12th grade or currently not in school (but had attended school within the last year and a half). The majority of respondents were in 10th, 11th, or 12th grade (16%, 20%, and 29% of respondents, respectively). 23% of respondents were not currently in school.

School Demographics

37% of respondents characterized their schools as having "majority Black and Brown students," 31% as having an "equal mix of students of color and white students," 10% as having "majority Black students," 8% as having "majority white students," and 5% as having "majority Brown students." 8% of respondents selected "other," which included schools with majority Asian students. 53% characterized their schools as having an "approximately equal mix of students from households with low, middle, and high incomes." 37% of respondents characterized their schools as having a "majority of students from homes with low incomes," and 10% as having a "majority of students from households with middle and high incomes."

This data reflects respondents' assessment of their schools. The report authors did not validate this with demographic data provided by schools or the district.

Explanation of Background Data

The first school year for which complete, detailed data on police activity in schools is publicly available is 2016–17. As this report is concerned with the impact on youth, it excludes from the analysis anyone over 21.

There are particularities in how city agencies report demographic data. The NYC Department of Education reports demographic data for the following racial/ethnic groups: Asian, Black, Hispanic, Multiple Race Categories Not Represented,

and White.[1] The NYPD notes the following racial/ethnic designations for all quarters prior to the fourth quarter of 2020: American Indian, Arabic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Black Hispanic, East Indian, Unknown, White, and White Hispanic.[2]

Reconciling these two systems required some compromise. In order to conform as much as possible to understanding the "Asian" category under the DOE's system, we note AAPI students as belonging to the NYPD categories of Arabic, Asian/ Pacific Islander, and East Indian. We found the Hispanic designation under the DOE to be inconsistent with how young people viewed themselves and thus we use the term Latinx to refer to a category of youth identified as "Hispanic," "White Hispanic" or "Black Hispanic."

With increased attention on the impact of anti-Blackness in policing and understanding the complexity of identity and impact of colorism on punitive discipline generally, Black Hispanic was kept as a separate category in our analysis. We state when a statistic looks at youth seen as Black or "Black Hispanic" by the NYPD. For consistency the descriptors of Black and Latinx are the only terms used in comparisons between youth representation in the general student body and NYPD interactions. Due to a shift in terminology in the fourth quarter of 2020, this delineation is not possible when examining school policing during the pandemic.

Terms: Policing in NYC Schools[3]

Child in Crisis: A student who is displaying signs of emotional distress who must be removed to the hospital for psychological evaluation.

Juvenile Report: Generally, a report taken for a subject under 16 who allegedly committed an act that would constitute an offense if committed by an adult. The report is prepared in lieu of an arrest or summons and the student is normally detained for the time it takes to gather the facts and complete the report.

Mitigation: The subject committed what would amount to an offense but was released to the school for discipline/mitigation rather than being processed as an arrest or summonsed.

Summons: A criminal summons generally is a legal document which requires the person named to appear in court and answer to an alleged charge.

Salem-Keizer Public Schools

Survey findings were based on a 55-question survey conducted by LUS staff and youth leaders from November 2020 to January 2021. The survey sample included 152 young people living in Salem and Keizer. To take the survey, respondents had to be 21 years old or younger and have attended a SKPS public school within the last year and a half. Incomplete responses were removed from the sample, except responses that were complete except for the demographic questions (two responses).

Respondents were asked to answer questions based on their experiences prior to COVID-19 school closures.

Student Demographics

Respondents identified as: Latinx (77%); white (13%); Black (5%); Native American (3%); Asian or Pacific Islander (3%) and other (7%). (Note: respondents were able to "check all that apply.")

Respondents' most commonly spoken languages were English and Spanish. For the majority of students, Spanish was their primary language spoken at home (61% of respondents), followed by English (37%).

Respondents identified as female (59%), male (37%) and non-binary/gender non-confirming (3%).

Respondents were in 6—12th grade or currently not in school (but had attended school within the last year and a half). The majority of respondents were in 10th, 11th, or 12th grade (17%, 15%, and 29% of respondents, respectively). 18% of respondents were not currently in school.

School Demographics

22% of respondents characterized their schools as having "majority Black and Brown students," 21% as having "majority Brown students," 34% as having an "equal mix of students of color and white students," 23% as having "majority white students." 52% of respondents characterized their schools as having a "majority of students from homes with low incomes" and 35% as having an "approximately equal mix of students from households with low, middle, and high incomes."

This data reflects respondents' assessment of their schools. The report authors did not validate this with demographic data provided by schools or the district.

Elizabeth Public Schools

Survey findings were the result of a 55-question survey conducted by MRNJ staff from November 2020 to December 2020. The survey sample included 166 young people living in Elizabeth, New Jersey. To take the survey, respondents had to be 21 years old or younger and have attended public school within the last year and a half. Incomplete responses were removed from the sample, except responses that were complete except for the demographic questions (one respondent). Two respondents answered questions about police at school, although they indicated that there were no police at their schools. To be conservative, the content about police in schools was omitted from those two responses.

Respondents were asked to answer questions based on their experiences prior to COVID-19 school closures.

Student Demographics

Respondents identified as: Latinx (73%), Black (20%), white (11%), Asian or Pacific Islander (6%), and other (5%). (Note: respondents were able to "check all that apply.")

Respondents' most commonly spoken languages were English and Spanish. For half of respondents, Spanish was their primary language spoken at home (51% of respondents), followed by English (38%).

Respondents identified as female (67%), male (31%), transgender (0.6%) and non-binary/gender non-confirming (2%).

Respondents were in 6–12th grade or currently not in school (but had attended school within the last year and a half). The majority of respondents were in 11th or 12th grade (34% and 36% of respondents, respectively).

School Demographics

38% of respondents characterized their schools as having "majority Black and Brown students," 37% characterized their schools as having an "equal mix of students of color and white students," 16% as having "majority Brown students," 4% as having "majority white students" and 5% as "other." 54% of respondents characterized their schools as having an "approximately equal mix of students from households with low, middle, and high incomes" and 38% of respondents characterized their schools as having a "majority of students from homes with low incomes."

This data reflects respondents' assessment of their schools. The report authors did not validate this with demographic data provided by schools or the district.

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National Summary

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New York City Public Schools, New York

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