

About Police on School Campuses

In 2018, Allegra Collins, an undergraduate working in our Center,* wrote the following:

In the aftermath of a school shooting in America, school and student safety is propelled to the forefront. Each event leads to new ideas being put forth to make sure that every student who goes to school makes it safely home.

One potential solution that gains a lot of support from anti-gun control advocates is to place more armed police officers at schools. The idea is that the officers would serve to not only neutralize threats and attacks on campus but also to serve as another kind of school administrator to aid with on-campus issues, such as common disciplinary issues.

Advocates believe that the presence of officers would act as a deterrent to crime on campuses. Additionally, advocates of this solution argue that students may feel more comfortable telling a police officer about any threats to the school....

While advocates of placing police officers in schools believe more police will make students will feel safer, not much attention is given to how this solution would make students of color feel. With growth of the Black Lives Matter movement and the recent criminalization of immigrants in this country, the attitudes towards and perceptions of police officers held by black and brown people have changed.

People of color are wary of police officers. Many fear that they may be racially profiled leading to their safety being compromised. This attitude could affect how minority students perceive police presence at their schools. The black students who survived the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida made a statement saying that "the increase [in] police presence at Stoneman Douglas made the [school] building feel like a prison for students." Some students even felt that their school was not made safer by having police officers at every entrance. This concern shows that what seems like a perfectly plausible solution to curbing gun violence in schools can actually have the effect of causing fear and anxiety among a particular group of students.

Additionally, police officers may be adding to the phenomenon of seeing students being funneled into the criminal justice system at younger ages because of their duty to report crime and uphold the law. Before police officers are placed at the front entrance of every school in America, more time needs to be taken to examine how their presence affects the mental health of minority students.

A Personal Note

When I was younger, I had positive views of police officers. I knew them as people I could count on whenever I felt unsafe. However, as I grew up my view began to change. I got a better understanding of the injustices that black and brown people experience in the judicial system.

Too many minorities, especially black men, find themselves affected by a judicial system that is not built to protect them. Black men find themselves lost in the prison system, and when they return to society they are treated worse than they were in prison. It does not even take going to jail to feel the effects of this system.

For me, I become nervous every time I see a police officer. As a black woman, what is usually a simple traffic stop for a white person fills me with terror. Seeing police officers or security in stores puts me on edge because I have a lingering feeling that I am being watched a little bit more than other customers. I am even more afraid for my younger brother. At 6'4" he can look physically intimidating. My biggest fear is for him to encounter a police officer and, because of his size, be perceived immediately as a threat....

Unfortunately, this is a reality for many black and brown people in America. We are taught to expect to be perceived as a threat because of the color of our skin. We learn, either through personal experience or through others, that the "system" does not always protect us. There can be very little reprieve from a life of constant fear. For me, I felt safe at school. I felt that school was the one place I could go and not feel the weight of being a black woman in America anymore. I personally do not know what I would have done if I did not have that one space to feel free. Every student should be able to experience the freedom that I did in school.

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And here's some of what the 2020 protests against the police generated:

>**Portland superintendent says he's 'discontinuing' armed police in schools**
<https://www.oregonlive.com/>

“Portland Public Schools will no longer have city police officers patrol the halls of its nine high schools, nor will the other two school districts inside Portland city limits. He intends to increase spending on social workers, counselors and culturally specific supports for students.”

>**A call for disbanding school police by a teachers' union**
https://laist.com/latest/post/20200608/teachers_union_defund_police_los_angeles_school_department

“For decades, the Los Angeles Unified School District has commanded its own, independent police force - one of the largest school police departments in the nation. But the district's powerful teachers union may soon call to dismantle the L.A. School Police Department. The board of directors for United Teachers Los Angeles recently voted 35-2 to call for stripping down the L.A. School Police Department. The policy proposal must win a vote of another body of UTLA members before it becomes the union's official stance. In the last week, the Minneapolis and Portland school districts have voted to cut ties with local police departments. Activists are pressuring Chicago Public Schools to end its police contract, too. Unlike LAUSD, though, those school districts didn't operate their own police departments. In recent years, UTLA has sided with activists who opposed the L.A. School Police on certain policy questions - for instance, on ending the district's policy on random student searches.”

>**Kamala Harris – less cops, more resources into public education, health care, etc.**

We have confused the idea that to achieve safety, you put more cops on the street instead of understanding to achieve safe and healthy communities, you put more resources into the public education system of those communities, into affordable housing, into home ownership, into access to capital for small businesses, access to health care regardless of how much money people have. That's how you achieve safe and healthy communities.