

# **School Justice PSD**

## **Board Report**

**April 17, 2021**

This report by School Justice PSD contains recommendations for the relationship between Poudre School District and law enforcement, specifically in regards to the 2021-2022 School Resource Officer (SRO) contract. This report also provides guidance towards creating additional protections and climates of safety and inclusion for all students, particularly Black students, Indigenous students, and Students of Color. For your reference, we include an appendix of sources and materials that we draw on throughout the report.

School Justice PSD is a broad coalition of students, parents, community members, non-profit organizations, educators, and others who believe that students benefit from schools that are free of police and that Students of Color, Students with Disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students suffer lasting damage when armed police officers are in their schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2020, Poudre School District (PSD) students and parents approached this Board with the request that School Resource Officers (SRO) no longer be placed in PSD schools. We asked that you not renew the SRO contract for the 2020-2021 school year. This Board, for the first time since SROs were placed in schools in 1995, agreed to evaluate the SRO program and consider alternatives to the existing SRO program and contracts. A timeline and process was agreed to in which you requested (1) robust community engagement with Communities of Color on their experiences with SROs and discipline; (2) robust engagement with all stakeholders in school system; and (3) a full report from PSD administration in April of 2021 with recommendations, based on all of the engagement and knowledge gained, as to whether or not the District should renew the SRO contract for the 2021-2022 school year. The goal was to engage the community in an evaluation of the role of law enforcement in schools and their impact on students, in particular Students of Color, and consider alternatives to law enforcement in schools. The District established a Community Advisory Council (CAC) as one, but not the only, method of obtaining the robust community participation envisioned by the Board. The CAC is finishing their work and will present you with recommendations in April 2021, at which point the BOE can make a decision regarding the placement of law enforcement officers in our schools for the 2021-2022 school year and beyond.

While the CAC was meeting and working on that group's recommendations, School Justice PSD has also been working on this issue. We have continued to meet with diverse community groups and members of the school community. We have solicited input from communities of color and other communities. We have researched extensively and collaborated with and learned from organizations and student, parent and teacher groups, at the state and national level, who are considering alternatives to SROs in schools. Our community organizer is a member of the CAC, and we have been apprised of the work and progress of that committee. The document that we present to you today is our recommendation for reform, based upon our research and understanding of the impact of SROs on all students, and particularly on Black students, Indigenous students, Students of Color, Students with Disabilities, LGBTQIA+ students and Students of Difference. Our recommendation supports the majority proposal coming from the CAC.

The actions of this Board in considering alternatives to the status quo are historical and bold, but you are not alone. Since the cry for racial justice became louder in the summer of 2020, a number of other jurisdictions have considered eliminating or reducing the role of law enforcement in schools to put an end to the school-to-prison and deportation pipeline, prevent racial profiling of students, increase equity in discipline, remove law enforcement as a tool in the disciplinary toolbox, and change school culture so that schools are safe and welcoming places for all students. For the first time in PSD history, this Board has undertaken an evaluation of law

enforcement in our schools. You have taken a critical look at a relationship in existence for nearly 25 years that operated with minimal oversight or accountability and little understanding of its goals, results, or impact on students. In the past year we have all learned a lot. The pandemic has shown us that we can change, adapt, and care for each other. The rising movement for racial justice has proven to us that we must do more. We thank you for your courage, your commitment to making PSD schools a place where all students are safe to learn, and your desire to do more.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

It is our understanding that the CAC reached *Majority Opinion on Implementation* in which 11 of the 15 voting CAC members believe the PSD SRO model needs to shift from a full-time embedded model to more of a response model where law enforcement is not embedded on-campus. We agree with the majority of the CAC members and support this form of implementation, including the alternative police liaison model that is mentioned in the CAC report.

Only deciding to leave police in schools while “shifting their role” does not make significant changes to the status quo and does not address any of the issues that we discuss in Part 3 below. In addition, this route is vague and indeterminate and does not offer this Board any solid footholds for a path forward.

Similarly, a decision to only proceed with additional research and study of the issue does not make any changes that would lessen the harm caused by SROs in schools. This does not support this Board’s real desire to address the problems caused by SROs in our schools, especially for Black students, Indigenous students, and Students of Color. If we take a year to study the issue, and then only agree to study the issue further, we are abrogating our duty to students who have been harmed directly by SROs or indirectly by a school culture with a law enforcement presence. If we only agree to more study and no action, we have failed to learn anything from our students who spent a pandemic summer marching for racial justice.

The CAC’s *Majority Opinion on Implementation* supports the establishment of a law enforcement liaison for each school who would fulfill the responsibilities previously performed by an SRO when those services are needed. The liaison would be assigned to patrol areas adjacent to the assigned school to reduce response time when called by the school. Expectations for how police respond would be jointly agreed upon by the school, community, and law enforcement, and detailed reports kept and shared. This recommendation includes additional training with patrol officers who might respond to schools. We ask that you all ensure community monitoring, oversight, and access to data on law enforcement contact with schools, including: (1) equipping parent and youth councils to monitor law enforcement that come into

schools, including through having timely access to data on arrests and referrals to law enforcement disaggregated by student subgroup, holding regular joint meetings with the police department and school district to ensure the well articulated Standard Operating Procedure is being followed, and acting as a liaison between the police, school staff and any students they are interacting with (2) publishing all the restrictions on law enforcement in the school or district code of conduct so that parents and students are made aware of what police can and cannot do in their schools (3) collecting and reporting data on all police interactions with students, including calls to police for services, referrals to law enforcement, school-based arrests, tickets and summonses, disaggregated by student subgroup. The data should be made publicly available and accessible, including through posting data on school district's websites and translating data.

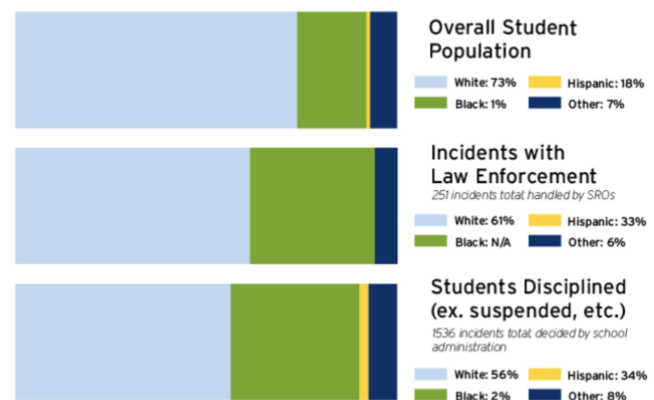
## EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF REFORM

The SRO program in PSD contributes to a variety of problems within the district. One of these problems is the disproportionate harsh disciplining of Students of Color within PSD. In addition to many pieces of anecdotal evidence presented in Community Comment at Board meetings throughout the past year,<sup>1</sup> our analysis on the data that the Colorado Department of Education has for PSD supports this assertion. Data analysis based on the proportion of students in each ethnicity group that were disciplined during the 2019-2020 school year shows that, for out-of-school suspensions, students of two or more racial identities, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students, Hispanic or

Latino students, Black students, and American Indian or Alaska Native students were all disciplined at much higher rates than their white peers, despite the fact that there is a much higher proportion of white students in PSD than Hispanic, Black and Indigenous students, and other Students of Color. This same exact trend can also be observed within the 2019-2020 in-school suspension rates and a similar trend is also present in the 2019-2020 rates of expulsion without services. Likewise, this very concerning disparate pattern is evident in each of the school year data sets that we analyzed, which date back to the 2015-2016 school year.<sup>2</sup> These disparities are indicative of racial bias within disciplinary practices at PSD schools and, while SROs are not the only aggravating factor of this climate, SROs play an instrumental role in this because of their highly punitive powers. Testimony before the Board in the past year included numerous examples of administrators involving SROs in the disciplinary process; therefore, electing to

### Students of color are disproportionately cited and disciplined.

*Breaking Down  
PSD's Data on  
Race/Ethnicity  
from 2018-19*



Data from Colorado Division of Criminal Justice + Colorado Department of Education | The Rocky Mountain Collegian

By the Numbers: PSD's SRO Program. (Infographic by Samantha Ye | The Collegian)

move towards the CAC's proposed police liaison model within PSD is a necessary first step towards approaching discipline in a more equitable way that will minimize the opportunity for racial disparity.

In addition to school related discipline, the presence of SROs contributes to the disparate introduction of Hispanic, Black and Indigenous students and other Students of Color into the criminal justice system, namely, the school-to-prison pipeline. This is a well-documented phenomenon and it is a systemic issue, and ample evidence demonstrating this can be found in the Board Packet provided by School Justice PSD on June 23, 2020. Included in this previous packet, there is actually a resolution passed by the Denver Public Schools' Board of Education on June 11, 2020 that explicitly acknowledges and opposes the school-to-prison pipeline in which they state that "the perpetuation of the school-to-prison pipeline is incompatible with [their] goal of creating safe, healthy, and equitable schools for all DPS students."<sup>3</sup> The school-to-prison pipeline is also a reality within PSD and needs to be addressed immediately. Using the data that the Colorado Department of Education has for PSD, we analyzed the proportion of students in each ethnicity group that received referrals to law enforcement during the 2019-2020 school year and found that students of two or more racial identities, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students, Hispanic or Latino students, Black students, and American Indian or Alaska Native students all received referrals to law enforcement at disproportionately higher rates than their white peers, despite the fact that there is a much higher proportion of white students in PSD than Black students, Indigenous students, and Students of Color. Similar trends of the same concerning nature can be observed all the way back to the 2015-2016 school year.<sup>2</sup> These disproportionate rates reflect racial discrimination amongst who SROs are policing within PSD schools and subsequently demonstrate the disparate introduction of PSD students who are Hispanic, Black, Indigenous, or who are Students of Color into the criminal justice system through these initial referrals, which serve as the beginning of the school-to-prison pipeline. Ultimately, implementing the CAC's suggested police liaison model within PSD is crucial to cutting off the school-to-prison pipeline at the source. Additionally, if PSD schools are to tangibly create and uphold equitable and inclusive experiences for all, as is promised on the district's [Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion webpage](#), PSD schools cannot be a site of the criminalization of students and of the funneling of students into the criminal justice system. Consequently, the removal of SROs from PSD campuses is an imperative next step.

In other words, we understand the role of SROs in these discriminatory disciplinary practices and the perpetuation of the school-to-prison pipeline in PSD schools to be contributing to a school climate that is not safe and inclusive for all students. This is actually reflected in the results of the PSD SRO Survey that was conducted by the CAC. For "(Q3) SRO Importance for School Safety?," only 8.32% of student respondents answered "N/A or Need More Information," and only 3.56% of student respondents answered "Detrimental to Safety."<sup>4</sup> However, for "(Q4) SRO Importance for School Climate?," an alarming 30.0% of student respondents answered "N/A or

Need More Information” and a concerning 13.2% of student respondents answered “Contributed Negatively to School Climate.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the very same trend is present in both family and staff responses for elementary school, middle school, and high school.<sup>4</sup> This tells PSD that when it comes to climate, SROs do not receive the same kind of support from students, family, or staff as they may in regards to school safety. Using this information, we surmise that school climate in PSD schools can be improved by employing the CAC’s proposed school liaison model with the removal of SROs from school campuses.



**By the Numbers: PSD's SRO Program. (Infographic by Samantha Ye | The Collegian)**

Additionally, implementing the CAC’s proposed police liaison model with the removal of SROs from campuses will improve school climate in PSD because it will allow for the additional funding of mental health and counselor programs in PSD, which the SRO program currently takes available funding away from. In fact, one of our team members who is on staff at [The Arc of Larimer County](#), estimates that the roughly \$1 million PSD currently puts towards the SRO program could pay for about 13-14 social workers.<sup>5</sup> Having the necessary amount of properly trained mental health professionals and culturally

appropriate counselors is a fundamental part of cultivating a safe school climate. Currently, a safe school climate is not being achieved in PSD because students are harmed by the lack of mental health staff and culturally appropriate counselors within PSD schools. When we envision a safe school climate, students are not in an environment where they are expected to form relationships with and receive mental health support from adults that are not properly trained to address their mental health needs. SROs in PSD are attempting to create relationships in a law enforcement capacity, in an educational capacity, and in a mentorship capacity. Managing all three of these relationships at the same time is an unachievable assignment and students can not receive the mentorship they need from SROs. Students should instead be receiving support from properly trained mental health professionals and culturally appropriate counselors. PSD students also are not receiving the mentorship and support they need from counselors due to the inadequate counselor to student ratio in PSD. This is an especially pertinent concern because of the mental health crisis that the state of Colorado and PSD currently face. Therefore, we are advocating for the selection of the CAC’s police liaison model moving forward so that PSD can put more funding towards providing a safe school climate for students with adequate numbers of properly trained mental health professionals and culturally appropriate counselors.

Furthermore, when we envision an inclusive school climate, no student is expected to form relationships with and receive mental health support from adults they do not trust. This is an especially important consideration for Hispanic students, Black Students, Indigenous Students, Students of Color, Students with Disabilities, Students from Immigrant Families, LGBTQIA+ Students and Students of Difference who are disproportionately harmed by the presence of SROs through disparate discipline practices and the school-to-prison pipeline, as is amply demonstrated in the Board Packet provided by School Justice PSD on June 23, 2020.<sup>3</sup> When at school, all students should be met with inclusive environments that acknowledge their social and cultural identities and experiences and that provide them appropriate support from trusted adults. SROs do not provide appropriate support to all students because they are not trusted by all students. This is an important point that was made in many Community Comment statements during Board Meetings throughout this past year.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, we believe that in order to truly create an inclusive environment for all students, SROs must be removed from PSD campuses and PSD should instead direct funding toward hiring an adequate number of properly trained mental health professionals and culturally appropriate counselors for all students.

We also envision an inclusive school climate as an environment that not only has no SROs on campus, but replaces the punitive methods of discipline that SROs embody with preventative and restorative methods of discipline. Therefore, we recommend that, in conjunction with enacting the CAC's police liaison model, the district use this transitional time to implement more adequate preventative and restorative models of discipline within schools. This may look like fully engaging with a Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) framework as a more proactive approach to handling behavior rather than prescriptive approach.<sup>6</sup> This PBIS model is currently being used as the main discipline framework by Oak Grove School District in California which does not involve SROs in any form of student discipline.<sup>7,8</sup> In addition, we recommend that PSD incorporates more comprehensive and sustainable forms of restorative justice within schools. This may look like hiring or contracting with restorative justice practitioners who consider and who are aligned with the experiences and needs of Black students, Indigenous students, and all Students of Color; as is similarly laid out in the Oakland Unified School District's Safety Plans.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, these preventive and restorative practices will only be fully effective alongside the removal of SROs from school campuses, as their goals are inherently contradictory to the jobs of SROs. Consequently, this is another reason why we suggest selecting the CAC's proposed police liaison model.

We recognize that the police liaison model may bring up the concern that police officers who are not trained to work with youth will now be responding to PSD schools. However, we would like to direct attention to the logic that the city of Fort Collins can use the funds that previously went towards the PSD SRO program to instead go towards training all of their officers on how to appropriately and safely interact with youth. After all, every police officer should be trained on how to work with youth because schools are not the only context in which they may have to

work with youth. Additionally, we acknowledge the concern that the police liaison model means removing SROs from PSD schools and that this may bring up concerns over the response time that will be required if there is a threat or act of violence on a PSD school campus. However, this very concern is one reason we recommend the police liaison model. That is, because the police liaison model proposes that officers be assigned to patrol areas next to schools, response times within the police liaison model will be comparable to a situation in which an on campus SRO responds to an incident. Ultimately, these considerations demonstrate that the police liaison model minimizes concerns about removing SROs from PSD schools and serve as reasons that we support the implementation of this option moving forward.

## CONCLUSION

In the course of the past year we have learned a lot about what SROs actually do in our schools; the financial cost of the SRO program; long established disparities in discipline and law enforcement referrals; the impact of SROs on Students of Color and other marginalized students; the mental health needs of our students; and the effect of a physical law enforcement presence in schools on campus culture. We have also learned about bias and disparities in treatment based on race within our own district; other jurisdictions where SROs are not in schools or are being phased out of schools; alternatives to discipline; restorative justice programs; innovative school safety plans; and the importance of a fully staffed, culturally competent network of social and mental health services for our students. Armed with this knowledge we must act; to fail to do so would be to completely fail our students and community.

We ask that you consider the CAC's *Majority Opinion on Implementation*. This could establish a law enforcement liaison for each school who would fulfill the responsibilities previously performed by an SRO when those services are needed. The liaison would be assigned to patrol areas adjacent to the assigned school, and protocol for their responses would be jointly agreed upon by the school, community, and law enforcement. Data collection, reporting, and training of patrol officers are included in this recommendation. A police liaison model within PSD will allow us to engage in discipline in a more equitable way that will minimize the opportunity for racial disparity. The removal of SROs from PSD campuses will prevent PSD schools from becoming a site of the criminalization of students and the funneling of students into the criminal justice system. The school liaison model will improve the school climate in PSD schools for all students, especially marginalized students. Under the liaison model PSD can put more funding towards providing a safe school climate for students with adequate numbers of properly trained mental health professionals and culturally appropriate counselors. The removal of officers from campuses will allow us to employ effective preventative and restorative practices in our schools. Finally, response times within the police liaison model will be comparable to a situation in which an on-campus SRO responds to an incident and minimizes concerns about removing SROs from



PSD schools. For all of the above reasons, we support the implementation of a program that removes SROs from our school campuses, and we welcome the establishment of a law enforcement liaison program with innovative approaches to restorative discipline and increased funding for counseling and mental health services.

We thank you for your commitment to serving all students in PSD schools in a just and equitable manner, and for acting on your spoken commitment to equity and equal opportunity for all students. We look forward to working with you in the future as you move towards a school system that truly teaches every child, every day.

## APPENDIX

1. [Archive of Community Comments at BOE Meetings](#)
2. [Data Analysis of Poudre School District Only.xlsx](#)
3. [School Justice PSD Board Packet June 23, 2020](#)
4. [PSD SRO Survey Results](#)
5. [How many social workers will \\$1 mil pay for](#)
6. [Center on PBIS](#)
7. [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports – OGSD Educational Services Department](#)
8. [OGSD BP 5144 – Discipline](#)
9. [20-2147 George Floyd District Safety Plan \(Phase 1\) \(Second Reading\)](#)
10. Infographics captured from articles in *The Rocky Mountain Collegian*. These articles and all related media coverage can be found [here](#).