DRAFT

Month/Day/Year

Superintendent

School Board Directors

RE: Request for Community Dialogue and Shared Decision-making to reduce ***police presence in the day-to-day operation of our public schools***

Dear School Board Directors and Superintendents,

In the year since the brutal killing of George Floyd at the hands of police, communities have called on school leaders across our state and the nation to reconsider the approach to policing our public schools. As you have no doubt seen in the news, some large districts have cut programs placing officers in schools on a daily basis, including Minneapolis and Denver. Our state’s two largest districts, Seattle and Spokane, have also acted on this call.

Those are just the ones that have made the news. We expect many more of you are also taking up this question. For those who have not yet taken up the issue, we want to share resources and invite your engagement on the critical question of whether police presence in schools is consistent with promises to ensure racial equity and a safe learning environment for all students.

In our state at least, simply continuing with the status quo of police in school programs is not an option.

Washington State law now required that before the start of the 2020-2021 school year, any school district considering continuing with a school police program must engage its school community in reviewing the proposed role and design for the program.[[1]](#footnote-1)

To be clear, no school district is required to have police officers in its schools. Neither is any school district required to allocate any part of its education dollars to policing our schools. It is a local, school district level choice on whether or not to place and pay for police in schools.

We all want and need schools to be safe. Yet, even after decades of police presence in school hallways, there remains a notable lack of clear evidence policing makes our schools safer. Advocates have long cautioned that placing police in school hallways leads to over-criminalization of youthful behavior and disproportionately harms students of color and students with disabilities, increasing the likelihood that students will be pushed out of school instead of obtaining the education they have a right to. It is time for us all to listen and learn what it has been like for those students and families directly affected by racial injustice and biased policing.

As you engage your local school community on this issue, we encourage you to focus on the structural impacts of reducing police presence in schools, including freeing up funds for essential educational and supportive services that are threatened by budget cuts right now. As the Superintendent of the Minneapolis School District explained in relation to their decision to cut their contract with their local police department, it is not about whether an individual officer is doing a good job. It is about taking a hard look at whether police in schools make some students feel safer while making others feel more vulnerable and exacerbating racial disparities. It is about whether shifting investments from police to teachers, school counselors and mental health professionals, partnerships with community-based organizations, and training in conflict management, crisis response and mental health would better meet the goals of school safety and student well-being.

As leaders in our public schools, we count on you to engage parents and students in these crucial conversations, and we hope you will not hesitate to call on us for support as you do.

Sincerely,

Office of the Education Ombuds

**Research, Reports, Background Materials**

Among recent reports and studies on school police programs, one we recommend for your review is a 2018 [report from Dr. Kenneth Alonzo Anderson of Howard University](https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1119&context=mgreview.). Dr. Anderson was able to look at seven years of data from 110 districts, involving 471 middle schools across North Carolina, assessing the effectiveness of a state-funded SRO program.[[2]](#footnote-2) Dr. Anderson starts by acknowledging the tensions between a desire for protection from potential acts of violence and the risk of negative impact on impressionable youth, especially Black and brown communities impacted by biased policing. He looked at multiple variables and found that “offering matched SRO funds to increase policing and training” was not associated with reduced instances of misconduct in schools. Academic achievement, though, was associated with lower levels of misconduct. Accordingly, he recommends investments in improving academic achievement and addressing larger societal challenges in order to enhance school safety.

For an in-depth review of the history of policing in our nation’s schools and its connection to race, we recommend reviewing the report from the Advancement Project and Alliance for Equal Justice: *We Came to Learn: A Call to Action for Police Free Schools*, available here: <https://advancementproject.org/wecametolearn/>.

For a detailed implementation plan for moving away from policing in schools, with answers to some common concerns regarding what that might actually look like, we recommend the Black Organizing Project of Oakland’s *The People’s Plan for Police Free Schools*, available here: <http://blackorganizingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Peoples-Plan-2019-Online-Reduced-Size.pdf>

**Example Resolutions**

Spokane Public Schools Resolution: <https://go.boarddocs.com/wa/spokane/Board.nsf/files/BQG8JK1E8B55/$file/2020-11%20Equity%20Policy%2006.10.2020%20.pdf>

Seattle Public Schools Resolution: <https://www.seattleschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_543/File/District/Departments/School%20Board/19-20%20agendas/June%2024/A01_20200624_Resolution%201920-38%20Affirming%20SPS%20Committment%20to%20Black%20students.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0wxcgnQElHzRb_JawZd2DldTwJ-VUmhBdi01YesNa7JnqGj4yhQhhm-_Y>

Denver School District Resolution: <https://go.boarddocs.com/co/dpsk12/Board.nsf/files/BQGUND783ACE/$file/Board%20Resolution%20re%20SROs_6.11.2020.pdf>

**Preparing for your School Community’s Dialogue and Decision Making**

As you prepare for community-centered conversations on this issue, here are some resources that you can gather to help set the stage for productive discussions:

* District strategic goals and priorities
* District equity statement
* School safety and student well-being related data and reports. This might include:
  + Recent disciplinary data for each school, including types of offenses, sources of referral (teachers, security officers, other), and student demographic and program related data
  + Data specific to police contact with students (if available) including disciplinary or other referrals, interventions and arrests
  + Data regarding student access of mental health supports (for schools with supports available in the school)
* Information about staffing allocation for each school for positions (in addition to teachers and administrators) whose roles support school safety and student well-being, including, for example:
  + School counselors
  + School psychologists
  + School nurses
  + School social workers
  + Mental health providers
  + Behavioral health specialists
  + Behavior Analysts, Intervention specialists
  + School police or security officers
* Information about existing partnerships with community-based organizations or agencies whose collaborations with the district support school safety and student well-being, including for example:
  + Behavioral or mental health specialists
  + Student mentor programs
  + After school programs
  + Other community connectors

1. Any school district in Washington that wants to maintain a school police program must develop a detailed, written memorandum of agreement with their local law enforcement agency. The law requires that districts use a process that involves parents, students and community members in reviewing those agreements. Those agreements must address the respective roles and responsibilities of police and educators, training requirements for police in schools, data collection and complaint processes. [RCW 28A.320.124](https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.320.124). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Anderson, Kenneth Alonzo (2018), "Policing and Middle School: An Evaluation of a Statewide School Resource Officer Policy," Middle Grades Review: Vol. 4, Iss. 2, Article 7. Available at: <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/mgreview/vol4/iss2/7>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)