

# CARE NOT COPS

Movements Against School Policing and  
Alternatives for Student Safety and Success



# MOVEMENTS AGAINST SCHOOL POLICING

## Introduction

Over the last few years, dozens of cities, large and small, have eliminated school policing programs and replaced them with a variety of student services and alternative disciplinary systems. Here in LA County, across the US, and internationally communities are rethinking their reliance on school police to produce safe and successful schools. These movements have been led primarily by parents and students themselves and have occurred mostly in communities of color.

## LA County

In February 2021, The **Los Angeles** Unified School District voted unanimously to significantly reduce the size of its school police force. The district reduced the number of officers by 133 positions, reducing the police budget from \$77.5 million to \$52.5 million. That savings, plus additional resources went into a "Black Student Achievement Plan" that included:

- \$4.4 million for curriculum and instruction, including expanding diverse representation, inclusion of Black authors, and social justice connections;
- \$2.4 million for teacher professional development;
- \$2 million for school curriculum grants for schools to supplement their curriculum to make it more inclusive to Black students;
- \$2 million for community partnership to work with organizations that have demonstrated success with Black students;
- \$30.1 million for school climate and wellness to reduce over-identification of Black students in suspensions, discipline and other measures through targeted intervention;
- \$7.9 million for psychiatric social workers;
- \$7.6 million for counselors;
- \$2.9 million for school climate coaches;
- \$6.5 million for restorative justice advisors; and
- \$5.2 million for flexible climate grants.<sup>1</sup>

In 2020, the Claremont Student Equity Coalition<sup>2</sup>, a conglomerate of student organizations, and Claremont Change<sup>3</sup>, a local grassroots group, began calling for the removal of SROs from local schools and replacing them with student centered support services. That November, the City Council created a working group to

1 <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/la-school-board-unanimously-votes-to-remove-officers-from-campuses-approves-black-student-investment/2528512/>

2 <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1cqyYPUfIM4PTU2kvh58Tg8nSC-Z282HBRezH2mt0i7o/edit#slide=id.p>

3 <https://www.claremontchange.org/>

study the issue.<sup>4</sup> In July 2021, the Claremont City Council voted unanimously to end its SRO program. In its place they have created new mental health and social support services and increased training for teachers and staff to better manage conflicts and disruptive behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Also in July 2021, following a 4 year campaign led by Gente Organizada, the Pomona Unified School District voted to end its school policing program and to replace it with proctors trained in de-escalation techniques.<sup>6</sup> These proctors are often parents or former students. In addition, resources were transferred into efforts to acclimate students to coming back to school following Covid shutdowns. In 2022, a more conservative School Board was elected that brought back the contract with the Pomona Police Department to provide school police.<sup>7</sup> Organizers remain committed to removing officers permanently from their schools.

**“IT’S TIME TO TAKE THE \$6 MILLION TO \$8 MILLION PER YEAR THE DISTRICT SPENDS ON ITS POLICE FORCE AND MOVE IT TO OTHER PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THAT HAVE BEEN PROVEN MORE EFFECTIVE IN SUPPORTING THE WELL-BEING OF STUDENTS AND KEEPING SCHOOLS SAFE.”**

**- LANGE LUNTAO, SCHOOL BOARD TRUSTEE, STOCKTON, CA<sup>8</sup>**

## California

In June of 2020 the **West Contra Costa County** Unified School District Board voted unanimously to end contract services with local police agencies and transfer the money to efforts supporting African American students. The \$1.5 million that had been budgeted for police services in the 2020-21 school year was reallocated toward supporting African American student achievement. They also directed the superintendent to develop antiracist policies and procedures and provide training for teachers, staff, and administrators to understand racism and its impact on teaching, learning, and knowledge transmission.<sup>9</sup> The vote was a result of long term organizing by the Contra Costa County Racial Justice Coalition<sup>10</sup> that culminated in a huge caravan in June 2020 under the banner “#CCC4RacialJustice.”<sup>11</sup>

The **Stockton** Coalition for Shared Safety<sup>12</sup> has been working for several years to eliminate police from their local schools. A March 2015 study by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice found that in 2012 there were 1,800 arrests in a school system of only 40,000 students, 94% of whom are non-white, including 182 under the age of 10.<sup>13</sup> These findings prompted an investigation by the California Department of Justice’s Bureau of Youth Justice, which found a pattern of abuse including excessive use of force, unconstitutional

4 <https://www.publicceo.com/2021/12/claremont-appoints-working-group-on-school-safety/>

5 <https://claremont-courier.com/city-government/commission-elects-to-redesign-school-safety-eliminate-sro-39084/>

6 <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-07-02/pomona-unified-defund-school-police>

7 <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-11-05/pomona-schools-defunded-police-a-shooting-brings-them-back>

8 <https://www.recordnet.com/story/news/education/2020/06/24/proposal-to-defund-susd-police-moves-to-discussion/112803052/>

9 <https://www.wccusd.net/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=24&ModuleInstanceID=19750&ViewID=6446EE88-D30C-497E-9316-3F8874B3E108&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=74884&PageID=13440>

10 <https://www.facebook.com/CCCRJC/>

11 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7vOgwQJx0Y&t=15s>

12 <https://www.facebook.com/209sharedsafety/>

13 [http://www.cjcj.org/uploads/cjcj/documents/final\\_childcrime-stockton\\_supplement.pdf](http://www.cjcj.org/uploads/cjcj/documents/final_childcrime-stockton_supplement.pdf)



searches and seizures, and large numbers of arrests of students with disabilities.<sup>14</sup> In 2019 the Stockton Schools Initiative successfully advocated for a resolution of the school board calling for restorative justice approaches to school discipline. In June 2020, a proposal to eliminate the Stockton Unified School District Police and replace them with wellness centers, behavioral and mental health specialists, the expansion of ethnic studies, and the creation of restorative justice programs was proposed.<sup>15</sup> While the proposal did not pass, it laid the groundwork for additional organizing.

In addition, there have been successful campaigns to end or dramatically scale back school policing in several other California school districts including San Francisco,<sup>16</sup> Baldwin Park,<sup>17</sup> Palm Springs,<sup>18</sup> Hayward,<sup>19</sup> and San Rafael.<sup>20</sup>

**“REMOVING POLICE PRESENCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE FROM SCHOOLS IS ONLY ONE STEP IN THE PROCESS TO CREATE SAFE, SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS WHERE CHILDREN CAN THRIVE. CREATING SCHOOLS THAT ARE TRULY SAFE REQUIRES A CULTURAL SHIFT AWAY FROM PUNITIVE PUNISHMENTS AND CARCERAL PRACTICES, AND AN EMPHASIS INSTEAD ON HEALING, ACCOUNTABILITY, EQUITY, AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.”**

**- JUMAANE WILLIAMS, PUBLIC ADVOCATE, NY<sup>21</sup>**

## National

In **Milwaukee**, Leaders Igniting for Transformation led the effort to eliminate school policing there.<sup>22</sup> They issued a report entitled, “From Failure to Freedom” in 2018 that laid out an agenda for police free schools. Building on the work of the Center for Popular Democracy, the report calls for a “Youth Power Agenda” that includes eliminating school police and harsh disciplinary policies and replacing them with restorative justice programs, smaller class sizes, culturally responsive teaching practices, increasing the number of school counselors, and providing a range of student supports.<sup>23</sup> In the wake of the Goerge Floyd protests, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors voted in 2020 to end its contract with the Milwaukee Police Department. In an unusual move, the Milwaukee police department expressed its support for the move prior to the vote.<sup>24</sup>

14 <https://www.yesmagazine.org/democracy/2019/02/14/california-decision-aims-to-end-aggressive-policing-in-schools>

15 <https://www.recordnet.com/story/news/education/2020/06/24/proposal-to-defund-susd-police-moves-to-discussion/112803052/>

16 <https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2020/06/24/san-francisco-unified-school-district-votes-to-eliminate-police-from-citys-public-schools/>

17 <https://www.sgvtribune.com/2021/03/15/baldwin-park-unified-moves-to-disband-police-department-as-part-of-sweeping-budget-cuts/>

18 [https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/crime\\_courts/2021/08/04/psusd-decides-against-school-resource-officers-2021-district-rethinks-police-campus/5486044001/](https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/crime_courts/2021/08/04/psusd-decides-against-school-resource-officers-2021-district-rethinks-police-campus/5486044001/)

19 <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2021/01/28/hayward-to-eliminate-police-officers-on-school-campuses/>

20 <https://www.marini.com/2020/09/18/san-rafael-ends-school-resource-officer-program/>

21 <https://advocate.nyc.gov/reports/white-paper-on-reimagining-school-safety/#endnote-85>

22 <https://www.litwi.org/advocacy#freedom-to-thrive-0>

23 [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59babf0451a584437bcb6f6c/t/5acd2909758d467950cc5229/1523394831500/MKE\\_STP+%281%29.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59babf0451a584437bcb6f6c/t/5acd2909758d467950cc5229/1523394831500/MKE_STP+%281%29.pdf)

24 <https://www.wpr.org/milwaukee-public-schools-terminates-contract-milwaukee-police-department>



**“THESE VOTES DO MORE THAN REGISTER OUR PROTEST SYMBOLICALLY; THEY TAKE ACTION TO MOVE THIS DISTRICT AWAY FROM USING THE PUNITIVE PRESENCE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT TO A MORE SUPPORTIVE AND RESTORATIVE MODEL THAT PROTECTS STUDENTS FROM THE THREAT OF POLICE SURVEILLANCE AND VIOLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS.”**

**- STEPHANIE HERNANDEZ-JARVIS, SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT, WEST CONTRA COSTA, CA<sup>25</sup>**

In June of 2020, the **Seattle** School Board voted to suspend a partnership with Seattle Police that assigned five armed police officers at Seattle schools.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the proposal includes a provision to use unarmed rather than armed police officers for security at district events, and directs the superintendent to create a Black studies curriculum.<sup>27</sup>

In response to large protests in June 2020, a joint agreement was reached between the **Charlottesville, VA** city government, school board, and police department to remove all police from schools there.<sup>28</sup> In May of 2021, a new safety plan was agreed to as an alternative, which included a new system of emotional supports for students such as “Positive Behavioral Supports” programs, more small group and one on one instruction for high needs students,<sup>29</sup> as well as the creation of new unarmed Care and Safety Assistants to help work with young people in crisis.<sup>30</sup>

After a long campaign by community groups supported by the local chapter of the ACLU, The Rochester, NY City Council voted to create police-free schools in June of 2020. The vote will save the school district \$1.3 million which will be diverted into hiring more school counselors.<sup>31</sup> This was a part of a budget vote that also included 4 percent cuts to the Rochester Police Department budget and the diversion of funds from police to recreation and youth services.

25 <https://www.wccusd.net/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=24&ModuleInstanceID=19750&ViewID=6446EE88-D30C-497E-9316-3F8874B3E108&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=74884&PageID=13440>

26 <https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/police-presence-at-seattle-public-schools-halted-indefinitely/>

27 [https://www.seattlewea.org/file\\_viewer.php?id=10521](https://www.seattlewea.org/file_viewer.php?id=10521)

28 <https://www.nbc29.com/2020/06/11/charlottesville-discontinuing-use-school-resource-officers/>

29 <http://charlottesvilleschools.org/supports>

30 <https://www.nbc29.com/2021/05/06/charlottesville-city-schools-approve-new-safety-plan-after-removing-school-resource-officers/>

31 <https://www.nyclu.org/en/press-releases/nyclu-statement-rochester-vote-remove-police-schools#:~:text=ROCHESTER%20%2D%20Last%20night%20the%20Rochester,to%20recreation%20and%20youth%20services.>



# OAKLAND AND NEW YORK CITY

Oakland's Black Organizing Project (BOP) started a campaign to remove police from schools in Oakland in 2011.<sup>1</sup> They began organizing around the issue following the murder of Raheim Brooks by Oakland school police. In 2013, they issued a report detailing the racial disparities in the policing of Black students and provided survey data that showed that students did not feel safe with school police and wanted alternative school safety systems put in place. Over the next several years BOP worked with students, parents, and community members to document the harms of school policing and identify alternatives. In 2019, BOP issued a People's Plan for Police Free Schools.<sup>2</sup> The plan calls for:

- Divesting in school policing by eliminating the Oakland School Police Department (OSPD) and barring any future contracts with law enforcement
- Placing Campus Security under the Department of Equity and Behavioral Health
- Restructuring the duties of security personnel to become mentors and peace/culture keepers
- Reinvesting the \$2.3 million OSPD budget into hiring additional mental health and special education staff
- Establishing a community Oversight Committee to review complaints of misconduct by school police and security personnel

In June 2020, the Oakland School Board voted unanimously to disband the Oakland School Police Department and is working with BOP to put in place new school safety mechanisms consistent with the demands in the People's Plan.

**“OUR PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IS AN INSTITUTION THAT MIMICS THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX RATHER THAN A SAFE SPACE WHERE STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO UNLOCK THE JEWELS WITHIN THEIR MINDS. SRO'S ARE SIMPLY ONE ELEMENT THAT HIGHLIGHTS THIS FACT. WE MUST COMMIT TO THE CREATION OF A PARADIGM THAT REPLACES THIS CURRENT INSTITUTION THAT HAS CONTINUOUSLY FAILED BLACK CHILDREN SINCE DESEGREGATION,”**

**- NIKUYAH WALKER, MAYOR, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA<sup>3</sup>**

New York City's Public Advocate, is an elected city-wide official who acts as a watchdog for city government. In March 2021, the Public Advocate issued a whitepaper on Reimagining School Safety<sup>4</sup> that called for replacing police infrastructure, culture, and practice with youth, parents, and educator-led solutions that center liberation and restorative justice. New York City currently has over 5,000 school resource officers and armed school police in schools, which is greater than the number of counselors of all kinds combined. The whitepaper lays out the

1 Black Organizing Project, [www.blackorganizingproject.org](http://www.blackorganizingproject.org)

2 Black Organizing Project. (2019). A People's Plan for Police Free Schools. <https://blackorganizingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-Peoples-Plan-2019-Online-Reduced-Size.pdf>

3 <https://www.nbc29.com/2020/06/11/charlottesville-discontinuing-use-school-resource-officers/>

4 <https://advocate.nyc.gov/reports/white-paper-on-reimagining-school-safety/>

case for a variety of interventions that together would be more successful at producing safe schools than the current system. It includes:

- Hiring 3,500 school counselors over 3 years;
- Creating and expanding robust Restorative Justice disciplinary systems;
- Creating new Student Success Centers;
- Expanding funding for Community Schools;
- Implementing Culturally Responsive Education practices;
- Enhancing arts programming;
- Connecting students with summer employment;
- Expanding college and career counseling; and
- Providing free public transportation for students.



# ALTERNATIVES TO SCHOOL POLICING

## Introduction

No one intervention will single-handedly replace school police. What is needed is a constellation of programs that address the specific needs of specific school settings. As the needs of these schools change, so should the programmatic responses. Therefore, what is most needed is not a one size fits all ready-made program, but instead a menu of alternatives that can be drawn upon to address the needs of different schools at different times. The options below represent evidence-based practices that school systems across the country have undertaken in different combinations and intensities.

## Improve classroom teaching and support

Funding for public schools has too often fallen behind the needs of young people. Teachers have been left to manage large classes with limited support and a growing number of students facing major challenges. The first step in producing a healthy, safe, and successful educational experience for all students is to fully staff classrooms with high quality teachers, teachers' aides, and support staff. This means reducing student to teacher ratios and bringing in support personnel able to deal effectively with the learning needs of every student in the classroom in a way that gives them the most access to a mainstream learning environment. This can include more learning specialists, special education professionals, and teachers' aids as well as an increase in the number of fully credentialed teachers.

There is extensive research showing that improving teacher student ratios leads to better outcomes for students including less disruptive behavior, less absenteeism, and higher test scores.<sup>1</sup> A review of 11 separate class size studies showed decreases in anti-social behavior and increases in pro-social behavior. In North Carolina, disciplinary referrals decreased sharply in the two years after small classes were implemented, with a 26% drop in the first year and a 50% drop in the second year.<sup>2</sup> Tennessee's STAR program, which reduced class sizes, resulted in lower suspension rates in later grades among students who had been in small classes in the early years. Tenth grade students who had been in small classes in K-3 were suspended on average half the number of days as students in "regular" classes. Similarly, school attendance was significantly improved.<sup>3</sup>

Keeping kids in school both increases their safety and reduces the likelihood that they will become involved in serious criminal behavior. Children are much safer in school than they are at home or in the community. Rates of serious injury and death are much higher as a result of violence, abuse, and neglect at home than in a school setting.<sup>4</sup> Also, when students are forced out of school as a result of disciplinary punishments or school failure,

1 NCTE. (2014). Why Class Size Matters Today. <https://ncte.org/statement/why-class-size-matters/>

2 Finn, J., Pannozzo, G. and Achilles, C. (2003). The "Why's" of Class Size: Student Behavior in Small Classes. *Review of Educational Research*, Fall 73(3), 321-368.

3 Wilson, V., (2002). Does Small Really Make a Difference? A review of the literature on the effects of class size on teaching practice and pupils' behaviour and attainment. *The SCRE Center*, June.

4 Silberberg, N., Silberberg, M. (1971) School achievement and delinquency. *Review of Educational Research* 41:17-33.



they are more likely to become involved in community violence. When students miss school because of low academic performance, this can also lead to more disruptive and harmful behavior by that young person when they are in school. Therefore, keeping kids in school by providing better classroom based academic support significantly increases the safety of children.

**“THE POLICE IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS SHOULDN’T HAVE THAT MUCH MONEY TO BEGIN WITH. IT IS TAKING AWAY FROM THE RESOURCES AND VALUES THAT COULD ACTUALLY BE HELPING OUT STUDENTS.”**

**- BAKARI, SOAR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE**

### **Increase the number of school counselors**

Most school districts have significantly reduced the number of school counselors available to assist students facing significant life challenges that can interfere with their ability to stay in school in ways that are healthy for themselves and their peers. School counselors help students address a variety of social and mental health challenges in ways designed to keep them in school and promote a safe and healthy learning environment.

Most significant harmful behavior by young people is driven by the existence of major adverse childhood experiences (ACE).<sup>5</sup> Direct and indirect exposure to violence, parental neglect, sexual abuse, inadequate nutrition, and bullying are all major factors in producing harmful behavior. In California, 61.7% of adults have experienced at least one ACE and one in six, or 16.7%, have experienced four or more ACEs.<sup>6</sup> A well funded school counseling program works to identify young people in crisis and provide them with support and resources to better manage their problems so that they can play a positive role in school.

Ideally schools should have one counselor for every 250 students and an ever lower ratio for students in high need schools.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the National Association of School Psychologists recommends a 1 to 700 ratio for school psychologists<sup>8</sup> and the National Association of Social Workers recommends a 1 to 250 ratio generally, and a 1 to 50 ratio for students with intensive needs.<sup>9</sup> On average, though, there is only one counselor for every 450 students in US schools, and 1.7 million children go to schools with school police but no full time counseling staff.<sup>10</sup>

Recent research shows that improving the ratio of school counselors and social workers can reduce disciplinary

5 Balfanz, R., Byrnes, V., Fox, J., (2014). Sent Home and Put Off: The Antecedents, Disproportionalities, and Consequences of Being Suspended in the Ninth Grade. *Journal of Applied Research on Children*. 5:2. Article 13.

6 Center for Youth Wellness. (2014). A Hidden Crisis: Findings on Adverse Childhood Experiences in California. <https://centerforyouthwellness.org/wp-content/themes/cyw/build/img/building-a-movement/hidden-crisis.pdf>

7 American School Counselor Association. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/About-School-Counseling/School-Counselor-Roles-Ratios>

8 ACLU. (2019). Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students. 11. <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline/cops-and-no-counselors>

9 National Association of Social Workers, NAWS Standards for School Social Work Services (2012), <https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=1Ze4-9-0s7E%3D&portalid=0>.

10 ACLU. (2021). Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students.

<https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline/cops-and-no-counselors#:~:text=As%20this%20report%20reveals%2C%20millions,police%20but%20no%20school%20psychologists>



problems, weapons-related incidents, and student suspensions.<sup>11</sup> In addition, students report feeling safer and more positive about school and teachers report fewer disruptions in the classroom. The benefits are particularly strong in schools with high percentages of students of color.

**“I SEE MY COLLEAGUES WORKING SO HARD. THEY DON’T HAVE ENOUGH COUNSELING STAFF OR SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS. THE PRESENCE OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS IS NOT NECESSARY. THEY ARE MAKING THE ASSUMPTION THAT THESE STUDENTS ARE CRIMINALS.”**

**- BETH, TEACHER AT AV HIGH SCHOOL**

## Emotional Learning Supports

Young people need help in developing healthy emotional responses to challenging situations. Emotional learning supports young people in this effort. It should be integrated into classroom learning for all students and can be augmented through counseling interventions and transformative justice processes.

In Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), students and teachers work together to develop a variety of life skills to help them deal with conflict and be more effective at school. These programs aim to strengthen communication skills, self-control, and collaborative problem-solving practices to reduce aggression, increase social competencies and develop positive relations between students as well as students and teachers.<sup>12</sup> They are guided by five principles that are instilled through the process: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. The best known implementation of this approach is the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), begun in 1995.<sup>13</sup> The program, which has been active in New York City schools<sup>14</sup> and dozens of others, uses interactive methods to teach children skills in anger management, negotiation, mediation, cooperation, and intercultural understanding. Behavioral Monitoring and Reinforcement is a primarily middle school program designed to help students who are at high risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system, using drugs, or dropping out. This program relies on positive reinforcement and empowerment strategies. Students in the program had higher grades and better attendance compared to students in a control group. A one year follow-up study showed that students in the program had less self-reported delinquency, drug abuse, suspension, absenteeism, tardiness, academic failure, and unemployment compared to control students. A five-year follow-up study found that these students had fewer county court records than students in the control group.<sup>15</sup>

Extensive research shows that these programs consistently improve both school discipline and educational

<sup>11</sup> Carrell, Scott, Carrell, Susan. (2006). Do Lower Student to Counselor Ratios Reduce School Disciplinary Problems? *Contributions to Economic Analysis and Policy*. 5:1. Article 11. Lapan, R., Gysbers, N., Stanley, B., (2018). Missouri Professional School Counselors: Ratios Matter, Especially in High-Poverty School. *Professional School Counseling*. 16:2.

<sup>12</sup> Prevention Institute. (2001). Preventing and reducing school violence fact sheet #3: Strategies, resources, and contacts for developing comprehensive school violence prevention programs.

<sup>13</sup> Resolving Conflicts Creatively, CASEL Program Guide, <https://pg.casel.org/resolving-conflict-creatively-program-rccp/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://youth.gov/content/resolving-conflict-creatively-program-new-york-city>

<sup>15</sup> [http://bscc.ca.gov/s\\_cppebpromisingbehavioralmodification/](http://bscc.ca.gov/s_cppebpromisingbehavioralmodification/)

outcomes.<sup>16</sup> An analysis of 213 SEL programs found improvements in skills, attitudes, and behaviors.<sup>17</sup> Other studies show that social emotional and mental health programs and strategies assist students with coping skills, self-esteem, and emotions management to curb aggressive or violent behaviors.<sup>18</sup> A recent large-scale study Kautz et al. (2021) found that SEL programs that focus on self-management have the greatest potential for improving student outcomes.<sup>19</sup> A Columbia University study found that children receiving RCCP instruction from their teachers developed more positively than their peers: they saw their social world in a less hostile way, saw violence as an unacceptable option, and chose nonviolent ways to resolve conflict. They also scored higher on standardized tests in reading and math.<sup>20</sup>

The California Department of Education is a strong supporter of SEL based programs.<sup>21</sup> Dozens of districts have such programs already and more are in development. In response to the Covid pandemic, the Department of Education undertook a major study and found that SEL programs were needed more than ever and that they should be fully integrated into the core educational strategies of California schools.<sup>22</sup>

## Enhanced Health Services

Students who have their physical and mental health needs met are going to be more positively engaged with school. Millions of students go to schools that have school police but no school nurse. Mental health support consists of intensive interventions for students in need of long-term mental health or acute behavioral support. Interventions individual and group therapy as well as integrated support systems at school and in the community provided by counselors, community mentors, and social workers. School-based mental health clinics have been shown to reduce fights, suicides, and absenteeism. These services should be connected to in school counseling programs and community based providers to ensure continuity of care.

A study of the Emotional and Behavioral Health–Crisis Response and Prevention program to address student emotional and behavioral health showed significant effects on decreasing bullying, referrals, and suspensions.<sup>23</sup> Another recent study of elementary school-age children who received both targeted and curriculum-integrated mental health treatments in school found improved mental health and fewer disruptive behaviors.<sup>24</sup>

16 Jennifer Selfridge (2004) The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program: How We Know It Works, *Theory Into Practice*, 43:1, 59-67

17 Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child development*, 82(1), 405-432.

18 Grossman, D. (1997). The effectiveness of a violence prevention curriculum among children in elementary school. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 277(20), 1605-1611. Paolini, A. (2015). School shootings and student mental health: Role of the school counselor in mitigating violence (Article 90). <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/vistas/school-shootings-and-student-mental-health.p>

19 Kautz, T., Feeney, K., Chiang, H., Lauffer, S., Bartlett, M. & Tilley, C. (2021). Using a survey of social and emotional learning and school climate to inform decision making. Institute of Education Sciences, Regional Educational Laboratory Program. [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/pdf/REL\\_2021114.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/pdf/REL_2021114.pdf)

20 Aber, J. L., Brown, J., Joshua L., Henrich, C. L. (1999). Teaching Conflict Resolution: An Effective School-Based Approach to Violence Prevention. Research Brief. National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/teaching-conflict-resolution-effective-school-based-approach>

21 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/se/>

22 Education First. (2020). Advance SEL in California Final Report and Recommendations. California Department of Education. September. <https://education-first.com/library/publication/advance-sel-in-california-final-report-and-recommendations/>

23 Bohnenkamp, J. H., Schaeffer, C. M., Siegal, R., Beason, T., Smith-Millman, M., & Hoover, S. (2021). Impact of a school-based, multi-tiered emotional and behavioral health crisis intervention on school safety and discipline. *Prevention Science*, 22, 492-503.

24 Sanchez, A. L., Cornacchio, D., Poznanski, B., Golik, A. M., Chou, T., & Comer, J. S. (2018). The effectiveness of school-based mental health services for elementary-aged children: A meta-analysis. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 57(3), 153-165.

## Inclusive School Environment

If we want students to feel invested in a positive school environment, we need to send them a clear message that they are wanted. Too often young people feel excluded because of discriminatory behavior by teachers, administrators, and fellow students. We must ensure that students have access to an inclusive school environment that nurtures them regardless of their identity. To achieve this, schools need to rework curricula to be more inclusive by utilizing methods like Culturally Responsive Education that fosters student centered critical thinking skills responsive to the real lived experience of students.<sup>25</sup> Programs like this have shown positive results in improving retention and reducing disruptive behavior in schools.

In addition, schools should take active steps to more fully include LGBTQ+ young people in the life of the school. Some districts have created safe spaces on campus with appropriate counselors and support staff.<sup>26</sup> A recent review of 15 studies found that the presence of a safe space significantly lowered self-reported homophobic victimization, fear for one's safety, and hearing homophobic remarks.<sup>27</sup> The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network found that the listing of specific populations in school policies contributes to lower rates of student victimization and increases the likelihood of teacher intervention on targeted students.<sup>28</sup>

A school-based needs assessment of 180 racially and ethnically diverse LGBTQ+ students found that students articulated a need for broadly safe schools (and communities) that go beyond the "pockets of safety" created by GSAs and safe zones by nurturing supportive peers and adults who consistently "have their back," and developing supportive, culturally sound resources for their families.<sup>29</sup> Findings like this have led some districts to create networks of supportive faculty and staff and to establish connections with community based organizations. New York City recently hired an LGBTQ+ community liaison to better connect the school to larger social institutions that foster and promote the wellbeing of these students.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the school, services should be delivered in ways that are culturally appropriate and respectful. This means having school staff available that speak the language that students and their parents speak at home, offering culturally enriching clubs and after school activities and ensuring that teachers, administrators, and fellow students are expected to behave in ways that are inclusive. Ensuring inclusive and affirming curricula, providing ongoing teacher and staff training that moves from "cultural competence" to "structural competence," and affirming student perspectives are crucial.

## Wrap Around Services

Students in crisis are the most likely to be involved in harmful and seriously disruptive behavior in schools. These students need extensive support that addresses their needs holistically. This involves individualized care for the student and support for their families. This can include things like housing support, mental health services, academic tutoring, nutritional support, trauma counseling, and substance misuse treatment. The services need to be tailored to the specific needs of each student and require intensive case management to ensure that the right

25 <https://crehub.org/>

26 Sadowski, M. (2017). More than a safe space: How schools can enable LGBTQ students to thrive. *American Educator*, 40(4), 4-9, 42. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1123878.pdf>

27 Marx, R. A., & Kettrey, H. H. (2016). Gay-straight alliances are associated with lower levels of school-based victimization of LGBTQ+ youth: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45(7), 1269-1282.

28 Sadowski

29 Craig, S. L., McInroy, L. B., & Austin, A. (2018). "Someone to have my back": Exploring the needs of racially and ethnically diverse lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender high school students. *Children and Schools*, 40(4), 231-239.

30 <https://www.k12dive.com/news/nyc-schools-hire-first-lgbt-community-liaison/413290/>



supports are in place and are producing results.

This means hiring case managers, social workers, on-campus mental health staff and developing relationships with community based service providers as well as developing partnerships with local government departments that provide social and health services.

**“I DON’T WANT SHOOTINGS TO HAPPEN. I DON’T WANT ANYTHING LIKE THAT. BUT I WANT SCHOOL TO BE A SAFE PLACE NOT JUST FOR ME AS A TEACHER, BUT FOR OUR STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY STUDENTS OF COLOR. HAVING COPS ON CAMPUS CAN DERAIL THEIR ENTIRE LIFE. AT THE END OF THE DAY, I WANT THEM TO BE ABLE TO GET AN EDUCATION, NOT INCARCERATION.”**

**- JAMES, TEACHER AT EASTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL**

## Community Schools

Another approach rooted in inclusiveness is the Community Schools model, in which the school is seen as a central community resource that could be better utilized to support students and their families in ways that help the community more broadly and the learning environment specifically.<sup>31</sup> Community schools began in the US during the 1990s as a response to better serve new immigrant families and address student challenges through community partnerships and philanthropic organizations.<sup>32</sup>

The Community Schools model involves opening up the school during non-school hours to provide support services for students and their families. In many communities, the most trusted institution is the school, which could be utilized to encourage families to embrace support services like health screenings, nutritional supports, mental health services, family counseling, English as a second language classes, homework support for students, etc. When families have their survival needs better addressed and feel more connected to schools, student achievement improves.

This model has been embraced by the National Educational Association (NEA) American Federation of teachers (AFT) and is being used in several cities. Baltimore has forty-five community schools serving an overwhelmingly poor and minority student body. These schools have improved attendance rates and, with restorative justice programs, have reduced suspensions.<sup>33</sup> Additional research has found community partnerships with wrap-around services produce positive long-term social outcomes and economic benefits.<sup>34</sup>

New York City has over 300 community schools that provide a wide range of services to students and their

31 Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J. (2017). Community schools: An evidence-based strategy for equitable school improvement. National Education Policy Center.

32 Lubell, E. (2011). Building community schools: A guide for action. Children’s Aid Society. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED540950>

33 Payne, A. A., Gottfredson, D. C., & Gottfredson, G. D. (2003). Schools as communities: The relationships among communal school disorder, student bonding, and school disorder. *Criminology*, 41, 749-778.

34 Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence. Learning Policy Institute. [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/productfiles/Community\\_Schools\\_Effective\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/productfiles/Community_Schools_Effective_REPORT.pdf)



families.<sup>35</sup> Funded by local, state, and federal government and foundations, they offer arts, sports, academic tutoring, medical services, mentoring, tutoring, adult education classes, parent training, and access to social services. A recent study of New York City's program showed that it improved graduation rates and reduced absenteeism and disciplinary incidents.<sup>36</sup>

The Long Beach Unified School District has four Family Resource Centers. They offer free student services that include individual and group counseling. They also work collaboratively with families to connect them to community resources, school-based services, and parent education workshops.<sup>37</sup>

## Restorative Justice

The rise of "zero tolerance" disciplinary strategies has been a major contributor to the rise in school policing, pushing high needs students out of school, and criminalizing students. Even more flexible disciplinary systems tend to be heavily punitive in orientation in ways that further alienate young people from their schools. The alternative is to develop disciplinary systems that look to repair harms and help students who engage in harmful and disruptive behavior to be a more positive part of the school community.

Restorative justice practices are based on a variety of indigenous practices from around the world that predominate in traditional, close-knit communities, in which problems need to be resolved in ways that encourage community stability, cohesion, and self-sustainability. These practices are being implemented in many forms, including peer juries, problem solving circles, community service, and conflict mediation. To be truly effective, these programs need buy-in from teachers and administrators over time in order to build student trust. At the core of all these mechanisms is the desire to make schools a welcoming place for young people regardless of the problems they bring to school and to try to work out those problems cooperatively in a way that is in the best interest of the student and the larger school community. The National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the Advancement Project have teamed up to promote these efforts by producing a guide for teachers. *Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships and Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools* lays out basic principles, such as resolving conflicts in ways that demand that people take meaningful responsibility for their actions and work to change them, build healthy relationships throughout the school, reduce harmful behaviors, repair harms, and restore positive relationships.<sup>38</sup> These programs take resources. Teachers need to be trained and class time needs to be set aside. Further, schools that are undergoing stress from budget cuts and chasing after test scores to stay open will find it difficult to cultivate a supportive and caring atmosphere and will be reluctant to take the time away from instruction necessary to implement these programs in an effective way.

Restorative practices successfully promote dialogue and accountability, create a stronger sense of community, improve relationships, reduce exclusionary discipline referrals, and increase equity in discipline. A recent review of the research literature concluded that restorative practices produced safe and successful learning environments.<sup>39</sup> An evaluation of ten studies found that restorative practices reduced the use of suspensions, lowered rates of bullying, and increased measures of students' social skills and self-esteem.<sup>40</sup> A case study of

35 <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learning/programs/community-schools>

36 Johnston, W. R., J. Engberg, I. M. Opper, L. Sontag-Padilla, and L. Xenakis, *Illustrating the Promise of Community Schools: An Assessment of the Impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR3245.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3245.html).

37 [https://www.lbschools.net/Departments/Student\\_Support\\_Services/frc.cfm](https://www.lbschools.net/Departments/Student_Support_Services/frc.cfm)

38 The Advancement Project et al. (2014). *Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships and Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools*. <https://advancementproject.org/resources/restorative-practices-fostering-healthy-relationships-promoting-positive-discipline-in-schools/>

39 DePaoli, J. L., Hernández, L. E., Furger, R. C., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2021). *A restorative approach for equitable education*. Learning Policy Institute.

40 Katic, B., Alba, L. A., & Johnson, A. H. (2020). *A systematic evaluation of restorative justice practices: School violence pre-*

restorative justice programs in Pennsylvania schools found that one “persistently dangerous,” school had a “60% decrease in assaults on students and a 72% decrease in incidents of disorderly conduct” after implementing restorative justice practices.<sup>41</sup> School districts that use restorative justice practices instead of traditional school discipline measures have cited overall drops in in- and out-of-school suspensions. The Dallas Independent School District experienced a 70% decrease in in-school suspensions, a 77% decrease in out-of-school suspensions, and a 50% cut to the number of students sent to an alternative place of learning.<sup>42</sup> Following the elimination of school police in Toronto, Canada, school officials reported that suspensions decreased by 25% and expulsions were cut in half with no increase in disruptive behavior by students.<sup>43</sup>

**“WHEN YOU ARE SPENDING \$1.6 MILLION ON LAW ENFORCEMENT IN OUR SCHOOLS, WHAT YOU ARE SAYING TO THAT POPULATION OUT THE GATE IS ‘WE SEE YOU AS CRIMINALS. WE SEE YOU AS LESS THAN.’”**

**- CHRIS, LANCASTER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE**

### After School Programs

When young people are engaged in positive after school activities it improves their safety, reduces the level of harmful juvenile behavior in the community and improves student behavior in school. Students are at much greater risk of becoming involved in violent behavior or being the victims of violence during unsupervised after school hours than they are while enrolled in high quality afterschool programs.<sup>44</sup> This can include organized athletics, tutoring, arts, and intellectual enrichment programs.

These programs can lead to improved social emotional skills, better attendance, improved attentiveness in class, and better cooperation with fellow students.<sup>45</sup> A review by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning found that youth who participate in after school programs showed significantly improved emotional well being, behavioral adjustment, and school performance.<sup>46</sup> A 2007 evaluation report found that children attending the after school program LA’s BEST are 30 percent less likely to participate in criminal activities than their peers who do not attend the program.<sup>47</sup> This program is made available to students in high needs communities and engages children creatively, emotionally, intellectually and physically, empowering them to explore and discover the opportunities in their lives.

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vention and response. *Journal of School Violence*, 19(4), 579– 593.

41 Justice Policy Institute. (2011). *Education Under Arrest: The Case Against Police in Schools 28*, [http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest\\_fullreport.pdf](http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest_fullreport.pdf)

42 Long, C. (2016, August 25). *Restorative Discipline Makes Huge Impact in Texas Elementary and Middle Schools*. NEA Today. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-fromnea/restorative-discipline-makes-huge-impact-texas-elementary-and>

43 Belsha, K. (2020). *Canada’s Largest School District Ended Its Police Program. Now Toronto May Be an Example for U.S. Districts Considering the Same*. Chalkbeat. June 19.

44 Afterschool Alliance. (2009). *America After 3PM: The most in-depth study of how America’s children spend their afternoons*. Washington, D.C. [http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3_Full_Report.pdf).

45 Joseph A. Durlak, Roger P. Weissberg, and Molly Pachan, (2010). “A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 45, no. 3–4:285–293.

46 Durlak, J and Weissberg, R. (2007). *The Impact of After-School Programs that Promote Personal and Social Skills*. Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED505368.pdf>

47 Goldschmidt, P. and Huang, D. (2007). *The Long-Term Effects of After-School Programming on Educational Adjustment and Juvenile Crime: A Study of the LA’s BEST After-School Program*. National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), University of California, Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA.





# SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

Mass school shootings have been a major justification for the expansion and maintenance of school policing. The Columbine school shooting in suburban Denver in 1999 played a key role in expanding school policing. What few know, however, was that there were armed school police on the campus when that school shooting began. Since then, school police have failed to prevent additional shootings such as the Parkland High School shooting in Florida in 2018.

Mass shootings in schools, while incredibly tragic, remain extremely rare, hard to predict, and difficult to prevent and the presence of armed police in schools has done nothing to address the problem and may even make it worse. Over the last 12 years, 70 students have been fatally shot in a school building or about 6 per year and most of these occurred in only 5 incidents. While this is a terrible toll, it means that the chances of a young person being killed in school is about 1 in 10 million<sup>1</sup>. It is a terrible mistake to build an entire security apparatus around this chance for two reasons. First, policing has not proven successful at preventing these shootings and second, school police can themselves place a huge burden on students. School police also kill and injure students, subject them to humiliations, harassment, and sexual assaults and instill fear.

The majority of school shootings are committed by current and former students, not intruders or outsiders.<sup>2</sup> In most of these cases, someone in the school community was aware that there was a threat. The people who knew there was a danger either failed to report it, or reported it and no meaningful action was taken by authorities. The fact is that policing is a reactive enterprise that has few tools to prevent these kinds of incidents from occurring.

While no intervention will provide complete security, we should focus on putting early warning and prevention systems in place to dramatically reduce the likelihood of these incidents. The most important intervention is to create a healthy trusting school atmosphere in which students feel safe bringing their concerns about their own well being and threats to the school to the attention of teachers and administrators without fear that they or their fellow classmates will be ignored or criminalized.

We also need stronger partnerships between schools, families, community institutions, and healthcare providers. Together these institutions provide a web of protection that can help identify potential threats and take proactive steps to reduce the likelihood of school shootings. Parents, clergy, doctors should all be seen as resources in identifying and addressing potentially threatening behavior and should be in communication with school officials. This requires creating a regularized system of information sharing and putting in place procedures for responding to threats with both greater target hardening and more therapeutic interventions. It means doing more to bring the community into the classroom, which would be aided by a community schools model that builds relationships with families and community based service providers.

Among the steps that can be taken are implementing programs like PRAISE from Philadelphia which promotes a positive school environment in ways that attempt to reduce everyday aggressive behavior like bullying that contribute to emotional distress and isolation, which are linked to school shootings.<sup>3</sup> We also need to reduce the isolation some students feel because of academic failure, bullying, problems at home, etc. When students are actively encouraged to be part of the school community they are more likely to seek help when in crisis and to report threatening behavior among their peers. Finally, we need to radically expand access to high quality culturally appropriate mental health services and to link them to services provided in the community so that there is continuity of care and awareness of potential threats.

1 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2022/01/14/school-shooter-drills-terrify-students/9106629002/>

2 <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/charts-graphs/#shootersaffiliation>

3 <https://violence.chop.edu/preventing-aggression-schools-everyday>





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