



REPORTER FACT-SHEET ON SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS (SROS)

The presence of armed police officers on school campuses is proven to be detrimental to the health and safety of students while having no shown benefits. As you report on issues involving policing in schools, please refer to this factsheet as a resource to help provide fair coverage of an issue that is far too often reported through the lens of law enforcement and without proper perspective from students and communities of color, among other important voices.

Above all, when reporting on issues involving policing in schools, please do not rely on the popular but misleading narrative that police make campuses safer or prevent school shootings. No matter how well-intentioned the use of armed officers may be, their presence diminishes healthy school environments and criminalizes youth of color, which lead to a wide array of negative outcomes. Please consider these factors within the context of your community or coverage area, and please venture to include diverse perspectives in your reporting of this vitally important topic.

WHAT ARE SROs?

School resource officers (SROs), sometimes called community resource officers, are commissioned law enforcement officers deployed in schools with sworn authority to make arrests. They are not private security guards. They are almost always armed.

There is no federal body that oversees or streamlines protocols and practices, so the total number of SROs is unknown. Roughly 10% of schools in the U.S. had an SRO on campus at least once per week, according to the most recent data reported in 2017. In 2018, that rate was estimated to be 15%.

The use of SROs has grown exponentially since the deadly shooting at Colorado's Columbine High School, when law enforcement agencies started to use the tragic event as a talking point to spread the message that SROs were necessary to keep campuses safe.



Research, however, strongly suggests SROs have no positive impacts on students' safety and, instead, may in fact be detrimental to students' wellbeing. A study found that among all schools that experienced a school shooting from 2000 to 2010, the number of injuries and deaths was around 1.5 times higher in schools that had an SRO.

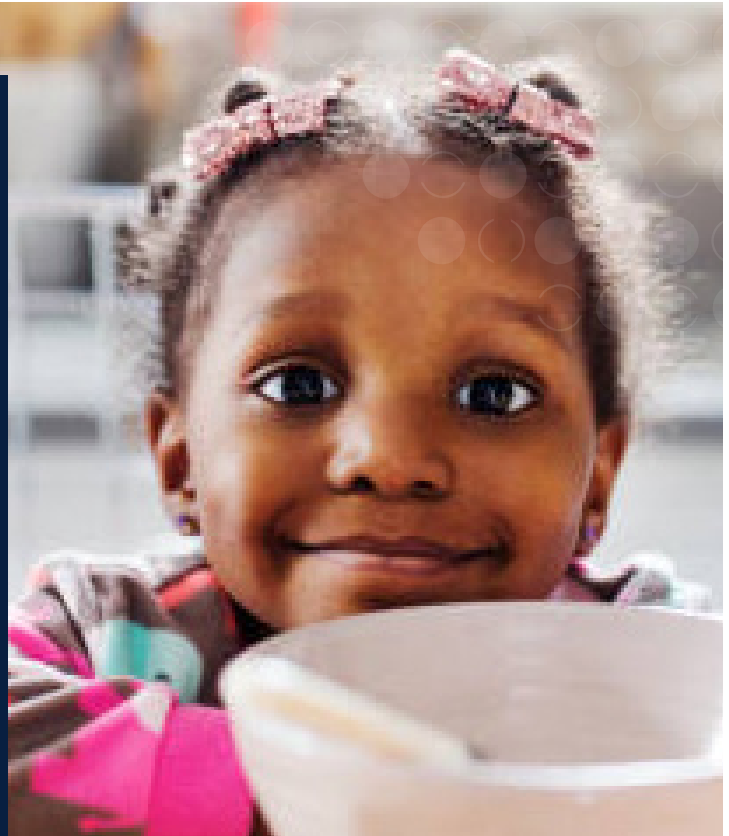
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WHAT?!? BUT DON'T THEY STOP SCHOOL SHOOTINGS?



Research shows that a student is much more likely to be involved in a shooting away from a school campus than on one. A study commissioned by Texas State University and the FBI examined more than 160 incidents, including 25 school shootings, and found that none of the school shootings were ended by an officer returning fire. Instead, they ended when the shooter was restrained by unarmed responders or simply decided to stop.

Research on averted school shootings—those planned by students but not carried out—suggests that the key to stopping shootings is to make available trusted adults, like counselors or therapists, whom other students can inform. The study found that students are significantly more likely to report a planned shooting to a school staffer and only rarely go to police officers.

BUT DO THEY KEEP CAMPUSES SAFE IN OTHER WAYS?

No. There is no evidence showing that SROs are effective at deterring violence or that their presence leads to increased campus safety. In fact, the research points to SROs having harmful impacts on the campuses they patrol.

WHAT? HOW ARE THEY HARMFUL?

Black, Latine and Indigenous communities, in general, are often subject to over-policing that can perpetuate racial inequalities. Having police in schools has the same harmful effects on students from those communities. It's been shown that SROs are more likely to reproduce broader patterns of police targeting and criminalizing students of color. This means Black and Brown students' actions are more likely to be framed as criminal – rather than simply a school violation or expected youthful development – compared to their white peers. Further, officers are more likely to use force against students of color.

These patterns are particularly damaging for Black and Brown students because:

- Studies have shown a direct correlation between increases in both suspensions and arrests and the presence of SROs in schools;
- Schools with SROs generally had a student arrest rate 3.5 times higher than schools without, according to a recent ACLU report;
- Students of color, across the nation, are subject to these exclusionary discipline practices at much higher rates than their peers; and
- Once in the juvenile justice system, a youth is less likely to graduate high school and more likely to be re-arrested and end up in juvenile hall or an adult prison.
- The consequences of a school arrest can also include the loss of access to higher education, job opportunity and public housing.

Students with disabilities are also disproportionately impacted by the presence of SROs.

- Students with disabilities were 2.9 times more likely than their counterparts to be arrested, according to an ACLU report.
- Black and Latino boys with disabilities made up 3% of the student population but 12% of school arrests, that same report found.

SROs are key to these negative outcomes because they have the potential to escalate school disciplinary situations, no matter how minor, into what they then deem to be arrestable offenses. SROs are given a great deal of discretion when determining how and whether to discipline a student, according to a 2014 national survey of SROs, and that often leads to inequitable outcomes. Among other findings from that same survey:

- 77% of SROs indicated they had arrested a student in the past to calm that student down;
- 68% indicated they made arrests to “show students that actions had consequences”; and
- 55% indicated they had arrested students for minor offenses because teachers encouraged them to do so.

Students' mental health also suffers when SROs are present.

- Black and Brown students have reported feeling less safe with SROs at their schools.
- Strict security measures on campuses, including the use of SROs, create “a prison-like environment resulting in a deteriorated learning climate for students,” according to a published university report.
- Studies have shown that the presence of SROs can create less inclusive school social climates. This is critical, as researchers have found that students are less likely to misbehave in schools with inclusive social climates. Those schools, rather, are where students report feeling valued and respected.
- The presence of SROs reduces students' feelings of school connectedness, or the belief that adults and peers at school care about them. School connectedness is important, as young people who feel connected to their school are less likely to engage in harmful behaviors and are more likely to have better academic achievement and attendance, among other outcomes.

SROs also eat up valuable resources that could be more effectively used to benefit students in healthy and equitable ways, such as by investing in teachers, guidance counselors and health professionals.

- There are more sworn law enforcement officers than there are social workers in our nation's schools, with the ratio as high as 3:1 in some states, according to a 2018 U.S. Department of Education report.
- Ten million students are in schools with police but no social workers, and 3 million students are in schools with police but no nurses.
- Black, Latine and Asian students, when compared to white students, are more likely to attend schools where districts chose SROs over counselors.

ARE THERE ANY RESOURCES I CAN FOLLOW-UP WITH FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Yes — I am glad you asked. The National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) has a team of attorneys and policy advisors with extensive experience in the fields of juvenile justice and education. To arrange an interview, please contact media@youthlaw.org or wjacobson@youthlaw.org.

Additionally, for further readings, please click on any of the citations linked within this document or reach out to media@youthlaw.org.

