

# **Police in School Are Not the Answer to the Newtown Shooting**

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## **The Aftermath of the Sandy Hook Tragedy**

- Our nation faced a tragic mass shooting at a school in Newtown, Connecticut on December 14, 2012. This mass shooting followed closely on the heels of the shootings at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, at a movie theater in Aurora, at a political gathering in a supermarket parking lot in Tucson. Everyone wanted to know what we could do to keep our children safe and how could we reduce violence in our communities.
- Many of the responses from our country's leaders have focused on placing more security and more guns in schools. We have seen calls for armed officers at every school, deploying the National Guard, arming every teacher, and increasing law enforcement in schools overall.
- We know that these proposals will create the *appearance* of safety rather than create truly safe schools. These proposals don't address the root causes of violence in our communities.

## **Don't Let History Repeat Itself**

- After the shooting at Columbine High School, police in schools and harsh, zero tolerance policies exploded across the country. For example, in the name of school safety, many Colorado schools saw increased security and police presence in schools. With these changes, unsurprisingly, Colorado also saw increasing numbers of students arrested in school – mostly for minor offenses.
- What happened in Denver Public Schools is a perfect case study. Between 2000 and 2004, there was a 71% increase in school referrals to law enforcement. Most of these referrals were for minor behaviors like cursing or having a 'disruptive appearance.' Serious misbehavior, like carrying a dangerous weapon to school, made up only 7% of the referrals. Despite great progress by youth and parents, there is still a discipline crisis in Denver's schools.
- Year after year in Denver, in Colorado, and in other places nationwide, more and more students have been arrested for minor misbehaviors and pushed out of school. As a result, students face lasting consequences, not only in the justice system, but also when applying for college, the military, or a job.

## The Real Result of Police in Schools

- Placing more police in schools has significant and harmful consequences for students that we must think about before increasing police presence in schools.
- School-based police often arrest students for typical childhood behavior that does not threaten the safety of others. For example, of the 45 school arrests that occur each day in Florida, two-thirds are for misdemeanors. In Delaware, 90% of arrests are misdemeanors. Misdemeanors include things like talking back to a teacher (“disorderly conduct”) or disrupting a school function. These unnecessary arrests are a direct result of placing police in schools.
- Students of color are disproportionately burdened by increased law enforcement in schools. Students of color are arrested more frequently than their White peers, and schools with large populations of students of color are more likely to have a significant police presence in school and rely on zero tolerance policies.
- Rather than making students feel safer, placing police in schools often creates a hostile environment for students and strains the relationships between students and adults. With more metal detectors, surveillance cameras, pat-downs, drug-sniffing dogs, tasers, and other security measures, students feel alienated, distrust others, and then, may be more likely to act out.

## Creating Truly Safe Schools & Reducing Violence

- We must dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Research and the experiences of students across the country tells us that the key to school safety is creating strong relationships between students, parents, and staff. We must focus on long-term solutions that will reduce violence and give students the support and resources they need to be successful.
- Federal, state, and local officials should:
  - 1) Not place more law enforcement or armed personnel in schools, especially at the expense of teachers, counselors, nurses, and mental health professionals*
  - 2) Place meaningful restrictions on police that are already in school, so that they are only responding to serious safety concerns and not acting as school disciplinarians*
  - 3) Provide increased support for best practices in improving school community and connectedness, like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative justice*
  - 4) Create grant programs that can be used to support community-based solutions that will get at the root causes of violence, like community intervention and peace-building.*
- Creating truly safe schools – instead of creating the appearance of safe schools – means focusing on relationships and communication, and on promoting practices that have proven to be effective.

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