

School Policing in Richmond

Schools Resource Officers and School Safety

Haven't there always been police in schools?

- No. It is only in the past 20 years that having police and SROs on a full time basis in schools has become a regular occurrence. In 1975 about 1% of schools reported a regular police presence. The 1990s saw a huge increase in the numbers of police in schools, due in part to a small number of high profile school shootings, but also mirroring a larger national shift towards being “tough on crime”. This has led to mass incarceration generally, and increasingly criminalizing environments in schools.¹

Do School Resource Officers prevent school shootings and decrease crime in schools?

- **No. There is no research evidence to suggest that School Resource Officers (SROs) prevent school shootings.** Some shootings have not had armed security present, such as Newtown, while others, such as Columbine, Parkland, and Santa Fe, had armed security present but did not prevent the shooting from occurring.²
- While there are some studies that suggest SROs decrease crime in schools, **a greater number of well-designed studies suggest officers increased negative outcomes for kids**, including increasing the number of drug- and weapon-related offenses and exclusionary disciplinary actions.³ This means far greater numbers of kids than necessary being exposed to the justice system.

Even so, we need police officers to help manage “bad” behavior, right?

- No. Students and teachers can be kept safe in schools by hiring trained restorative justice practitioners, behavior interventionists, school aides, counselors or other support staff to help prevent and address safety concerns and conflict, monitor entrances and ensure a welcoming environment, respond to the root causes of behavior and address students' needs.⁴

¹ Dignity in Schools Resource Guide for the Counselors Not Cops campaign, available at: http://www.dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Resource_Guide-on-CNC-1.pdf. (September 2016).

² <https://www.endzerotolerance.org/single-post/2019/03/11/Research-on-the-Impact-of-School-Policing>

³ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1745-9133.12512#:~:text=Research%20Summary&text=We%20found%20that%20increased%20SROs,for%20students%20without%20special%20needs.>

⁴ Dignity in Schools Resource Guide for the Counselors Not Cops campaign, available at: http://www.dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Resource_Guide-on-CNC-1.pdf. (September 2016).

- Additionally, research shows that LBGTQ and gender non-conforming youth of color report higher levels of surveillance and policing from schools, and are more likely to be blamed for their own victimization at school.⁵

But I love my school's SRO!

- Even likeable SROs push kids into the juvenile justice system. Research shows that even well-intentioned SROs can still influence schools to be somewhat more focused on law and order and less focused on students' social and emotional well-being.⁶ This is an opportunity for schools to identify the positive qualities you see in your SRO and instead hire the coaches, mentors, and counselors who are specifically trained to focus on student well-being—not law enforcement officers who unnecessarily criminalize students.

School Resource Officers and School Discipline in Richmond Public Schools

School Resources Officers are more likely to push youth of color into the school to prison pipeline for minor offenses, such as misdemeanors.

- Youth of color are far more likely to be arrested at school. In Richmond during the 2019-2020 school year, Black students made up 62.9% of the total student population, but over 85% of arrests in school. White students represent 14.2% of the total student population, but made up less than 10% of arrests.⁷
- In Richmond, SROs file more misdemeanor offenses and far less felony offenses when compared with other complainants (such as police in the community).⁸
- In Richmond in 2019, SROs filed only 1.2% of juvenile intake complaints in the City, none of which were for felony offenses.⁹

The pushout of students in RPS into the school to prison pipeline extends to school suspensions and expulsions.

- During the 2018-2019 school year, Black students made up 66.1% of the total student population but 90.7% of all students receiving short-term suspensions, 92.9% of students receiving long-term suspensions, and 100% of students expelled;
- 38% of students at Armstrong High School in Richmond received at least one short-term suspension in 2018-2019;

⁵ GSA Network, available at: https://gsanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/LBGTQ_brief_FINAL.pdf

⁶ Kupchik, Aaron (2016) *The Real School Safety Problem: The long-term consequences of harsh school punishment*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

⁷ Data from the Department of Juvenile Justice, 2019-2020 for Richmond, analyzed by the Legal Aid Justice Center.

⁸ Data from the Department of Juvenile Justice, 2019-2020 for Richmond, analyzed by the Legal Aid Justice Center.

⁹ Data from the Department of Juvenile Justice, 2019-2020 for Richmond, analyzed by the Legal Aid Justice Center.

- 49 students from George Wythe High School in Richmond received a long-term suspension (more than 10 days) in 2018-2019;
- 34% of students at MLK Middle School in Richmond received at least one short-term suspension in 2018-2019; and,
- 14% of students at Chimborazo Elementary in Richmond received at least one short-term suspension in 2018-2019.¹⁰

School Funding and SROs

Virginia's state spending on schools has yet to recover from the Great Recession over ten years ago, so localities are making up the difference on their own—which mean poorer localities can't make up the extra costs. Spending on support staff has dropped, resulting in 2,801 fewer support staff positions in Virginia schools, despite increased enrollment of 55,470 students.¹¹

However, state spending on SROs has increased during that same time. The state offers a grant fund for local divisions for SROs. This means that as support staff has dropped, the presence of SROs has increased.

It doesn't have to be this way. With more spending on counselors, social workers, and restorative justice programs, and with intentional and authentic engagement with community members, parents, and students, our schools can become safe, positive places of learning where **all students can thrive**.

What is restorative justice?

Research shows that restorative justice programs have helped reduce exclusionary discipline and narrow the glaring racial disparities in how discipline is meted out in schools.¹²

Restorative Justice is a theory of justice that emphasizes seeking to **repair** rather than to **punish** when there is harm, using practices that:

- a. Bring understanding to how harm took place, its root causes and impacts;
- b. Include those involved and affected by the harm;
- c. Seek to support the needs of all involved;
- d. Center values of growth, safety, empathy, shared power, choice, and healing; and,
- e. Build mutual responsibility and constructive responses to conflict.

Restorative Justice Practices is a framework for a broad range of restorative justice approaches that proactively build school community based on cooperation, mutual understanding, trust and

¹⁰ Virginia Department of Education, <https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/>

¹¹ The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis, available at: <https://www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org/2019/06/27/ten-years-behind-the-vital-role-of-non-instructional-staff-in-promoting-successful-learning-environments-and-the-critical-need-for-funding/>

¹² <http://neatoday.org/2020/01/30/restorative-justice-in-schools-works/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20NEPC%20brief,school%20climate%20and%20student%20development>

respect, and respond to conflict by including all people impacted by a conflict in finding solutions that restore relationships and repair the harm done.¹³

Many schools have implemented restorative justice practices. In general, research shows that restorative justice programs have helped reduce exclusionary discipline and narrow the glaring racial disparities in how discipline is meted out in schools, but results are best when the schools implementing the program must commit resources and time to ensuring the programs' success.¹⁴

How can I get involved and learn more?

Follow Dignity in Schools' national campaign, Performing Statistics, and the Legal Aid Justice Center to learn more and stay involved! Submit public comment to school board meetings to make your voice heard. To learn more about how to submit public comment, visit the RPS website or Facebook page. Usually, public comments for school board meetings should be submitted to speakers@rvaschools.net by 1 pm on the day of the school board meetings to be read aloud.

¹³ Definitions from Dignity in Schools Model Policy on Restorative Justice Practices, available at: https://dignityinschools.org/toolkit_resources/3-7-b-model-policy-on-restorative-justice-practices/

¹⁴ <http://neatoday.org/2020/01/30/restorative-justice-in-schools-works/>