

PART 1: Three Critical Questions for School System Leaders About Alternatives to School-Based Policing

In the wake of historic protests against police violence across the United States and around the world, many school boards, superintendents, and CMO leaders are rethinking their relationships with law enforcement. These question prompts and their accompanying resources are designed to support the effective reassessment of those relationships.

The history and purpose of school-based policing and school resource officers (SROs)

1

Understand the research*

The expansion of SROs grew out of concerns for school safety¹ and from the increased fear of active shooter incidents beginning in the late 1990s.² As of 2019, 41 states allowed law enforcement on K-12 school campuses,³ and prior to June 2020, the push to secure schools by way of law enforcement presence was only increasing.⁴

Engage your stakeholders

Ask teachers and principals: How do SROs make your job easier? Harder?
Ask students: How do SROs support your school experience? Do they disrupt it?
Ask families: How do you understand the role of SROs in our school community?

Reflect on deeper questions

- Whose needs are we not paying attention to?
- How do we balance competing needs, and is that aligned with our mission?
- Do we better understand our needs now (or have our needs changed)?

Consult additional resources

[National Association of School Resource Officers](#) (website)
["Schools Getting More Police but at the Expense of Counselors, Nurses: Report"](#) (ABC News)
["The Prevalence of Police Officers in U.S. Schools"](#) (Urban Institute)

Ask yourself:
What needs should SROs meet?

The failure of school-based policing

2

Understand the research*

The weight of the research indicates that school-based policing creates more problems than it solves⁵ — and it has not reduced school shootings.⁶ Moreover, it is clearly established that the harms are experienced disproportionately by students of color,⁷ students with disabilities,⁸ and students perceived as LGBTQ+.⁹

Engage your stakeholders

Ask teachers and principals: How do SROs help you meet the needs of your students?
Ask students: What makes you feel safe at school?
Ask families: What helps you to have confidence that your children are safe with us?

Reflect on deeper questions

- Have SROs been successful in meeting student needs? How do we know?
- Are there harms created for others even when this need is met for some?
- Has law enforcement lost credibility in this community such that they can no longer meet this need effectively?

Consult additional resources

["The Right to Remain a Student"](#) (ACLU Northern California)
["Does More Policing Make Middle Schools Safer?"](#) (Brookings)
["Do Police Officers in Schools Really Make Them Safer?"](#) (NPR)
["Handcuffs in Hallways"](#) (Shriver Center on Poverty Law)

Ask yourself:
Are SROs actually meeting those needs?

Alternatives to school-based policing

3

Understand the research*

Evidence suggests that alternative models¹⁰ and investments in social workers,¹¹ school counselors,¹² and mental health professionals¹³ lead to safer schools for all students¹⁴ at lower long-term costs for the public.¹⁵

Engage your stakeholders

Ask teachers and principals: What community partnerships have been most effective for you? What made them good?
Ask students: What does a safe school look, feel, and sound like?
Ask families: What does your child need to be successful?

Reflect on deeper questions

- Do we have other community partners who could help meet this need?
- How much does this cost us? What might happen if we used these limited resources differently?
- What constraints do we need to manage (e.g., existing contracts)?

Consult additional resources

["Counselors Not Cops"](#) (Dignity in Schools)
["Do the Harder Work"](#) (Communities for Just Schools Fund)
["We Came to Learn"](#) (Advancement Project)
["Beyond Confrontation"](#) (PolicyLink)

Ask yourself:
Are there more effective ways to meet those needs?

* *A note about research:* Research is one type of evidence, but it is not the only type. Experience is another type of evidence; so are personal stories, photographs, and news reports. Even when the research is inconclusive, other kinds of evidence may be compelling and should be considered.

PART 2: Five Steps for School System Leaders Who Want to Reduce or End School-Based Policing

Reducing (or ending) school-based policing can be a complex undertaking with sophisticated policy and strategic elements. This map is designed to get you started.

LEARN

1. Know your contracts, memoranda of understanding, and other legal constraints

- Current contracts may extend far in time, making quick divestment close to impossible (or impractical, without paying a hefty price).
- Thoughtful renegotiation of existing contracts can support more limited and intentional relationships with law enforcement.
- Other laws or regulations may be implicated, such as required traffic enforcement presence at arrival and drop-off or safe school zone laws that create sentencing enhancements.

2. Understand your funding

- Funding for SROs can come from a variety of sources, not all of which can easily be repurposed.
- Consider not only opportunity costs (different ways this money could be spent), but also unplanned costs (e.g., exposure to liability for misconduct).
- What are the likely fiscal consequences of COVID-19's economic slowdown on local, state, and federal funding streams, and how might you mitigate them?

PLAN

3. Develop a path forward

- Consider multiple opportunities for stakeholders to engage and provide meaningful input on key questions before making decisions.
- In question 3 of *Part 1*, you identified more effective ways to meet the needs of your students, families, and communities; which of these will you adopt?
- Document your process publicly and share your plan to keep stakeholders engaged over time.

Note that our website designforedpolicy.org offers free resources to support this step.

4. Create a plan to pursue that path

- In consultation with stakeholders, determine the goals of the new policy or practice that align with the needs you identified in question 1 of *Part 1*.
- Describe in specific terms what success will look like and for whom.
- Identify and articulate the metrics of success, the tools with which you will measure, and how often you will collect and review data.
- Agree on who will do what and by when.
- Memorialize all of these agreements in a public document.

IMPLEMENT

SUSTAIN

5. Monitor, evaluate, and adjust as needed

- Follow your plan to gather data at regular intervals and reflect on progress.
- Hold ongoing conversations about progress toward goals.
- Be prepared to change course if progress slows or if goals are not being achieved.

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