



A Union of Professionals

Efficacy of Cops in Schools: Research List

Introduction to Research

In the past 20 years, there has been a significant shift in the strategies schools have implemented to address growing concerns over school safety. Violence in schools and student discipline once were primarily handled by educators within schools, but many schools have now implemented school resource officer (SRO) programs, shifting school safety to law enforcement officials. In the 2017-18 school year, 58 percent of American public schools reported having a law enforcement officer on campus at least once a week (Diliberti, Jackson, Correa, Padgett and Hansen, 2019).

The murder of George Floyd reignited anti-racist protests against police violence across the nation with calls to “defund the police,” and it is with due diligence that we, too, must take a closer look at the presence of law enforcement in our schools and how it negatively affects students of color and perpetuates systematic racism. The American Federation of Teachers has compiled a list of resources, included below, that take a closer look at the efficacy of cops in schools. An analysis of research shows: It is clear that police presence in schools negatively affects students and shifts the school culture from one of learning and supporting students to one that seeks to criminalize and discipline students for minor infractions.

- The implementation of police in schools has not been found to deter crime, improve student safety, improve students’ academics or improve students’ mental well-being.
- SRO programs have resulted in discipline problems that would normally be handled by teachers and principals to be outsourced to SROs.
- Schools with SRO programs are more likely to arrest students for minor behavior infractions or low-level offenses resulting in an increase of student arrests in schools and the criminalization of students for normal behavior.
- Only in limited cases are SRO programs implemented as a response to the level of violence in a school.
- Schools with high percentages of students of color are more likely to have assigned law enforcement in the school, which has resulted in an increase in arrests of students of color.
- Some schools aim to have SROs serve as additional mentors in schools, yet it has been found that law enforcement activities are the most central activities SROs are involved in and that SROs lack appropriate training to work with children.
- A positive school climate is shown to help reduce school violence, but the hardening of schools through metal detectors and SRO programs has negatively affected the school climate.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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- Instead of helping students, police presence in schools has been shown to lead to more students entering the criminal justice system, thus, resulting in more students dropping out of school and fewer students enrolling in higher education.
- Mental health services in schools are shown to aid in the development of a positive school environment, improve student attendance and academic achievements, increase graduation rates, and reduce rates of suspensions, expulsions and general disciplinary incidents; yet a 2019 American Civil Liberties Union analysis found that there are “1.7 million students in schools with police and no counselors and 14 million students in schools with police but no nurses, social workers or psychologists” (ACLU).

Research List

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