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DISPELLING THE MYTH THAT SCHOOLS ARE SAFER WITH POLICE IN SCHOOLS FACT SHEET[1]

There is no evidence that police in schools make schools safer.

Police in schools criminalize typical youth behavior. According to the Advancement Project, a multi-racial civil rights project, "[t]he presence of police in schools threatens student safety and denies students the opportunity to learn because it leads to the criminalization of age-appropriate behavior. This is especially true for children of color, students with disabilities and LGBTQIA students who are disproportionately funneled through the school to prison pipeline."[2]

A study on the effects of police in schools on student crime showed that increased use of SROs (school resource officers) does not improve school safety. The study further found that the presence of police in schools resulted in an increased use of exclusionary responses to school discipline and increased criminalization of student behavior.[3]

Research shows that gender non-conforming youth, and LGBTQ youth of color in particular face persistent and frequent harassment and bias-based bullying from peers and school staff. They also experience increased surveillance and policing, relatively greater incidents of harsh school discipline, and consistent blame for their own victimization.[4]

School shootings are rare.

Over the past two decades, less than 3% of youth homicides occurred at school.[5]

No empirical evidence supports the claim that the continued deployment of police in schools prevents mass shootings from occurring.[6]

The school shooting incident in Parkland, Florida demonstrated clearly that the presence of police officers in schools does not fully protect schools from experiencing school shootings as the law enforcement officer stationed at the school failed to intervene to stop the shooter.[7]

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Schools in Vermont rely on police to deal with routine discipline problems.

Vermont Legal Aid reported, in 2015, that schools in Vermont referred students to police for citation or arrest 543 times in the 2011-2012 school year.[8] Students are more likely to be arrested and referred to the criminal justice system when police are present in schools.[9] Some studies suggest that police presence results in harsher responses to minor offenses that would otherwise be handled by school administrators.[10]

Vermont is not immune from racial, ethnic and disability-based bias and discrimination.

As in the rest of the country, Vermont schools disproportionately discipline native students, students of color, and students with disabilities. Black and Native American students are two to three times more likely to be suspended than white students. Students with disabilities are nearly three times more likely to be suspended that students without disabilities.[11]

The use of police in schools has long-term negative consequences for youth.

A 2012 Johns Hopkins study showed that students suspended just one time in grade 9 had double the risk of dropping out.[12] Evidence shows that the presence of police can mean increased rates of arrests for relatively minor offenses such as disorderly conduct and simple assaults resulting in greater numbers of children than necessary being exposed to the justice system.[13] When students are suspended or expelled, the likelihood that they will repeat a grade, not graduate, and/or become involved in the juvenile justice system increases significantly.[14]

Intentionally correcting these disparities by lowering exclusionary discipline improves school climate, safety, and order, but also keeps students engaged in learning and increases their chances for life-long success.

According to the Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative, numerous studies show that the use of positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), non-punitive response protocol such as restorative justice, and associated professional development for school staff have effectively improved school climate and academic achievement for all students.[15]

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DISPELLING THE MYTH FACT SHEET
RESOURCES

1. The Dispelling the Myth factsheet was prepared by Vermont Legal Aid Staff Attorneys Barbara Prine and Marilyn Mahusky. Contact us at: https://www.vtlegalaid.org/).

2. "*We Came to Learn: A Call to Action for Police Free Schools*," a publication of the Advancement Project (9/13/18) (available at: https://advancementproject.org/wecametolearn/).

3. Gottfredson, Denise C., *Effects of school resources officers on school crime and responses to school crime*, Criminology & Public Policy, 2020:19:905-940 (available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1745-9133.12512).

4. Research by the Crossroads Collaborative at the University of Arizona and the Gay-Straight Alliance Network. (available at: https://gsanetwork.org/resources/lgbtq-youth-of-color-discipline-disparities-school-push-out-and-the-school-to-prison-pipeline/; https://gsanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/GNC-Youth_ReportWEB.pdf).

5. Gottfredson, Denise C., *Effects of school resources officers on school crime and responses to school crime*, Criminology & Public Policy, 2020:19:905-940. (available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1745-9133.12512).

6. Gottfredson, Denise C., *Effects of school resources officers on school crime and responses to school crime*, Criminology & Public Policy, 2020:19:905-940. (available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1745-9133.12512).

7. Sun Sentinel article (available at: https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/fl-florida-school-shooting-videos-released-20180314-story.html).

8. Diaz, Jay, "*Kicked Out! Unfair and Unequal Student Discipline in Vermont Schools,"* Vermont Legal Aid Report, 2015 (available at: https://www.vtlegalaid.org/kicked-out-unfair-and-unequal-student-discipline-vermonts-public-schools).

9. Gottfredson at 908, citing Brown, B. (2018) *Evaluations of school policing programs in the USA*. In J. Deakin, E. Taylor, & A. Kupchik (Eds.), Handbook of school security, surveillance, and punishment (pp.327-349). Palgrave. (available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1745-9133.12512).

10. Gottfredson at 908, citing Na, C. & Gottfredson, D.C. (2013). *Police officers in schools: Effects on school crime and the processing of offending behaviors. Justice Quarterly,* 30(4), 619-650. (available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2011.615754).

11. Diaz, Jay, "*Kicked Out! Unfair and Unequal Student Discipline in Vermont Schools,"* Vermont Legal Aid Report, 2015 (available at: https://www.vtlegalaid.org/kicked-out-unfair-and-unequal-student-discipline-vermonts-public-schools).

12. Report Prepared for the Center for Civil Rights Remedies and the Research to Practice Collaborative, National Conference on Race and Gender Disparities in Education. (available at: http://www.sese.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Sent-Home-and-Put-Off-Track.pdf).

13. Kupchik, A., *Research on the Impact of School Policing,* ACLU Pennsylvania 2020, (available at: https://www.endzerotolerance.org/impact-of-school-policing).

14. "*Breaking Schools' Rules,"* reported by Council on State Governments Justice Center, July 2011. (available at: https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/breaking-schools-rules/).

15. Skible, Russell J., *New and Developing Research on Disparities in Discipline,* Discipline Disparities: A Research-to-Practice Collaborative (March 2014). (available at: https://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/OSF_Discipline-Disparities_Disparity_NewResearch_3.18.14.pdf).