

Re-Envisioning School Safety in Massachusetts: A Guide to Alternatives to School Police and School Hardening Policies Thriving in Other Jurisdictions

When issues of school safety arise, the response to address them are often school hardening policies. School hardening involves investing resources in visible security measures that symbolically signal the presence of security in an attempt to alleviate parental and student fears regarding school safety and to make the community aware that schools are doing *something*.

School hardening policy proposals include employing armed school resource officers and installing video cameras, bulletproof glass and metal detectors. Although these approaches may initially create a feeling of greater safety, **in truth there is a lack of evidence that they actually make schools safer**. A meta-analysis of 12 studies found that [none "indicated a positive impact" of a police presence](#) on school safety outcomes and a separate 2020 study found that "increasing SROs [does not improve school safety](#)" and recommended that educational decision-makers seeking to enhance school safety consider the many alternatives to programs that require regular police presence in schools." Looking at other school hardening approaches, a comprehensive review of the literature on school firearm violence from 2000 to 2018 by researchers from The University of Toledo & Ball State university "[failed to find any evidence](#) indicating that these approaches reduced such firearm violence."

It is time to reimagine the approach to school safety

A number of districts across the country have pivoted away from relying on school hardening approaches, including school police officers, as the linchpin of school safety. This includes shifting budget priorities to center addressing the underlying needs of students and root causes of student misbehavior.

A Few US Cities Leading by Example

Los Angeles, California

In February 2021, the Los Angeles School Board, prompted by sustained advocacy from students, approved a plan to shift \$25 million in funding previously allocated for school police into a \$36.5 million initiative called the "Black Student Achievement Plan" which added 221 psychiatric social workers, counselors, "climate coaches," and restorative justice advisers to schools.

- New staffers targeted campuses with higher rates of suspension, chronic absenteeism, and low student achievement.
- Priority is given to hiring coaches who are residents of the communities that their schools serve.
- Students report that the climate coaches help de-escalate conflicts and provide social and emotional support for struggling students and restorative justice advisers are helping shift the schools' disciplinary practices to focus on rehabilitation and reconciliation to address conflict

More Information [Here](#)

Oakland, California

The City of Oakland and the Oakland Unified School District eliminated its school police force in 2020. As an alternative to staffing from the Oakland Police Department, a district-wide safety plan was created that utilizes social workers and school psychologists rather than police officers to work with students experiencing behavioral or mental health crises.

- The district also established a Department of Culture and Climate that transitioned and retrained school security officers so they can mediate conflicts using restorative justice practices and relationship building.

More Information [Here](#); Additional Information [Here](#)

Denver, Colorado

In 2021, the City of Denver removed school resource officers and instituted an alternative plan which allocated \$625,000 in the school police budget to student mental health resources, restorative and trauma-informed practices, and behavioral health supports.

More Information [Here](#); Additional Information [Here](#)

San Francisco, California

In 2020, the San Francisco Board of Education passed a resolution that directed the San Francisco Unified School District not to renew its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) and reallocate funds used to pay for SROs toward student support services and school health and wellness programs.

- The resolution directed school staff to do "everything legally possible to protect children from witnessing or being subject to engagement with federal, state or local law enforcement on school grounds".
- The resolution mandated that the Superintendent to lead a process, with parent and community input, to revise the District's School Safety Plan to minimize reliance on law enforcement to handle school conflicts at school sites
- District policy was amended to mandate that, in the event law enforcement is needed on school grounds, interactions are limited as much as possible to only adult staff. If students are involved, law enforcement will only be involved after parents/caregivers and the Public Defender's office are notified.

More Information [Here](#); Additional Information [Here](#)

