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**Reimagining School Safety:
New Institute for Policy Studies Report Shows
How Much It Costs Communities to Have Cops in Schools**

Washington, D.C. – On September 9, 2020, the Criminalization of Race and Poverty project at the Institute for Policy Studies released a critical new report, "[Reimagining School Safety](#)," authored by Karen Dolan, Cecelia Scheuer, and Uma Nagarajan-Swenson with Lindsay Koshgarian.

As the movement for racial justice forces a reckoning on police brutality, school districts across the country are beginning to reconsider the place of police in our schools. Meanwhile, the presence of armed police officers in schools in districts throughout the nation has had a clear disproportionate adverse impact on marginalized students. As students return to classrooms or to virtual instruction, it's time to examine the full cost of police officers patrolling schools.

This new report finds that those police officers, euphemistically called School Resource Officers (SROs), who have the capacity to both arrest and use force on students, have disproportionately targeted low-income Black and brown students, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities and created more harm than good.

The report offers recommendations about how to promote safety and well-being in schools that don't involve the use of law enforcement officers. It also highlights data on the cost of policing in schools in Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Philadelphia as well as comparative costs associated with shifting funding away from harmful policing towards evidence-based harm reduction, including social and emotional supports and restorative justice practices.

“As schools across the country begin a new school year, we’re focused on the safety of our children. A critical component of real safety and well-being is ensuring that every student has the mental and physical health support they need,” says Karen Dolan, report co-author and director of the Criminalization of Race and Poverty project director at the Institute for Policy Studies. “Evidence shows us that law enforcement officers in schools cause more harm than safety, especially to Black and brown students, to students with disabilities, to LGBTQ students, to poor and low-income students, and to students living at the intersections of these demographics. At the same time, our schools are stunningly understaffed with school nurses and school counselors. It’s time to change that equation so that all children can be safe and thriving.”

Key Findings:

- If the \$33.2 million "school security" budget allocated for 2021 in Washington, DC, was reinvested in hiring workers who can provide real support for student well-being and safety, it could instead fund up to 222 psychologists, 345 guidance counselors, or 332 social workers.
- If the \$15 million "school security" budget approved for 2021 in Chicago was reinvested in hiring workers who can provide real support for student well-being and safety, it could instead fund up to 140 psychologists, 182 guidance counselors, or 192 social workers.
- If the \$32.5 million "school security" budget allocated for 2021 in Philadelphia was reinvested in hiring workers who can provide real support for student wellbeing safety, it could instead fund up to 278 psychologists, 355 guidance counselors, or 467 social workers.

Key Observations:

- Since the Parkland, FL and Santa Fe, TX shootings, states have allocated an additional [\\$965 million](#) (pg. 1) to law enforcement in schools.
- According to a 2019 ACLU study, [1.7 million students](#) are in schools with cops, but no counselors. 3 million students are in schools with cops, but no nurses. 6 million students are in schools with cops, but no school psychologists. 10 million students are in schools with cops, but no social workers.
- As of 2020, [nearly 60 percent of all schools](#) and 90 percent of high schools now have a law enforcement officer at least part-time.
- A 2019 study found that students at schools with higher relative suspension rates were [15-20%](#) more likely to be arrested later in life.

- According to the [US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights](#), for the 2015-2016 (the most recent data available) school year, over two and a half million students in U.S. public schools experienced out-of-school suspension. Black students, who represented [15.4%](#) of all enrollment in the 201, were 40.6% of those suspensions.
- By excluding training on the [psychological issues](#) that youth face throughout adolescence and neglecting to train SROs on the best practices for communicating with them, student safety doesn't improve at the hands of these officers – it [suffers](#).

As we reimagine a world post-COVID-19 and strategize about recovery, this is a critical time to talk about enacting better policies to keep students safe as they learn and promote healthier learning environments. It's time to reimagine school safety and enact policies that keep all students safe, instead of perpetuating harm and the school-to-prison pipeline.

Among IPS's recommendations, this report finds that school districts should follow in the footsteps of cities such as Minneapolis, Portland, Denver, Oakland, and Madison, which have voted or proposed resolutions to terminate their relationship with local police departments as calls to defund the police gain momentum across the country. The grave budget cuts that public schools are facing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic should also serve as an incentive to divest from counterproductive retributive justice and reinvest in evidence-based restorative practices and counseling programs whose services are most reliable in assessing students' mental health needs and their safety risks to others.

Read the full report online: <https://ips-dc.org/report-reimagining-school-safety>

Access IPS's reimagining school safety toolkit, including a fact sheet and other critical resources: <https://ips-dc.org/reimagining-school-safety-resolution-toolkit/>

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About the Criminalization of Race and Poverty project at the Institute for Policy Studies

Criminalization of poverty has increased significantly in the U.S. since the Great Recession of 2009. Poor and low-income people, especially Black and Indigenous people, as well as other people of color, face a far greater risk of being targeted, profiled, fined, arrested, harassed, violated, and incarcerated for minor offenses than other Americans.

The criminalization of poor people happens at the intersectional oppressions of race, class, gender, and gender identity. The criminalization of children is especially inhumane and disproportionality affects low-income Latinx and Black children, LGBTQI children, and children with disabilities. The school-to-prison pipeline is a significant factor in removing opportunities for self-fulfillment, education, and employment, often creating and perpetuating poverty.

By conducting research and reports on the various components of these injustices, and supporting movements on the ground with resources and capacity, the Criminalization of Poverty project aims to encourage and influence policy that will move us from intersectional *in*justice into intersectional justice.