



## SCHOOL POLICE DON'T MAKE THESE STUDENTS FEEL SAFE. HERE'S WHY.



In Clark County, Nevada, they pepper-sprayed young people in schools nearly 180 times between 2012 and 2020.

In New York City, they arrest Black students at more than twice the rate that one might expect given the racial composition of that school system's enrollment: Black youth comprise 59 percent of school arrests but just 26 percent of the student population.

In Salem, Oregon, they conducted a threat assessment of an autistic student who had not actually made any threats, leading the teenager to drop out of school.

They are school police and they are supposed to keep students safe.

But too often, as the information above illustrates, their behavior does the exact opposite, according to a [new report](#) by the Center for Popular Democracy, in collaboration with staff and young people from Make the Road New York (MRNY), Make the Road Nevada (MRNV), Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS), the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC), and the Research Hub for Youth Organizing at the University of Colorado Boulder, a collaboration between CU Engage and the National Education Policy Center.

For the report, MRNY, MRNV, LUS, and UYC conducted background research and surveyed 630 of their members to learn more about experiences and perceptions related to interactions with police and security at school. The surveys took place between November 2020 and January 2021, months after officials in districts across the nation had responded to spring 2020 racial justice protests by making sweeping promises to remove or curtail the

role of police from schools.

Just 16 percent of the student activists surveyed said police made them feel safe at school. The experiences they shared help explain why.

“There was an incident where a student was targeted at school by 5+ officers saying he looked like he had something on him,” a Clark County, Nevada student reported in a district where pepper spray has become a weapon of choice among school police.

The student kept repeating that he didn’t have anything on him. All 5+ officers used unnecessary force to search him down and he didn’t have [anything]. Other students started to ‘boo’ at the officers and that’s when the officers decided to pepper spray the whole crowd of students nearby.

An Elizabeth, New Jersey student reported experiences with sexual harassment that were echoed by peers from other activist organizations:

“I normally don’t like walking out in the hallway alone,” the student said. “I feel the security guards watching the girls and they call us these little pet names.”

In addition to these more serious threats of bodily harm, the students report an ongoing barrage of lower-level harassment that quickly add up to a broader sense that school is unwelcoming and unsafe. Lengthy lines for metal detectors make them late to class. Classes are interrupted on an ongoing basis by security guards and school police. Minor, non-criminal infractions like dress code violations or simply eating lunch in the “wrong” spot escalate to police and security matters.

“I just feel like things would be way better in schools if cops weren’t there—it would be a better experience for students of color,” one surveyed student said. “We already have to worry about other [stuff] outside of school, we shouldn’t have to deal with racist cops in a building where we need [to] be learning, not being policed.”

The report is not so much an end in unto itself as evidence to employ in the youths’ ongoing struggle to create schools that serve all students. For this reason, it is full of practical recommendations to recreate schools as safe institutions of growth and learning. These recommendations include redirecting funding from policing and metal detectors to restorative justice and mental supports; ensuring that young people and people of color have a say in selecting educational leaders; and funding [community schools](#), a research-based model that emphasizes wrap-around services such as health clinics, expanded and enriched learning time, family and community engagement, and collaborative/shared leadership practices.

“To accomplish this we must dismantle the power that police have over Black youth, youth of color, immigrant youth, youth with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ youth. We must return power and control over schools and safety to communities, and build a liberatory education system that reflects the society we want to create,” the report concludes.

## NEPC Resources on Discipline Policy

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