



June 24, 2020

Chicago Board of Education
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Via E-Mail

**RE: REMOVING POLICE FROM SCHOOLS IS NECESSARY TO PROTECT
BLACK AND BROWN CHILDREN FROM FURTHER HARM**

Dear Members of the Chicago Board of Education:

We write on behalf of Advancement Project National Office and the Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ) to fully and enthusiastically support the call to terminate the contract between the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and remove police from schools. If we have learned anything from this historic moment spurred by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police, it is that police cannot be trusted to keep us safe. Years of CPS data reflecting a relentless school-to-prison pipeline indicate disparate criminalization of students of color by the police. CPS has a duty to protect students from a police department whose culture allows for the brutal and violent use of force against peaceful protestors.¹ Officers that roam school hallways are no different from the officers on the streets of Chicago and thus, a new vision for safety must emerge from this crisis. Over the past two weeks, school boards in Minneapolis, Denver, Seattle, Oakland, Portland, and West Contra Costa, California, have all taken historic action to remove police from schools, demonstrating that a police-free schools future is both possible and necessary to protect the safety and humanity of Black and Brown children.²

Our organizations have spent the last few years highlighting the need for police-free schools across the country, because we believe that in order for our nation's students to truly thrive, their educational and socio-emotional needs must be met by those most qualified to meet those needs, like counselors, psychologists, and social workers. We already know that investment in law

¹ Kelly Bauer, *258 Complaints Filed Against Chicago Police Amid Protesting over George Floyd Murder*, Block Club Chicago (June 4, 2020), <https://blockclubchicago.org/2020/06/04/258-complaints-filed-against-chicago-police-amid-protesting-over-george-floyd-murder/>.

² Moriah Balingit, Kim Bellware, Valerie Strauss, *Fueled by Protests, School Districts Across the Country Cut Ties with Police*, The Washington Post (June 12, 2020) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/06/12/schools-police-george-floyd-protests/>.



enforcement personnel fundamentally fails to make schools safer for students.³ Instead of paying the Chicago Police Department to police Chicago children—or paying out millions of dollars in settlements related to misconduct by CPD police assigned to schools⁴—CPS funds should be allocated towards counseling services, mental health support, positive behavioral interventions, restorative justice programs, and other methods that create holistically beneficial learning environments for young people. These commitments to resources are especially important for youth returning to school after the isolation and traumas inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For 20 years, Advancement Project, a national racial justice organization, has pioneered efforts to end the school-to-prison pipeline. We have collaborated with Chicago youth organizations in this fight, like Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC) and Assata’s Daughters, and we have been proud to support Chicago students in the progress they have made in Chicago Public Schools. Unfortunately, the school-to-prison pipeline persists in the district, and it is clear that we need a new vision of police-free schools in Chicago and across the country. Working alongside Advancement Project, the Alliance for Educational Justice—a national network of 35 youth and intergenerational organizing groups of color across 12 states—has been similarly leading and coordinating efforts to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

The proliferation of law enforcement in our nation’s schools is a pressing and alarming issue that our organizations have worked tirelessly to combat. To this end, we released a joint report in 2018 titled “We Came to Learn,” which chronicles the violent history of school policing in the United States and the ongoing harms that students, particularly Black & Brown, LGBTQ, and differently-abled students face at the hands of school police officers.⁵

We know that the mere presence of police in schools serves to reinforce and accelerate the school-to-prison pipeline, and this is borne out by the data. According to the most recent data released by the U.S. Department of Education’s Civil Rights Data Collection for the 2015-2016 academic year, Black students represented 15% of enrollment in public schools across the country, yet they accounted for 31% of students who were referred to law enforcement or arrested.⁶ Research shows that higher discipline rates for students of color are not due to higher rates of misbehavior, but instead due to systemic racism.⁷ A March 2018 report from the Government Accountability Office

³ Ryan W. Miller, ‘It’s Tragic’: Video Shows Chicago Police Officers Hitting, Dragging Student Down Stairs, USA Today (April 12, 2019) <https://usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/04/12/video-chicago-police-hit-dragged-student-dnigma-howard-lawsuit-says/3450778002/>.

⁴ Hannah Leone and Morgan Greene, *Police Killing of George Floyd Amplifies Calls to Remove School Resource Officers from Chicago Public Schools: ‘We Don’t Need More Cops.’* Chicago Tribune (June 5, 2020) <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-chicago-police-in-schools-cps-george-floyd-20200605-6g6boucp7jb77hj6eryyacs3vy-story.html>.

⁵ See <https://advancementproject.org/wecametolearn/>.

⁶ U.S. Dep’t of Ed., 2015-2016 Civil Rights Data Collection: School Climate and Safety, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/school-climate-and-safety.pdf>.

⁷ Russel J. Skiba and Natasha T. Williams, *Are Black Kids Worse? Myths and Facts About Racial Differences In Behavior: A Summary of the Literature*, Indiana University (Mar. 2014), https://indrc.indiana.edu/tools-resources/pdf-disciplineseries/african_american_differential_behavior_031214.pdf.



confirms this fact; the study concluded that stark disparities persist in the administration of discipline for Black students and students with disabilities across the country.⁸

In Chicago, these disparities also exist. Black boys and girls are disproportionately disciplined compared to other groups in their schools. In the 2018-2019 school year, 15% of all Black students in CPS received either an in-school or out-of-school suspension at some point, compared with only 2.6% of white students.⁹ **Police in schools exacerbate these problems. Of the 1,758 total notifications of police in the 2018-2019 academic year, approximately 59% were for Black students, despite Black students being only 36.6% of the district’s student population.**¹⁰

These existing disparities must be contextualized within the backdrop of rampant police violence—amidst a global pandemic—in response to protests against police brutality. In this time of national civil unrest, we cannot continue to operate our schools and live in our communities as if things will just “go back to normal.” We know firsthand that “normal” for communities of color has always been suspensions, expulsions, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the under-resourcing of public schools. We can no longer be satisfied with “normal.” It is time to actually listen to what Black and Brown youth—who routinely experience police violence in school—have been saying for years: Being forced to interact with a system of policing that views them as threats and not as students is detrimental to their sense of safety in school. Young people should not have to fear being assaulted, arrested, or killed by a police officer every single time they show up to school to learn. There is no way that a policing culture that allows for the brutality we have all witnessed can co-exist with the nurturing culture that students need to thrive.

We urge you to act and eliminate the contract with the Chicago Police Department and remove all police from Chicago schools. Additionally, we urge you to prioritize the health and well-being of Chicago students by ensuring that there are plentiful supports available to them both academically and socio-emotionally. Many organizations have pushed for school districts to prioritize real school safety for years—which includes providing more mental health resources, more counselors and more mentors. In the wake of the Newtown, CT, and Parkland, FL, school shootings, organizations urged more psychologists, therapists, counselors, social workers, and nurses be placed at every school in order to best respond to the social and emotional needs and well-being of students.¹¹ We know that for many young people, school is the only place where they can access mental health counseling and support. As this pandemic continues, we are already seeing school districts either making or anticipating significant cuts as a result of budget shortfalls.¹² We cannot

⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *K-12 EDUCATION: Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities* (Mar. 22, 2018), <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-258>.

⁹ Chicago Public Schools, *Suspensions and Expulsions Report*, https://cps.edu/Performance/Documents/Datafiles/Misconduct_Report_EOY2019_DistrictLevel.xls.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Advancement Project, Dignity in Schools, Alliance for Educational Justice, and LDF, *Police in Schools are Not the Answer to School Shootings*, (Mar. 2018), <https://advancementproject.org/resources/police-schools-not-answer-school-shootings/>.

¹² Alex Zimmerman and Christina Veiga, *De Blasio proposes over \$221 million in NYC education cuts, including pre-K and school budgets*, Chalkbeat New York (Apr. 7, 2020), <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2020/04/07/budget-cut-tk/>; Max Larkin, *In Randolph, Officials Cited Coronavirus As They Made State’s First Cuts to School Staff*,



ignore the needs of students and remove the vital support needed for their growth and development—especially given that the mental health effects of this pandemic will be felt for years to come. Eliminating the contract with CPD will allow for resources to be reallocated to the supports that students truly need.

In this time of crisis, we all have the responsibility to care for and support our most vulnerable communities. Young people and their concerns are often left out of decision-making efforts, despite their being the ones most directly affected by changes in the education system. We need to support the wellbeing of our students by investing in the supports that will truly guide them through to adulthood. Eliminating the contract with the Chicago Police Department is a great first step towards that goal. If you have any questions, please reach out to Jessica Alcantara, Staff Attorney, at jalcantara@advancementproject.org, or to Maria Fernandez, Senior Campaigns Strategist, at mfernandez@advancementproject.org. We fully support ending Chicago Public School’s contract with the Chicago Police Department, and we believe that this is what it will take to ensure our young people are safe, healthy, and thriving in their schools and communities during and after this crisis.

Sincerely,

Judith Browne Dianis
Executive Director
Advancement Project National Office

Jonathan Stith
National Director
Alliance for Educational Justice

The **Alliance for Educational Justice** is comprised of the following organizations:

- Baltimore Algebra Project, Baltimore, Maryland
- Black Organizing Project, Oakland, California
- Boston Youth Organizing Project, Boston, Massachusetts
- Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, Chicago Illinois
- Californians for Justice, Statewide, California
- Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, San Francisco, California
- Community Coalition, Los Angeles, California
- DRUM: Desis Rising Up and Moving, Queens, New York
- Future of Tomorrow, Brooklyn, New York
- Inner City Struggle, Los Angeles, California
- Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, Chicago, Illinois
- Labor Community Strategy Center, Los Angeles, California
- Youth Organizing Institute, Raleigh, North Carolina
- Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, Denver, Colorado

WBUR (Apr. 15, 2020), <https://www.wbur.org/edify/2020/04/15/randolph-school-furloughs>; Chris Jones and Nadia Pflaum, *Utah schools could lose up to \$30 million in coronavirus budget cuts*, KUTV (Apr. 13, 2020), <https://kutv.com/news/beyond-the-books/coronavirus-leading-to-cuts-in-utah-school-funding>.



Philadelphia Student Union, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Power U Center for Social Change, Miami, Florida
Project South, Atlanta, Georgia
Rethink, New Orleans, Louisiana
Sistas and Brothas United, Bronx, New York
Tenants and Workers United, Alexandria, Virginia
Youth Empowered in the Struggle, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Youth Justice Coalition, Los Angeles, California
Youth Together, Oakland, California
Youth United for Change, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Puente Human Rights Movement, Phoenix, Arizona

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