



June 29, 2020

New York City Council
250 Broadway
New York City, NY 10007
(212) 788-7370
correspondence@council.nyc.gov

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Via E-Mail

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

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

We write on behalf of Advancement Project National Office and the Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ) to fully and enthusiastically support the call to eliminate the New York City Police Department School Safety Division 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 NYC DOE data reflecting a relentless school to prison pipeline indicate disparate criminalization of students of color by the police. The DOE has a duty to protect students from a police department whose culture allows for the brutal and violent use of force against peaceful protestors. Officers that roam school hallways are no different from the officers on the streets of New York City and thus, a new vision for safety must emerge from this crisis. Over the past few 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.¹

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 enforcement personnel fundamentally fails to make schools safer for students.² Instead of paying

¹ 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/>.

² Matthew Glowicki, *Police officer uses stun gun on Jeffersontown student who assaulted cop, officials say*, Louisville Courier-Journal (Nov. 1, 2017), <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/crime/2017/11/01/police-officer-uses-stun-gun-jeffersontown-student-who-assaulted-cop-officials-say/822783001/>.



the New York Police Department to police New York City children, those funds should be allocated towards counseling services, mental health supports, 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 isolation and the 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 worked with the Urban Youth Collaborative, Make the Road New York, Girls for Gender Equality, Alliance for Quality Education, and the NYC Coalition for Education Justice for years in this fight – and have been proud to support them in the progress they have made in New York City Public Schools. From winning the 2016 amendment to the NYC Student Safety Act to releasing *The Schools Girls Deserve* report, we have proudly supported and applauded our partner organizations’ advocacy efforts in the city.³ Unfortunately, despite some progress, the school-to-prison pipeline persists in the district, and it is clear that we need a new vision of police free schools in New York City 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 on-going harms that students, particularly Black & Brown, LGBTQ, and differently-abled students face at the hands of school police officers.⁴

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.⁵ Research shows that higher discipline rates for students of color are not due to higher rates of misbehavior, but instead due to systemic racism.⁶ A March 2018 report from the Government Accountability Office 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.⁷

³ Make the Road New York: Policing and Criminal Justice, <https://maketheroadny.org/issue/policing-and-criminal-justice/>; Schools for Gender Equity: The Schools Girls Deserve, <https://www.ggenyc.org/the-schools-girls-deserve/>.

⁴ See <https://advancementproject.org/wecametolearn/>.

⁵ 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>.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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>.

In New York City, these disparities also exist—Black boys and girls are disproportionately disciplined compared to other groups in their schools. In the Civil Rights Data Collection Discipline Report from the 2015 survey year, 51% of the 11,434 NYC Public Schools district students who were disciplined with out-of-school suspensions were Black and 60.7% of the 214 students who were expelled were Black. Comparatively, only 6.8% of their white counterparts received out-of-school suspensions and 6.5% of the students expelled were white.⁸ **Police in schools exacerbate these problems. Of the 4,414 total referrals to law enforcement in the 2015 survey year, 48.7% were reported to be Black students, despite being only 24.5% of the district’s student population.**⁹ Latinx students received 38.4% of the referrals to law enforcement, compared to a district population of 40.9%¹⁰ - this is still troubling because if any of those students were undocumented or DACA-mented, this contact with law enforcement would make them vulnerable to the school-to-deportation pipeline. Meanwhile, 0% of those students referred to law enforcement were white.¹¹ From 2016 to 2019, Black students represented over 60% of students having mental health crises who were restrained in metal handcuffs.¹² Black students also receive relatively longer suspensions.¹³ In the 2018-2019 school year, 5,249 Black students and 1,370 white students were removed from schools of 12,415 total students who were removed.¹⁴

These existing disparities must be contextualized within the backdrop of rampant police violence—amidst a global pandemic—in response to protests of 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 all witnessed, can co-exist with the nurturing culture that students need to thrive.

⁸ New York City Public Schools, *LEA Summary of Selected Facts: Discipline Report*, <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Urban Youth Collaborative: Policing in New York City Schools by the Numbers, http://www.aqeny.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Police-Free-Schools-UYC-One-Pager%E2%80%93Data.pdf?link_id=1&can_id=c5f9c32f06802c843aa4949a10fe20d6&source=email-upcoming-events-in-nyc-3&email_referrer=email_835626&email_subject=upcoming-events-in-nyc

¹³ *When Students Of Different Ethnicities Are Suspended For The Same Infraction Is The Average Length Of Their Suspension The Same?* (OCT. 11, 2018), <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/cgi-park2/2018/10/when-students-of-different-ethnicities-are-suspended-for-the-same-infraction-is-the-average-length-of-their-suspension-the-same/>.

¹⁴ NYCED Info Hub: Student Discipline (2018-2019), <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/government-reports/suspension-reports>.



We urge you to eliminate the New York Police Department’s presence from New York City schools. Additionally, we urge you to prioritize the health and well-being of New York City students by ensuring that there are plentiful supports available to them both academically and socio-emotionally. Many organizations have been pushing 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ We cannot 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 New York City Police Department School Safety Division will allow for resources to be reallocated to the supports that students truly need.

We must also urge you that in eliminating NYPD from New York City schools, the solution is NOT to replace them by creating an internal DOE police force. Whether or not a police department is its own law enforcement agency, like NYPD, or is housed within the school district, does not change the fact that policing is harmful for students, and especially to Black students and other students of color. A police officer still has the power to police and criminalize young people regardless of who signs their paycheck. In fact, there are already other school districts across the country who have carried out the experiment of having their own police departments – and advocates in those cities are also calling for the elimination of those departments, as in Los Angeles and Oakland.¹⁷ The Oakland school district sets the example – they recently won their fight and will be eliminating the Oakland School Police Department due to the longstanding work and advocacy from the Black Organizing Project.¹⁸ Instead of removing police from schools and

¹⁵ 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/>.

¹⁶ 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*, 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>.

¹⁷ Ashley McBride, *For 9 years, the Black Organizing Project has been campaigning to remove police from Oakland schools. Will it finally happen?*, Berkeleyside (Jun. 5, 2020), <https://www.berkeleyside.com/2020/06/05/for-9-years-the-black-organizing-project-has-been-campaigning-to-remove-police-from-oakland-schools-will-it-finally-happen>; Sonali Kohli and Howard Blume, *For teen activists, defunding school police has been a decade in the making*, The Los Angeles Times (Jun. 15, 2020), <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-06-15/defund-police-schools-case-security-guards-campus>.

¹⁸ Brett Simpson, *District police eliminated from Oakland schools: Board votes to abolish agency*, San Francisco Chronicle (Jun. 25, 2020), <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/District-police-eliminated-from-Oakland-schools-15364811.php>.



replacing them with other police, again we urge the city to invest in the supports *proven* to help students feel safe, welcomed, and to thrive in their schools.

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 New York City Department from New York City schools 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 the passing of this resolution, and we believe 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, New York City, 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 New York City Community Organization, Chicago, Illinois
Labor Community Strategy Center, Los Angeles, California
Youth Organizing Institute, Raleigh, North Carolina
Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, Denver, Colorado
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, New York City, California
Youth United for Change, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Puente Human Rights Movement, Phoenix, Arizona

CC: *Margaret S. Chin*
District 1

Carlina Rivera
District 2

Corey Johnson
District 3

Keith Powers
District 4

Ben Kallos
District 5

Helen Rosenthal
District 6

Mark Levine
District 7

Diana Ayala
District 8

Bill Perkins
District 9

Ydanis Rodriguez
District 10

Andrew Cohen
District 11

Andy King
District 12

Mark Gjonaj
District 13

Fernando Cabrera
District 14

Ritchie J. Torres
District 15

Vanessa L. Gibson
District 16

Rafael Salamanca Jr.
District 17

Ruben Diaz, Sr.
District 18

Paul Vallone
District 19

Peter Koo
District 20

Francisco Moya
District 21

Costa Constantinides
District 22

Barry Grodenchik
District 23

Rory I. Lancman
District 24

Daniel Dromm
District 25

Jimmy Van Bramer
District 26



*I. Daneek Miller
District 27*

*Karen Koslowitz
District 29*

*Donovan J. Richards
District 31*

*Stephen T. Levin
District 33*

*Laurie A. Cumbo
District 35*

*Carlos Menchaca
District 38*

*Mathieu Eugene
District 40*

*Inez Barron
District 42*

*Kalman Yeger
District 44*

*Alan N. Maisel
District 46*

*Chaim M. Deutsch
District 48*

*Steven Matteo
District 50*

*Adrienne E. Adams
District 28*

*Robert Holden
District 30*

*Eric A. Ulrich
District 32*

*Antonio Reynoso
District 34*

*Robert E. Cornegy, Jr.
District 36*

*Brad Lander
District 39*

*Alicka Ampry-Samuel
District 41*

*Justin Brannan
District 43*

*Farah N. Louis
District 45*

*Mark Treyger
District 47*

*Deborah Rose
District 49*

*Joseph C. Borelli
District 51*