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PROJECT**



# A COP IS A COP

**The rise  
of school  
district police  
departments  
and why  
they must be  
dismantled.**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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# IN MAY 2022, A GUNMAN OPENED FIRE AT ROBB ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN UVALDE, TEXAS - TRAGICALLY KILLING 21 PEOPLE, INCLUDING 19 CHILDREN AND TWO TEACHERS, AND INJURING DOZENS OF OTHERS.

This tragic event raised the question for many for the first time: what is the function of school policing? The Uvalde school district spent heavily on its school policing infrastructure, and it failed to keep its students and school community safe.

**THE DISTRICT OF ABOUT 4,500 STUDENTS EVEN HAD ITS OWN SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENT: A RELATIVELY NEW PHENOMENON IN THE LONG HISTORY OF SCHOOL POLICING.**

Members of this department, despite having recently received active shooter training, stood idly by during the shooting—as did hundreds of other police and law enforcement.<sup>1</sup> The district suspended its police department in October 2022, but is already rebuilding it.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Department of Justice released a 600-page investigation of the shooting in January 2024, detailing the many failings of the school district police department and other law enforcement agencies.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that school police do not keep young people safe, most school districts today police students through the physical presence of police in schools as one component of the school policing infrastructure.<sup>4</sup> Often, these districts work with local law enforcement agencies to police students, but increasingly,

**DISTRICTS ARE ALSO CREATING THEIR OWN LAW ENFORCEMENT DEPARTMENTS, EMBEDDING THE POLICE THAT CONTROL, SURVEIL, AND CRIMINALIZE YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN THE DISTRICT ITSELF.**

The prevalence of school police departments has more than doubled over the past two decades. In 2000, there were 162 school district police departments across the country,<sup>5</sup> in 2018, there were approximately 300,<sup>6</sup> and today there are at least 410 departments policing nearly 8 million students. School district police departments account for nearly 20 percent of all sworn school resource officers in the country.<sup>7</sup>

Building upon our years of fighting for the end of criminalization and policing of young people in schools, in 2018, Advancement Project in collaboration with the Alliance for Educational Justice released *We Came to Learn: A Call to Action for Police Free Schools*.<sup>8</sup> The 2018 report and accompanying toolkit chronicle the nation's violent history of school policing and detail the harm Black students and other students of color experience when forced to interact with law enforcement in schools throughout the country. This brief builds on that history of school policing by reviewing the rise of school

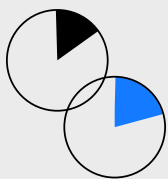
district police departments as well as their structures and impact.

## WE REVIEW THE FORCES—INCLUDING POLITICAL, BUDGETARY, AND NARRATIVE—THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE RISE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS.

This brief refutes the misconceptions about the differences in policing structures, including that school district police departments are “special” police. A cop is a cop – and school

district police **perpetrate the same harms against young people as any other police.** Previously not available in one place due to a lack of publicly accessible information about these departments, this brief offers the first-ever compilation of the over 400 school district police departments across the country, and that they disproportionately harm Black and Latine students. Finally, it reaffirms the call to action from young people and organizers for Police Free Schools, and warns that school district police departments ignore these demands and in fact, can be even harder to dismantle.

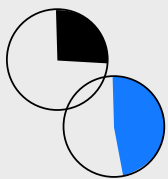
# SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS TARGET BLACK AND LATINE STUDENTS, FAIL TO KEEP THEM SAFE, AND ACTUALLY CAUSE VIOLENCE.



**These departments police over 7.9 million students.** While Black students make up 15 percent of students in public schools across the country, they make up 21 percent of students in districts with their own police departments.



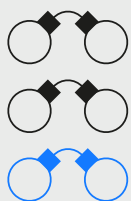
**Black students with disabilities comprise 2.7 percent** of districts with school police departments, but 8.8 percent of those referred to law enforcement and 9.6 percent of students arrested in those districts.



**Latine students are even more disproportionately represented by these departments** – they make up 27 percent of national student enrollment and 46 percent of enrollment in districts with school police departments.



**School district police regularly assault students.** For example, in Clark County, Nevada, the fourth-largest school district police department, for example, police routinely pepper spray the district students.

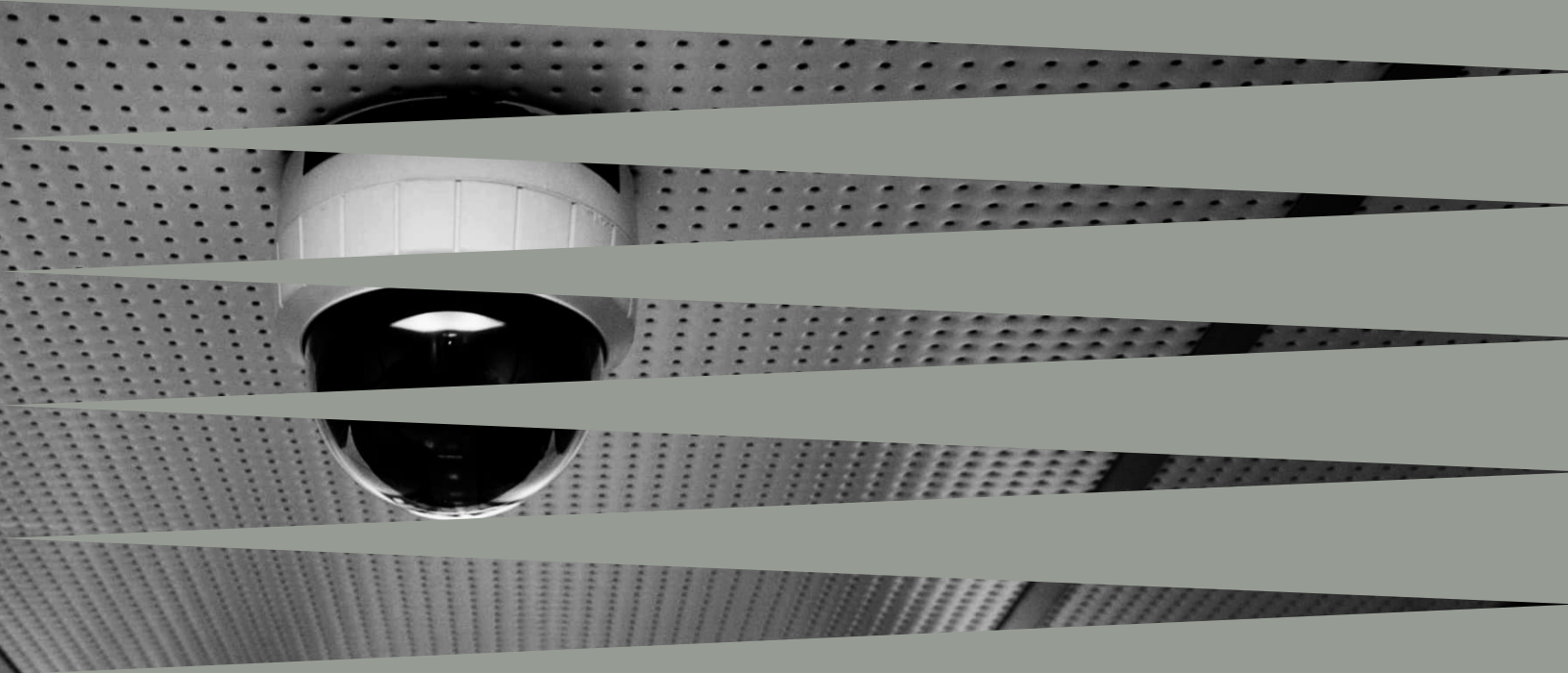


**Black students make up 32 percent of those referred to law enforcement** in districts with their own police departments, and 34 percent of those arrested – over 1.5 times higher than their enrollment.

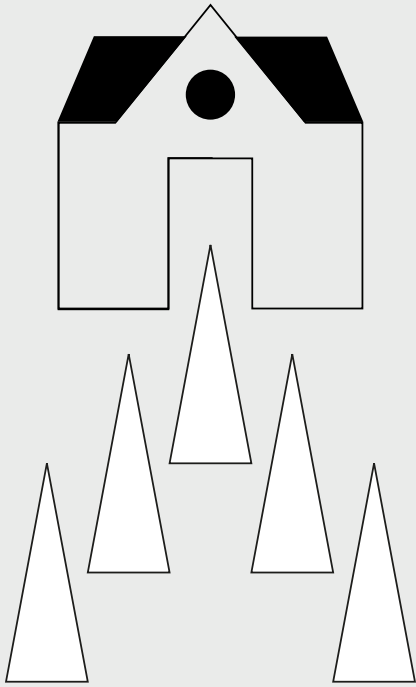


**School district police departments fail to keep students safe** – Uvalde is the latest tragic example of this.

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# **BRIEF HISTORY OF SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS**



# THE FOUNDING OF SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS OFTEN DEPENDS ON THE POLITICAL CONDITIONS AT THE TIME OF THEIR ESTABLISHMENT.

Some school police departments began with the placement of one officer or a school safety division in a district. One early example is the Indianapolis Public Schools district, which hired one “special investigator” in 1939 and then rebranded as “watchmen” in 1952 when the investigator began to supervise a loosely organized group of police—all while the Ku Klux Klan controlled the

school board.<sup>9</sup> In 1970, the group became the Indianapolis Public School Police.<sup>10</sup> In Los Angeles, a security unit was created in 1948 to patrol schools under the pretense of protecting school property during integration, later becoming the Los Angeles School Police Department—now the country’s largest school district police department.

## FEDERAL FUNDING AND INFRASTRUCTURE HAVE PLAYED A FORMATIVE ROLE IN RAMPING UP SCHOOL POLICING AND ENCOURAGING THE CREATION OF SCHOOL POLICE DEPARTMENTS.

Since the late 1960s, federal policies and programs have incentivized police in schools and cast young people of color as delinquent and predatory.<sup>11</sup> The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, also known as the 1994 Crime Bill,

and its ensuing federal spending were particularly important in fueling school police departments. The legislation championed by then-Senator Joe Biden and signed into law by former President Bill Clinton instated harsh criminal sentences and penalties and expanding federal influence over police departments by creating the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) within the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

Immediately after the mass shooting at Columbine High School in April 1999, one of the first and largest school shootings to draw national media attention, the DOJ created its COPS

in Schools grant program within the COPS office. COPS in Schools awarded over \$750 million to more than 3,000 law enforcement agencies over the next six years,<sup>12</sup> including to school districts that planned to expand or establish their own law enforcement agencies. For example, Florida’s Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the third-largest school district police department, renamed its Division of School Police the Miami-Dade School District Police Department in 2000, and later that year became one of a few law enforcement agencies to receive millions in COPS in Schools funding. This resulted in the significant expansion of the district’s department.<sup>13</sup>

Other districts, such as Dumas Independent School District in Texas, established entire departments from COPS funding in the wake of Columbine.<sup>14</sup> These funds covered three years of salaries, but required districts to pick up the bill after the grant ended—seeding the establishment of these departments that districts then decided to maintain (and fund) over time.<sup>15</sup> While this specific program ended in 2005, the COPS office continues to fund police in schools through other programs, including the COPS Hiring Program.<sup>16</sup>

## TODAY, SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS ARE MOST LIKELY TO REPORT A FEDERAL GRANT AS A FUNDING SOURCE, COMPARED TO LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES EMPLOYING SROS

(eight percent of school district police departments, compared to less than five percent of all agencies).<sup>17</sup>



### States have also fueled the growth of – or even established themselves – school district police departments.

In 1967, following a surge in student protests around the country, Baltimore City effectively created a school security division by requesting that 25 police officers patrol the schools. Decades later, in 1991, the Baltimore City School Police Force was established by the Maryland legislature through House Bill 732, giving school police full police powers in Baltimore.<sup>18</sup>



In Texas, state legislators expanded the state’s school-to-prison pipeline and the practice of school policing in 1995 by adopting Chapter 37 of the Education Code. School finance legislation passed in 1993 required this 1995 overhaul of the Education Code. The majority of the 1995 plan focused on deregulating local school districts’ management and curriculum but required stricter school discipline statewide.<sup>19</sup> The legislation codified zero tolerance policies, classified age-appropriate forms of student behavior as Class C misdemeanors, and codified parameters for school districts to employ School Resource Officers (SROs), commission their own school police departments or combine these practices for even more extensive school policing.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. Department of Justice’s investigation of the Uvalde shooting noted a substantial increase in school district police departments in 2018, following the school shooting in Parkland, Florida. In 2023, Texas went even further and passed legislation requiring armed security in every public school.<sup>21</sup>

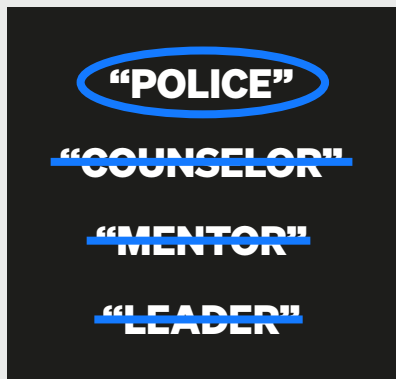


Florida has long encouraged the presence of police on school campuses, with some school districts having their own police departments as early as the 1950s.<sup>22</sup> Though police patrols in Florida schools predate the mass shooting era, following the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018 the Florida legislature required school districts to increase security by mandating more policing of school campuses.<sup>23</sup> Some school districts hired more officers contracted from local law enforcement agencies, while others decided to create their own.<sup>24</sup> Florida currently has at least 17 active school district police departments.<sup>25</sup>

In 2022, Kentucky introduced legislation to allow school districts to establish their own police departments. While this legislation did not pass, the state now requires at least one armed, full-time SRO at each school.<sup>26</sup>



Efforts to counter and stifle the evidence of the harms of school policing by “rebranding” also play a role in the growth of these departments.



For example, in discussions about establishing a school district police department in West Independent School District in Texas in summer 2021, the District’s safety and security coordinator noted, “Some of the parents, they may have concerns as to why they need an ISD police department, I want to assure them

# SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS OFTEN FALSELY PORTRAY THEMSELVES AS UNIQUE POLICE DEPARTMENTS WITH SPECIFIC CAPACITIES TO “SERVE” YOUNG PEOPLE AND KEEP THEM SAFE.

that I don’t expect any major issues in the school district...I’m here more as a mentor, a counselor, as a leader for these kids to let them know that law enforcement is here for you because I know the way society is and the climate is not the greatest, but I know we can bridge that gap.”<sup>27</sup>

In another example, the director of the Indiana Association of SROs claimed that “part of the problem in Indiana lies in the different models schools use to get police into their buildings...it’s harder to ensure officers are properly trained if they aren’t employed by a school district.”<sup>28</sup>

## AS WE DOCUMENT IN THIS BRIEF, HOWEVER, SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS PRESENT THE SAME HARMS AS ALL OTHER FORMS OF POLICE IN SCHOOLS AND IN COMMUNITIES.

In fact, it is reported that the vast majority of agencies employing school police require conflict resolution and de-escalation training, but school police continue to assault, harm, and criminalize the young people in the schools they police. For example, Houston Independent School District (HISD) Police Department, the second-largest school district police department in the country,<sup>29</sup> states that it “works to ensure students and staff are safe and the community is confident in the safety of the district.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, they expanded their unit to promote “relational policing” and efforts to promote “positive youth-police

dialogues”<sup>31</sup> after a boost of funding<sup>32</sup> – even investing in a “comfort dog”.<sup>33</sup>

Despite these public relations efforts, school policing data and policing practices show that students have experienced harm, not relationships, from this department. In 2017-18, Black students made up 24 percent of the HISD population, yet accounted for 43 percent of referrals to law enforcement and school-based arrests.<sup>34</sup> HISD has the highest number of school-based referrals in Texas for terroristic threats—a vague, subjective misdemeanor that often results in disparate enforcement.<sup>35</sup>

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# **SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENT STRUCTURES**

# PRIMARY SCHOOL POLICE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES:



## SRO unit within local law enforcement agency

- Contract with school district
- Chain of command: law enforcement agency leadership



## Local law enforcement agency

- Contract with school district
- Chain of command: law enforcement agency leadership



## School district police department

- Employees of school district
- Chain of command: Chief of police reports to district superintendent/school board

## SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS OPERATE AS THEIR OWN LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES.

A department has its own organizational budget, **diverting scarce resources away from student supports and learning**, approved by the school board. The distinguishing factor of this model is that the school district hires and oversees school police officers and directly sets policy.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the school police unit is accountable to the school district rather than an outside law enforcement authority. These policing structures share more similarities than differences. Despite differences in hierarchy, the staff are police officers; a cop is a cop. School district police perpetrate the same harms and serve the same functions to surveil and patrol as police in communities. Today, school district police departments

– often with substantial funding from the local, state, and federal levels – can resemble traditional police departments, including K-9 teams, gang suppression units, crisis response teams, traffic safety, and incident reporting hotlines.<sup>37</sup>

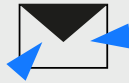
Establishing a district police department can require both state and federal approval and oversight, providing multiple points to intervene in the establishment of these departments. The officers generally have the same powers as other police in their state, including to make arrests and carry firearms.<sup>38</sup> Other policies can vary significantly from department to department, including on use of force and criminalization of students.<sup>39</sup>



**In Florida for example, the current process of establishing a school district police department is:**



District School Board votes to establish a police department.



District School Board notifies the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) of the vote and cites statutory authority to establish a police department



FDLE contacts the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to request the FBI to issue the Originating Agency Identifier number and establish the police department.



**The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) requires the following process for state approval:<sup>40</sup>**



School District reaches out to TCOLE and receives an application.



The district must submit all paperwork and demonstrate that they meet the requirements including statutory authority, policies, and services or equipment deemed necessary, such as dispatch and evidence storage.



TCOLE assesses the application and conducts an onsite visit.



TCOLE approves creation of the agency and activates it in its database.

Although all structures result in the harms of school policing, school district police departments present some specific challenges and harms. One consequence of school districts directly hiring officers is the heightened potential of sharing confidential student information with law enforcement,

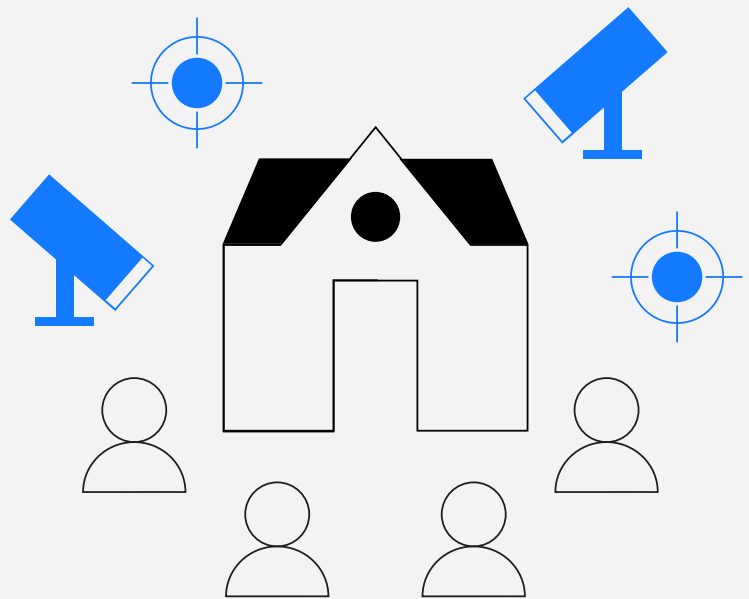
including agencies outside of the school police department. Whether or not officers qualify as “school officials” under federal law can impact their access to student records that would otherwise be confidential. Districts often more easily grant school police officers access to these records if they

are classified as “school officials.”<sup>41</sup> Although surveillance is an issue in districts across the country, school district police classified as “school officials” will typically have easier access to student information, opening up the potential for bad actors to abuse their access to student records.<sup>42</sup>

A survey of Texas school district police departments by the ACLU found that one department acknowledged it may **“integrate its public safety video surveillance system with other technology,”** including

**“INCIDENT MAPPING, CRIME ANALYSIS, LICENSE PLATE RECOGNITION, FACIAL RECOGNITION,” AND OTHER ANALYTICAL SYSTEMS.**

Another department, Austin ISD, maintains a gang intelligence database.<sup>43</sup>



## SCHOOL SURVEILLANCE PRACTICES

School surveillance practices compounded with easier access to student records only create a higher likelihood of surveillance occurring outside of schools as well.<sup>44</sup> School district police departments are required to conduct social media monitoring of students at a higher rate than other local law enforcement agencies working in schools—<sup>45</sup> they are also much more likely to allow police to interview students without first obtaining parental permission, and are more than twice as likely to carry handheld metal detectors as local police agency SROs. As policing continues to evolve to include methods like the digital surveillance of students, this threatens to disproportionately criminalize Black students and other students of color.

While some school district police officers fall under Fraternal Order of Police unions or form their own, others are members of the same unions representing teachers or other school staff, such as the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers.<sup>46</sup> For example, the Texas State Teachers Association offers “Guards/Police/Security” as a category under which individuals can register. This arrangement threatens the inroads that youth organizers have made in mobilizing their teachers through their unions to oppose school police and instead call for investments that support students’ wellbeing.<sup>47</sup>

# SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENT TRENDS

**Not Safety, but Targeting  
& Harming Black and  
Latine Students**

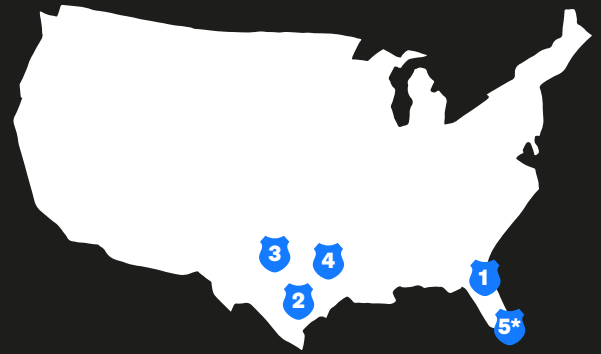


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## SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACT BLACK AND LATINE STUDENTS.

The prevalence of school police departments has more than doubled over the past two decades. By 2000, there were 162 school district police departments across the country,<sup>48</sup> by 2018 there were approximately 300,<sup>49</sup> and there are currently at least 410 school district police departments in the U.S.<sup>50</sup>

**Their growth continues, including recent establishment of these departments:**



1. Clay County School District Police Department, Florida (2019)<sup>51</sup>
2. Lake Travis Unified School District Police Department, Texas (2020)<sup>52</sup>
3. Amarillo Independent School District Police Department, Texas (2021)<sup>53</sup>
4. Pleasant Grove Independent School District, Texas (2021)<sup>54</sup>
5. \*Districts continue to consider establishing police forces, with Broward County, Florida most recently debating the switch<sup>55</sup> in 2023.

## TODAY THESE DEPARTMENTS POLICE OVER 7.9 MILLION STUDENTS.

And while Black students make up 15 percent of students in public schools across the country,<sup>56</sup> they make up 21 percent of students in districts with their own police departments. Latine students are even more disproportionately represented by these departments – they make up 27 percent of national student enrollment and 46 percent of enrollment in districts with school police departments.<sup>57</sup>

## SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY LOCATED IN THE FOLLOWING STATES:

State	Number of District Police Depts.
Texas	308
California	20
Pennsylvania	18
Georgia	18
Florida	17
Indiana	14

**TEXAS AND CALIFORNIA ALSO HAVE THE HIGHEST STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN DISTRICTS WITH POLICE DEPARTMENTS:**

State	Enrollment in Districts with Police Depts.
Texas	3,051,499
California	1,135,923
Georgia	807,477
Florida	173,412
Indiana	129,909
Pennsylvania	81,620

**TEXAS LEADS IN THE PROPORTION OF ITS SCHOOL DISTRICTS THAT HAVE POLICE DEPARTMENTS, FOLLOWED BY FLORIDA:**

State	Number of District Police Depts	Number of Total School Districts	Proportion of School Districts with Police Depts.
Florida	17	77	22%
Texas	308	1,235	25%
Georgia	14	241	5.8%
Indiana	12	435	2.8%
Pennsylvania	18	787	2.3%
California	20	2,120	0.94%

Districts of all sizes have their own police departments, from small, rural districts to urban, larger districts.<sup>58</sup> For states with only one school district police department, this district tends to be located within the states’ major urban center which typically also has a greater proportion of residents of color. These cities include Baltimore, Boston, Detroit, and Las Vegas. For example, Baltimore City Public Schools are

79% Black while just 34% of Maryland students are Black, and Detroit Public Schools Community District is 83% Black while only 18% of Michigan students are Black. The Baltimore City School Police Force has been the subject of a federal investigation that found that it is an “auxiliary force” to the Baltimore Police Department, and several public instances of abuse against students.<sup>59</sup> It is also currently being investigated for its use of

overtime pay of its police officers – including nearly \$2 million in overtime pay during a pandemic school year.<sup>60</sup> In Detroit, the school district police department has only expanded, while students sued the state for depriving them of access to literacy, citing classrooms without heat in the winter, rodent-infected schools, undrinkable water, unqualified and absent educators, and outdated or inappropriate textbooks.<sup>61</sup>

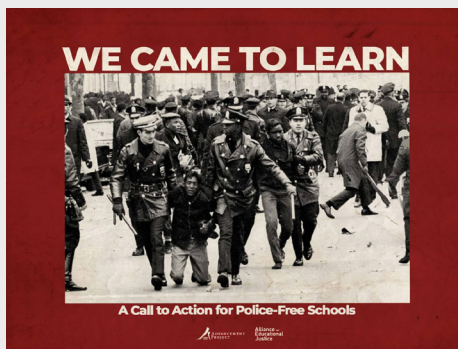


## BLACK STUDENTS MAKE UP 32 PERCENT OF THOSE REFERRED TO LAW ENFORCEMENT IN DISTRICTS WITH THEIR OWN POLICE DEPARTMENTS,

and 34 percent of those arrested – over 1.5 times higher than their enrollment. While the disparities are shameful across all school districts – Black students comprise 28.7 percent of all students referred to law enforcement and 31.6 percent of those arrested across the country – the disparity is worse in districts with their own school police departments. Black students disproportionately attend schools

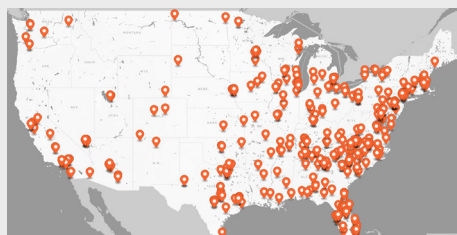
with district police departments and face disproportionate arrests and law enforcement referrals in those schools.<sup>62</sup> In Indianapolis, Black students were seven times more likely to be arrested than white students,<sup>63</sup> and in Los Angeles, the neighborhoods with the highest concentration of school police arrests and citations are predominantly poor, racially segregated Black and Latinx neighborhoods in the South Central region<sup>64</sup> – often using tactics to “preemptively criminalize students... [and gather] information about where students live, whom they associate with, their family histories with policing and incarceration, and overall reputations on campus and around the surrounding neighborhood”.

Students with disabilities make up 11 percent of the student population in districts with school police departments, but 24 percent of students arrested and referred to law enforcement in those districts. The disproportionate punishment is even more glaring for Black students with disabilities: these youth comprise 2.7 percent of districts with school police departments, but 8.8 percent of those referred to law enforcement and 9.6 percent of students arrested in those districts. The overall arrest rate for school districts with their own police departments is only 1.3 percent,<sup>65</sup> demonstrating the extent to which all these students face extraordinarily high rates of criminalization compared to their peers.



In addition to the harms of arrests and referrals to law enforcement, school police forces violently assault and attack students. Youth and intergenerational organizers created the #AssaultAt campaign in response to an assault of a young Black woman in Spring Valley, South Carolina recorded on video in 2015. (For more, see the *We Came to Learn Case Study*:

[#AssaultAtSpringValley & The Alliance for Educational Justice](#).)<sup>66</sup> #AssaultAt has since exposed the risk and pattern of police violence facing Black students and other students of color in schools – just as assaults by police threaten youth of color on the streets. The [#AssaultAt Map](#)<sup>67</sup> includes a total of over 300 incidents of school police violence against students since 2007. These include assaults in districts with their own police departments: in Clark



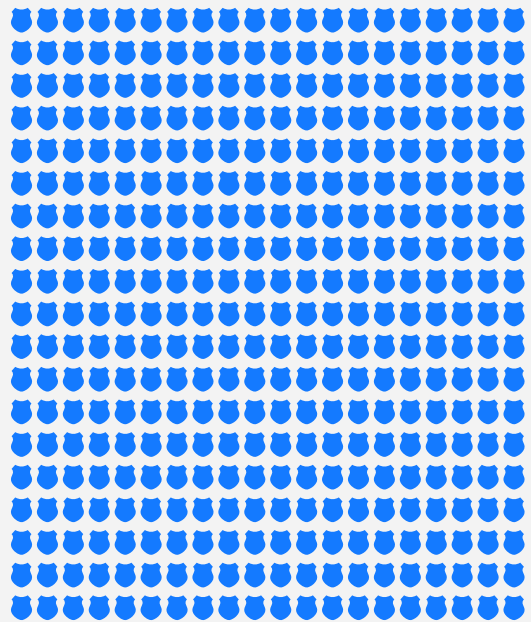
County, Nevada, the fourth-largest school district police department, for example, has seen repeated instances of use of force and pepper spraying of students at the hands of their police.<sup>68</sup> School police assaults are not limited to Clark County – other districts with their own police departments, including Baltimore, MD, Duval County, FL, Houston, TX, and Dallas, TX, employ police who have assaulted young people at school. These traumatic assaults on students are emblematic of the broader violence in the practice of school policing that surveils, detains, arrests, and hurts young people.

# SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS DO NOT KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE: UVALDE INVESTIGATION

Following the tragic 2022 school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, the U.S. Department of Justice conducted an investigation that highlights failings at the local, state, and federal law enforcement levels. The resulting *Critical Incident Review: Active Shooter at Robb Elementary* is a 600-page report detailing how nearly 380 law enforcement officers responded to, and failed to stop, an active shooter that killed 19 children and two teachers. The report notes that school district leadership created its own police department in 2018 with the “rationale that students and staff should be policed by their own officers as opposed to an outside law enforcement agency.”

The department was established with a chief, an assistant chief, and three police officers. They were all required to complete the state’s “School-Based Law Enforcement Training Program.” The Uvalde school district’s police department had many of the measures typically touted as ‘improving’ school safety: a threat assessment team, an emergency alert system, policies on locking exterior and interior doors, an active shooter response protocol, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Uvalde Police Department—among others.<sup>69</sup> All of these measures failed the children and community of Robb Elementary. What’s more – the investigation revealed the true function of policing in the district.

Of 267 “stakeholder” interviews DOJ conducted, nearly 120 were of law enforcement officers—and while the report is a glaring example of the abject failures of policing infrastructure to keep us safe, it concludes that the solution is to actually expand and reform this failed system. Families impacted by this tragedy discussed their experiences of being policed themselves rather than having the police protect their children. One person recounted a horrifying moment as “[o]ne mother was handcuffed by the U.S. Marshals, who accused her of being uncooperative regarding where to park her car and remaining outside the law enforcement perimeter.” Right after being released from the handcuffs, “she ran and got her two children out of the school and to safety. She



**380 LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS  
COULD NOT PREVENT THE DEATHS  
OF 19 STUDENTS AND 2 TEACHERS.**

indicated that law enforcement “was more aggressive with keeping us parents out than going in to get the shooter.” One parent recounted that the “[p]olice were very aggressive in moving parents away from the school. There was a lot of confusion and no clear direction.”<sup>70</sup>

The Uvalde investigation contributes to the extensive evidence that school police do not keep us safe – their function is not safety. Yet, the report recommends more specialized equipment for police, establishment of safety committees that include police, and better planning in the establishment of school district police departments. It further recommends better coordination between school district police departments and school communities, accreditation processes for these departments, and stronger memorandums of understanding.<sup>71</sup> Research has found that school police do not deter violence, and actually increase gun-related incidents.<sup>72</sup> These recommendations threaten to send even *more* money to a failed system, one that does not stop violence, but instead causes it.

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# **YOUNG PEOPLE'S FIGHT TO ABOLISH SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS**

With the dramatic rise of law enforcement in our schools has come significant physical, educational, psychological, and emotional harm to students as well as financial cost to families, school districts, and the public.

## IN RESPONSE, YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE DEMANDED A TRANSFORMATION TO POLICE FREE SCHOOLS.

But many of these districts reversed course as students returned to school in-person following COVID-19-related school closures. Two campaigns in particular have paved the way for defunding or abolition of school district police departments.

One campaign, led by the Labor Community Strategy Center and other Los Angeles based organizing groups, won an initial fight to defund

the Los Angeles school district police department but continues in its fight to abolish the department.<sup>73</sup> The second campaign, led by the Black Organizing Project, organized the unanimous passage of the George Floyd Resolution, disbanding Oakland Unified School District's police department after a decade-long fight. They are now in the implementation phase of their campaign.



**The Los Angeles Unified School District Police Department (“LASPD”) was initially established in 1948 as a security unit charged with surveilling and guarding school buildings and property in neighborhoods that were considered to be “increasingly integrated” following the migration of Black families to the North and West as they fled violent repression in the South.<sup>74</sup>**

However, in 1983, the unit expanded into a fully functioning school district police department, rising to become the largest independent school police department in the nation with over 400 members, including sworn law enforcement officers, non-sworn school safety officers, and civilian support staff.<sup>75</sup>

The Labor Community Strategy Center (“the Center”) was founded in 1989 and is a Think Tank/Act Tank for regional, national and international movement building. The Center has a long history of fighting to end the criminalization of young people, from fighting to end truancy offenses to demilitarizing the district's police department. The Center, in partnership with Black Lives Matter LA and Students Deserve, worked with

Brothers Son Selves, United Teachers of LA, and Inner City Struggle to develop a strategic plan to defund the LASPD by \$35 million in 2021—50 percent of its \$70 million budget—with the intent of defunding 75 percent by 2022, and 90 percent by 2023.<sup>76</sup>

In 2020, organizers across the coalition groups had strategy meetings on how to sway the votes of enough board members to win their defund goals.<sup>77</sup> At a school board meeting in June 2020, 50 students testified in-person about their experiences with school police and their demands for police free schools, while another hundred testified virtually.<sup>78</sup> On June 30th, 2020, the school board issued a late-night final vote after 13 hours of testimony and deliberation.

## YOUNG PEOPLE WON 4 TO 3,



## CUTTING THE LASPD'S BUDGET BY 35 PERCENT,



**\$25 million<sup>79</sup>**

## AND REINVESTING INTO BLACK STUDENTS THROUGH ITS BLACK STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT PLAN (“BSAP”).<sup>80</sup>

## BSAP IS INTENDED TO REIMAGINE SCHOOL SAFETY AND PROVIDE SUPPORT TO BLACK STUDENTS

who have been both historically and disproportionately targeted and criminalized by school police, using funds divested from the LASPD.<sup>81</sup> Another approximately \$100 million was added in 2021—ultimately investing over \$120 million into Black students in LA.<sup>82</sup> Approximately \$20 million of the funds invested into the BSAP are for Community Based

Safety Pilot Programs, including programs such as violence prevention, intervention, and de-escalation, community based safe passage, restorative practices, among others that will lay a strong foundation for Police-Free Schools in LA.<sup>83</sup> The BSAP is already showing promising results as School Climate Advocates positively shift the school atmosphere, creating a more welcoming, fun, and encouraging environment for students to learn.<sup>84</sup>

Students now have access to mental health counselors, psychiatric social workers, and restorative justice

teachers hired through BSAP.<sup>85</sup> In addition, midyear BSAP data from 2021-22 shows that district-wide English and math proficiency levels have increased, along with the number of students who are on track in their college preparatory classes. Meanwhile, rates of suspensions have decreased. This early data shows what is possible if the district fully divests from policing and invests in its students.<sup>86</sup> In 2022, the Police Free Schools LAUSD Coalition released its People’s Plan—a community vision for safe schools in LAUSD<sup>87</sup>—calling for the full dismantling of the LASPD and investment in youth.



**The Oakland Unified School District (“OUSD”) first established what became its school police department in 1957, following a period of time when many Black people fled the Jim Crow South and migrated to cities in the North and West in search of opportunity.<sup>88</sup>**

This was also true in places like the Bay Area following World War II,<sup>89</sup> as many Black migrants from the South settled in Oakland, increasing its Black population from 3 percent to 12 percent in a single decade<sup>90</sup> and from 8,500 to 159,000 in just four decades.<sup>91</sup> Oakland, much like the state of California, began to receive more pressure to integrate as a result of the boom in the Black population.<sup>92</sup> This pressure ignited fear among white residents and fueled the city’s response to criminalize and surveil potential “troublemakers.”<sup>93</sup>

In 1956, the Oakland school board approved \$5 million in funding to build a new high school to address issues of overcrowding at predominately Black high schools in the city.<sup>94</sup> However, Black parents would later discover that the school board implemented the school’s attendance boundaries to keep Black students out of the new fully resourced school, while continuing to underfund the overcrowded, predominately Black schools.<sup>95</sup> A year later, the same school board would vote to establish what became the district’s police force—to protect

district property from potential “delinquents” as the Black population continued to increase.<sup>96</sup> This force would later set the foundation for policing and surveillance at schools.

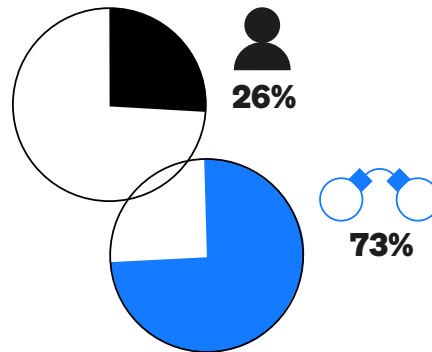
The Black Organizing Project (“BOP”) is an explicitly Black-led organization, birthed out of the Center for Third World Organizing—a racial justice movement training and resource center in Oakland. BOP’s work to end the criminalization and policing of Black youth in schools is grounded in and tied to the development of Black organizing infrastructure in Oakland.<sup>97</sup>



In 2011, an OUSD police officer murdered 20-year-old Raheim Brown in Oakland Hills as he sat in the passenger seat of a vehicle outside of a Skyline High School dance.<sup>98</sup> BOP understood that the murder of Raheim Brown by Oakland’s school district police was not an isolated incident—as school policing has always been part of the historically violent policing of Black communities.<sup>99</sup> BOP spent several months in the community conducting listening sessions, building relationships with community members and learning about the issues that were important to the Oakland community. The common themes were jobs, police violence, and education.

BOP launched its Bettering Our School System campaign (“BOSS”) in 2011 following the listening sessions, calling for the removal of police from Oakland Unified School District by 2020. And in June 2020, after almost 10 years of organizing to abolish policing in schools, BOP made history as one of the first organizing groups in the country to successfully remove police from their school district and the first to abolish an entire school district police department – nearly a decade after the murder of Raheim Brown. This win was built on lots of milestones in the BOSS campaign, including winning a policy to file complaints against school police after identifying no such process, limiting the use of exclusionary discipline for the subjective offense of “willful defiance,” and requiring more data transparency from the police department.

The data revealed that despite Black students being only 26 percent of the population they accounted for 73 percent of school-based arrests.<sup>100</sup>



BOP used this data, as well as personal storytelling, as part of its campaign.

### **BOP ALSO USED THE BUDGET PROTESTS, AND PROPOSED TEACHER PAY CUTS, AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD SOLIDARITY**

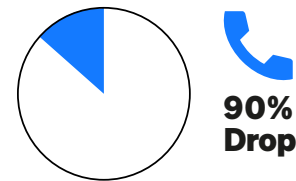
with teachers around the budget—pointing out that the district spends \$6.5 million in funding for policing.<sup>101</sup> BOP ultimately won support from the local teacher’s union.

In March 2020, the OUSD school board heard BOP’s People’s Plan for Police Free Schools resolution for the first time. Students, parents, educators, and community members packed the meeting and testified in support of the resolution, but it failed by one vote. Shortly after the police murder of George Floyd in May 2020, more community members began to reach out to BOP, asking how they could support. The resolution,

reintroduced as the George Floyd Resolution to Eliminate the Oakland School Police Department, was considered again by the school board on June 24, 2020, with hundreds of people joining to testify virtually.

### **IT PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The work ahead for BOP is in implementation of their win -- but initial data found that within the first nine months of Police Free Schools, calls to police dropped 90 percent in the district.



The detailed plan developed with the district for implementing

### **THE GEORGE FLOYD RESOLUTION PROVIDES A BLUEPRINT OF WHAT IS POSSIBLE WITH FULL IMPLEMENTATION.<sup>103</sup>**

**ADVANCEMENT  
PROJECT**



**CONCLUSION: MOVE  
TO DEFEND AGAINST &  
DISMANTLE SCHOOL  
DISTRICT POLICE  
DEPARTMENTS**

School districts and policymakers must listen to the demands of young people: end the establishment of school district police departments and dismantle existing school district police departments. While the Uvalde tragedy highlighted that the true function of policing is not safety, we still saw many of the same harmful responses that have followed other school shootings – increased funding and expanded school security and policing. The tragic

example of the Uvalde school district police department failing to protect, combined with the harmful impact of these departments on Black and Latine students across the country, as outlined in this brief, should be used to stop and reverse the spread of these departments. Earlier this year, in January 2024, the Broward County Public School District in Florida rejected a proposal to create its own police force after extensive opposition from the Broward community.<sup>104</sup>

**WE MUST HOLD THE GROUND IN LOS ANGELES AND OAKLAND, AND WORK TO DEFEND AGAINST, DIVEST FROM, AND DISMANTLE ALL SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS AT THE SAME TIME AS WE WORK TO ABOLISH ALL SCHOOL POLICING.**



## **FOR THOSE WITH SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENTS,**

- **Document the harms in your school district police department (including student referrals, arrests, and assaults on students)**
- **Resist reforms proposed by the DOJ investigation that will make these departments harder to dismantle, including agreements between school district police departments and local law enforcement**
- **Share the stories of young people in Oakland and Los Angeles who have made progress towards real safety by defunding or dismantling their departments**



## **IF YOU DO NOT YET HAVE A SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENT,**

use the harms in this brief to prevent the establishment of a school district police department.

- **Debunk the myth that school district police departments keep students safe**
- **Explain that they target and disproportionately harm Black and Latine students**
- **Share the stories of young people in Oakland and Los Angeles who have been able to use education funds to support young people in their districts, showing early signs of the positive impact that real investment in young people's education, instead of their criminalization, can have**



# APPENDIX

State	District Name
AR	Fort Smith School District
CA	Apple Valley Unified
CA	Baldwin Park Unified
CA	Clovis Unified
CA	Compton Unified
CA	Elk Grove Unified
CA	Fontana Unified
CA	Hesperia Unified
CA	Huntington Beach Union High School District
CA	Inglewood Unified
CA	Kern High
CA	Los Angeles Unified
CA	Norwalk-La Mirada Unified
CA	Oakland Unified
CA	San Bernardino City Unified
CA	San Diego Unified
CA	Santa Ana Unified
CA	Snowline Joint Unified
CA	Stockton Unified
CA	Twin Rivers Unified
CA	Victor Valley Union High
FL	Alachua
FL	Bay
FL	Brevard
FL	Broward
FL	Citrus
FL	Clay County
FL	Dade
FL	Duval
FL	Hillsborough
FL	Jackson
FL	Leon
FL	Nassau
FL	Orange

State	District Name
FL	Palm Beach
FL	Pinellas
FL	Putnam
FL	Sarasota
FL	Washington
GA	Atlanta Public Schools
GA	Bibb County
GA	Cherokee County School District
GA	Clarke County
GA	Clayton County
GA	Cobb County
GA	Columbia County
GA	Dekalb County
GA	Douglas County
GA	Fulton County
GA	Glynn County
GA	Gwinnett County
GA	Richmond County
GA	Savannah-Chatham County
IL	Peoria Sd 150
IN	Brownsburg Community School Corp
IN	Carmel Clay Schools
IN	Center Grove Community School Corp
IN	Evansville Vanderburgh School Corp
IN	Franklin Township Com Sch Corp
IN	Indiana School For The Deaf
IN	Indianapolis Public Schools
IN	Lebanon Community School Corp
IN	M S D Pike Township
IN	M S D Warren Township
IN	Monroe County Community Sch Corp
IN	Prairie Heights Community Sch Corp
KS	Auburn Washburn
KS	Kansas City

# APPENDIX (CONT.)

State	District Name
KS	Shawnee Mission Pub Sch
KY	Fayette County
KY	Montgomery County
MA	Boston
MD	Baltimore City Public Schools
MI	Detroit Public Schools Community District
MO	Blue Springs R-Iv
MO	Liberty 53
MO	Springfield R-Xii
MS	Wayne Co School Dist
NC	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
NC	Moore County Schools
NV	Clark County School District Police Department
OK	Jenks
OK	Putnam City
OK	Tulsa
PA	Altoona Area Sd
PA	Bangor Area Sd
PA	Central Dauphin Sd
PA	Coatesville Area Sd
PA	Gateway Sd
PA	Highlands Sd
PA	Mars Area Sd
PA	Nazareth Area Sd
PA	North Hills Sd
PA	Northwestern Lehigh Sd
PA	Pleasant Valley Sd
PA	Plum Borough Sd
PA	Quaker Valley Sd
PA	Selinsgrove Area Sd
PA	Spring-Ford Area Sd
PA	Upper Saint Clair Sd
PA	West Jefferson Hills Sd
PA	York City Sd

State	District Name
TX	Aldine Isd
TX	Aledo Isd
TX	Alief Isd
TX	Alvarado Isd
TX	Alvin Isd
TX	Amarillo Isd
TX	Angleton Isd
TX	Anna Isd
TX	Aransas County Isd
TX	Argyle Independent School District
TX	Arp Isd
TX	Atlanta Isd
TX	Aubrey Isd
TX	Austin Isd
TX	Avery Isd
TX	Azle Isd
TX	Barbers Hill Isd
TX	Bastrop Isd
TX	Bay City Isd
TX	Beaumont Isd
TX	Beeville Isd
TX	Bells Isd
TX	Ben Bolt-Palito Blanco Isd
TX	Bland Isd
TX	Blooming Grove Isd
TX	Boerne Isd
TX	Bonham Isd
TX	Brazosport Isd
TX	Bridge City Isd
TX	Broadus Isd
TX	Brownsboro Isd
TX	Brownsville Isd
TX	Bullard Isd
TX	Buna Isd

# APPENDIX (CONT.)

State	District Name
TX	Burkburnett Isd
TX	Calhoun County Isd
TX	Canton Isd
TX	Canutillo Isd
TX	Carrizo Springs Cisd
TX	Carthage Isd
TX	Castleberry Isd
TX	Cedar Hill Isd
TX	Celina Isd
TX	Center Isd
TX	Center Point Isd
TX	Chapel Hill Isd
TX	Childress Isd
TX	China Spring Isd
TX	Chisum Isd
TX	City View Isd
TX	Cleveland Isd
TX	Coldspring-Oakhurst Cisd
TX	Coleman Isd
TX	Columbia-Brazoria Isd
TX	Comal Isd
TX	Commerce Isd
TX	Community Isd
TX	Como-Pickton Cisd
TX	Connally Isd
TX	Conroe Isd
TX	Cooper Isd
TX	Corpus Christi Isd
TX	Corsicana Isd
TX	Crandall Isd
TX	Crowley Isd
TX	Crystal City Isd
TX	Cumby Isd
TX	Cushing Isd

State	District Name
TX	Cypress-Fairbanks Isd
TX	Daingerfield-Lone Star Isd
TX	Dalhart Isd
TX	Dallas Independent School District
TX	Damon Isd
TX	Danbury Isd
TX	Dekalb Isd
TX	Detroit Isd
TX	Diboll Isd
TX	Dimmitt Isd
TX	Dodd City Isd
TX	Donna Isd
TX	Dumas Isd
TX	Duncanville Isd
TX	Eagle Pass Isd
TX	East Central Isd
TX	Ector County Isd
TX	Edgewood Isd
TX	Edinburg Cisd
TX	El Paso Isd
TX	Ennis Isd
TX	Eustace Isd
TX	Evadale Isd
TX	Fairfield Isd
TX	Farmersville Isd
TX	Ferris Isd
TX	Floresville Isd
TX	Flour Bluff Isd
TX	Forney Isd
TX	Fort Bend Isd
TX	Fort Sam Houston Independent School District Police
TX	Frenship Isd
TX	Frost Isd

# APPENDIX (CONT.)

State	District Name
TX	Fruitvale Isd
TX	Gainesville Isd
TX	Galena Park Isd
TX	Galveston Isd
TX	Garrison Isd
TX	Gonzales Isd
TX	Goose Creek Cisd
TX	Granger Isd
TX	Greenville Isd
TX	Greenwood Isd
TX	Gunter Isd
TX	Hallsville Isd
TX	Harlandale Isd
TX	Harper Isd
TX	Hemphill Isd
TX	Hempstead Isd
TX	Highland Isd
TX	Highland Park Isd
TX	Hitchcock Isd
TX	Honey Grove Isd
TX	Houston Isd
TX	Howe Isd
TX	Hudson Isd
TX	Hughes Springs Isd
TX	Humble Isd
TX	Huntington Isd
TX	Hutto Isd
TX	Idalou Isd
TX	Ingram Isd
TX	Iowa Park Cisd
TX	Jacksonville Isd
TX	Jefferson Isd
TX	Jim Hogg County Isd

State	District Name
TX	Jonesboro Isd
TX	Joshua Isd
TX	Judson Isd
TX	Katy Isd
TX	Kaufman Isd
TX	Keene Isd
TX	Kemp Isd
TX	Kerens Isd
TX	Killeen Isd
TX	Klein Isd
TX	Krum Isd
TX	La Joya Independent School District
TX	La Vega Isd
TX	Lake Travis Isd
TX	Lamar Cisd
TX	Lancaster Isd
TX	Lapoynor Isd
TX	Laredo Isd
TX	Leon Isd
TX	Leonard Isd
TX	Liberty Hill Isd
TX	Liberty-Eylau Isd
TX	Lindale Isd
TX	Linden-Kildare Cisd
TX	Llano Isd
TX	London Isd
TX	Los Fresnos Cisd
TX	Lubbock Isd
TX	Lubbock-Cooper Isd
TX	Lufkin Isd
TX	Lyford Cisd
TX	Mabank Isd
TX	Madisonville Cisd

# APPENDIX (CONT.)

State	District Name
TX	Malakoff Isd
TX	Manor Isd
TX	Mansfield Isd
TX	Marlin Isd
TX	Marshall Isd
TX	Martinsville Isd
TX	Maud Isd
TX	Maypearl Isd
TX	Mcallen Isd
TX	Mcleod Isd
TX	Medina Isd
TX	Melissa Isd
TX	Mexia Isd
TX	Midland Isd
TX	Mildred Isd
TX	Miller Grove Isd
TX	Monahans-Wickett-Pyote Isd
TX	Montgomery Isd
TX	Mount Pleasant Isd
TX	Mount Vernon Isd
TX	Mullin Isd
TX	Nacogdoches Isd
TX	Needville Isd
TX	New Caney Isd
TX	Normangee Isd
TX	North East Isd
TX	North Hopkins Isd
TX	North Lamar Isd
TX	Northside Isd
TX	Palacios Isd
TX	Palestine Isd
TX	Paris Isd
TX	Pasadena Isd
TX	Pearsall Isd

State	District Name
TX	Pecos-Barstow-Toyah Isd
TX	Pewitt Cisd
TX	Pflugerville Isd
TX	Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Isd
TX	Pittsburg Isd
TX	Plainview Isd
TX	Pleasant Grove Isd
TX	Pleasanton Isd
TX	Point Isabel Isd
TX	Port Arthur Isd
TX	Post Isd
TX	Poteet Isd
TX	Presidio Isd
TX	Prosper Isd
TX	Queen City Isd
TX	Quinlan Isd
TX	Rains Isd
TX	Raymondville Isd
TX	Red Lick Isd
TX	Red Oak Isd
TX	Rice Cisd
TX	Richland Springs Isd
TX	Riesel Isd
TX	Rio Grande City Cisd
TX	Rio Hondo Isd
TX	Rivercrest Isd
TX	Robinson Isd
TX	Roma Isd
TX	Roosevelt Isd
TX	Ropes Isd
TX	Round Rock Isd
TX	Royal Isd
TX	Saltillo Isd
TX	Sam Rayburn Isd

# APPENDIX (CONT.)

State	District Name
TX	San Angelo Isd
TX	San Antonio Isd
TX	San Augustine Isd
TX	San Benito Cisd
TX	San Felipe-Del Rio Cisd
TX	Santa Fe Isd
TX	Santa Maria Isd
TX	Santa Rosa Isd
TX	Scurry-Rosser Isd
TX	Sealy Isd
TX	Seymour Isd
TX	Shallowater Isd
TX	Shelbyville Isd
TX	Shepherd Isd
TX	Sherman Isd
TX	Silsbee Isd
TX	Slaton Isd
TX	Socorro Isd
TX	Somerset Isd
TX	South San Antonio Isd
TX	Southside Isd
TX	Southwest Isd
TX	Splendora Isd
TX	Spring Branch Isd
TX	Spring Isd
TX	Springlake-Earth Isd
TX	Sulphur Bluff Isd
TX	Sulphur Springs Isd
TX	Sundown Isd
TX	Sweeny Isd
TX	Taft Isd
TX	Tahoka Isd
TX	Teague Isd
TX	Tenaha Isd

State	District Name
TX	Terrell Isd
TX	Texarkana Isd
TX	Tidehaven Isd
TX	Timpson Isd
TX	Trenton Isd
TX	Trinity Charter School
TX	Tyler Isd
TX	United Isd
TX	Uvalde Cisd
TX	Valley View Isd
TX	Van Isd
TX	Van Vleck Isd
TX	Venus Isd
TX	Vidor Isd
TX	Waco Isd
TX	Warren Isd
TX	Waskom Isd
TX	Webb Cisd
TX	West Isd
TX	West Orange-Cove Cisd
TX	West Rusk County Consolidated Isd
TX	Wharton Isd
TX	White Settlement Isd
TX	Whiteface Cisd
TX	Whitesboro Isd
TX	Whitewright Isd
TX	Wichita Falls Isd
TX	Wills Point Isd
TX	Winnsboro Isd
TX	Winona Isd
TX	Woden Isd
TX	Yantis Isd
TX	Ysleta Isd
TX	Zapata County Isd

# APPENDIX (CONT.)

State	District Name
TX	Zavalla Isd
UT	Granite District

## METHODOLOGY

We used a variety of sources to develop our database on school district police departments, because not all state law enforcement agencies publicly list all of their local and special police departments. We sent public records requests to every state law enforcement agency and/or the relevant agency in each state who may compile and oversee these departments, and included any responses we received.

In addition to these records requests, we also used Wikipedia to search each state's "List of Law Enforcement Agencies," and included departments from various states' lists of local law enforcement agencies after cross-checking their validity with the local district websites. We also added departments not included on Wikipedia from OpenPolice.org.<sup>105</sup> Finally, we added departments from

news searches. This analysis relies on 2017-18 CRDC data cleaned by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA. We identified 411 school district police departments but excluded two from CRDC analysis: Montebello Unified School District (CA) and Del Salle ISD (TX), because the raw data was not available from the CRDC source. Also, note that news sources indicate some school district police departments were authorized during or after the data collection timeframe of the 2017-18 CRDC, but there is no comprehensive source on the origin dates of these departments. However, the 2017-18 CRDC is the most recent federal data source to analyze demographics and trends in these departments. Our analysis was completed prior to the release of the CRDC 2020-21 data, which we are also not using due to potential COVID-19 pandemic related discrepancies in that dataset.

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