



ONE YEAR INTO POLICE-FREE SCHOOLS: THREE TRENDS TO KNOW



A year ago this month, the police-free schools movement ignited a historic wave of policy changes in school districts across the country. Following the murder of George Floyd, police-free schools campaigns emerged in numerous cities, demanding an end to School Resource Officer (SRO) programs and reinvestment of funding into programs that affirm and support students, particularly Black students and students of color. In city after city, organizers won these changes, and in doing so, challenged a 25-year trend favoring the expansion of police in schools. But what has happened to these successes over the past year?

1. Since June 2020, 38 school districts in 15 different states ended SRO programs.

An NEPC review of news reports and school board policies found that since June 2020, at least 38 school districts in 15 different states ended the use of SROs. Several states saw more than one district end SRO programs. In California, nine school districts voted to end SRO programs, including Sacramento, San Francisco, West Contra Costa, San Jose/Alum Rock Union, San Jose/East Side Union, Pajaro Valley, and Oakland, a district that operated its own police department. In Minnesota, where Minneapolis was the first district in the country to cut its SRO program last summer, three other districts in the state followed suit: Hopkins, St. Paul, and Winona. In Oregon, mayoral and school board decisions ended SRO programs in five districts, including Portland, David Douglas, Parkrose, Eugene, and Salem-Keizer. In other places, individual schools were left to decide on SRO programs. In Chicago, 17 local school councils voted to remove SROs.

2. 30 districts in 23 different states opted to retain SRO programs.

Nearly just as many districts opposed changes to SRO programs. Approximately 30 districts

in 23 different states considered but ultimately retained the use of police in schools. For instance, the Houston Independent School District, which operates its own police department, passed a budget with a \$3.5 million *increase* in HISD police officers' pay, despite youth and community advocates *calling* for the removal of police from schools. In Duluth, Minnesota, Superintendent John Magas *encouraged* the board to retain SROs, despite organized opposition from student and *civil rights groups*, a decision the board ultimately supported. Breaking stride with other California districts, San Diego Unified School District opted to retain SROs, *despite* organized opposition from students. Similar stories emerged on the east coast, where, in Maryland's Prince George's County, the school board recently opted to continue using SROs but did *agree* to reduce some of its 237-member security staff (while retaining SROs) and to invest in prevention and intervention programs for students. The Prince George's County decision came despite opposition from several organizing groups and state coalitions. In Chicago, *54 school campuses* chose to keep SROs.

3. In some districts, police-free wins show signs of reversal.

In several school districts, initial decisions to end SRO programs have been overturned. In November 2020, California's Fremont Unified School Board voted 3-2 to remove SROs but—with the election of two new school board members—*reversed* the decision in January 2021. In Kittery, Maine, the School Board in August 2020 decided to abstain from using an SRO position, but two weeks later *reversed* the decision, facing criticism that the decision was made without adequate community involvement. In Columbus, Ohio, talks to renew a contract between the Columbus school district and police department have *restarted* after a June 2020 decision to let the earlier contract expire. In Worthington, Ohio, the decision to remove full-time SROs from two high schools was met with opposition from parent groups who are *now* taking legal action against the district, seeking to reinstate SROs.

The summer of 2020 was significant in the ongoing fight for racial justice and police accountability. In education, demands to end SRO programs echoed across the country and spurred a historic wave of district policy change. Dozens of districts have taken action to reverse policies and programs that disproportionately harm Black students and students of color. At the same time, and in roughly the same number, another set of districts recommitted to the use of law enforcement in schools. Even where changes were made, some districts show signs of returning to policing tactics. Under President Biden's 2022 *budget request*, SRO programs will continue receiving federal support; with \$419 million allocated for hiring police officers, a two-fold increase from the year prior.

NEPC Resources on Discipline Policy

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