

Resolution on Policing in Schools

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is a nonpartisan organization committed to advocating for the civil rights, well-being, and educational and mental health needs of all students. As a longtime leader in efforts to improve school safety, we are committed to advancing school safety policies and practices that ensure the well-being of all students and staff, with particular attention to protecting the civil rights of those who experience inequity, racism, and injustice. These efforts must include acknowledgement and understanding of how the intersection of historical trauma, social justice, and the power and privilege embedded in our public institutions affect student experiences and behavior. The role of school police, including school resource officers, has been subject to increased scrutiny, and NASP acknowledges the challenges and potential harm that school law enforcement can cause, particularly for Black, Indigenous, and other students of color; students with disabilities; students in the LGBTQ+ community; and those with intersectional identities. The physical and psychological safety of all students must be prioritized in every school, and the potential effects on students and the school community must be carefully considered when deciding if and how to utilize school police.

For the purposes of this resolution, *school police* refers to all officers who are employed in any sworn law enforcement role, including school resources officers (SROs), deputies and police officers, school police departments, and armed school-based security personnel, regardless of whether the employer is a school district or a law enforcement agency. According to the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO, n.d.), *school resource officer* refers to a commissioned law enforcement officer who is “carefully selected, specially trained, and properly equipped ... to work in the school [setting],” as described in NASRO standards. In addition, for the purposes of this resolution, safety is defined as physical, psychological, and social-emotional well-being and the absence of threats to basic needs, which include shelter, bodily protection, belonging, social support, inclusion, and cultural appreciation (Williams, 1999). NASP acknowledges that safety can be a subjective experience based on the experiences (e.g., discrimination, systemic oppression and trauma, institutional violence) and perceptions of youth and families. When considering efforts to improve school safety, it is imperative that educators, school leaders, and other policy makers consider how safety is experienced by, and established for, all students. Failure to do so can lead to irreparable damage to the students whom school psychologists are meant to serve.

NASP’s short-term goal is to mitigate any harm associated with school-based policing. The long-term goals are to (a) eliminate the presence of policies and practices that perpetuate harm and (b) intentionally promote policies and practices that contribute to safe and inclusive learning environments. These goals can only be accomplished when there is an understanding of current institutional structures, including the fact that the use of school police is harmful to student well-being and compromises the safety of many students (Crosse et. al, 2022). We must also make a strong commitment to stop the damage while promoting healing and repair. The perspectives and viewpoints of minoritized students, families, and communities must be prioritized in all efforts to address educational inequities, develop solutions to address discipline disparities, and promote feelings of safety for all students. Importantly, school psychologists should actively engage in efforts to dismantle systemic racism in education and protect the right of students to be safe in schools. Schools and districts must: (a) prioritize the establishment of a strong, equitable, and culturally responsive multitiered system of supports that addresses students’ academic, behavioral, and mental health needs; (b) reduce

surveillance of students and overhardening of school campuses; and (c) ensure ongoing professional development for all school personnel on topics such as social justice, systemic racism, bias, privilege, restorative justice practices, and effective discipline. NASP is committed to advancing equitable and inclusive policies and practices that promote respect for cultural differences and ensure the safety and well-being of marginalized students.

WHEREAS, NASP honors and acknowledges that children are autonomous beings with inherent rights as outlined by the Convention of the Rights of the Child; and

WHEREAS, NASP is committed to supporting the educational and mental health needs of all students, regardless of race, culture, linguistic background, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, socioeconomic status, nationality, citizenship, disability, educational need, or other dimensions of identity; and

WHEREAS, school psychologists, regardless of the settings in which they serve, have an ethical obligation to promote fairness and justice and to assist their colleagues and professional communities with dismantling policies and practices that contribute to inequitable outcomes; and

WHEREAS, the NASP-adopted definition of social justice includes action to address systemic barriers, such as the long-term issues of poverty, inequity, prejudice, racism, and violence; and

WHEREAS, school psychologists assist administrators in evaluating current practices, policies, and procedures to identify and remedy any potential disparities in access, participation, or outcomes among groups of students, with particular attention to students of historically marginalized backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, NASP opposes all forms of physical discipline; and

WHEREAS, NASP opposes educational disparities and disproportionality that result from discriminatory or ineffective policies, procedures, or practices that marginalize students from historically minoritized backgrounds, particularly those related to exclusionary discipline and access to specialized educational programming; and

WHEREAS, NASP recognizes white supremacy as a factor in the oppression of marginalized populations (racially/ethnically marginalized, low-income and economically marginalized, LGBTQI2S+ youth) resulting in disproportionate policing in schools; and

WHEREAS, racial disparities in discipline are evident as early as the preschool years (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahrar, 2006); and

WHEREAS, NASP vigorously supports and promotes efforts that create safe, secure, and peaceful schools free of the destructive influence of violence in all forms; and

WHEREAS, NASP recognizes that no single strategy or program will create a safe school and that effective efforts require collaboration among all interested parties (e.g., administrators, teachers, school psychologists, other school mental health professionals, school police, parents, students, and community agencies); and

WHEREAS, police brutality can lead to physiological responses that increase morbidity and psychological stress for many communities of color (Alang et al., 2017); and

WHEREAS, NASP acknowledges the epistemic exclusion of scholars and youth of minoritized backgrounds in empirical research related to school policing; and

WHEREAS, NASP acknowledges the need to center the voices, perspectives, and viewpoints of historically marginalized students, families, and communities in research and generate solutions related to school policing and school safety; and

WHEREAS, most research about police in schools does not clarify whether school police are officers who have received training aligned with standards set by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) or are officers with no school-based training; and

WHEREAS, the current body of research contains little evidence demonstrating the positive impact of school policing programs on students and school-associated outcomes; and

WHEREAS, the presence of school police is associated with a number of negative outcomes, including higher rates of exclusionary discipline of students (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016; Gottfredson et al., 2020), especially Black students (Weisburst, 2019), and lower academic performance of Black male students (Legewie & Fagan, 2019).

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, NASP envisions a future where all schools and communities are free from violence and school police are viewed as unnecessary.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP opposes the use of school police or school resource officers in the implementation of discipline procedures.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, given the research linking the presence of police in schools to harmful outcomes for students, particularly students of color, school psychologists will work with administrators and other members of the school community to assess school safety measures and systems of increasing levels of support and ensure that these efforts do not negatively affect students from marginalized groups.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP acknowledges the importance of engaging with and partnering with school police in their role as first responders to emergency situations, in specific and limited school safety activities including school crisis and preparedness plans, and certain elements of behavior threat assessment and management protocols in collaboration with school-based mental health providers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP is committed to advancing the following policy and practices that properly define the role of school police, including school resource officers, in select school safety activities and that reduce harm for marginalized populations. School districts who use police in any school buildings should commit to and incorporate, at a minimum, the following elements in a memorandum of understanding (MOU):

- A process for involving school psychologists and other school mental health professionals in the development and review of the MOU.
- A process for school building administrators and school district leadership to have input and involvement in the (a) selection and hiring, (b) ongoing regular evaluation of performance, and (c) disciplinary processes of police in schools.
- A mechanism for the school district to remove police personnel when school policies are violated by law enforcement personnel.
- Clear statements prohibiting police in schools from involvement in student discipline.
- Definitions to distinguish criminal behaviors from student discipline behaviors in order to clarify that police should only address student behaviors that are criminal in nature.
- Clearly defined protocols regarding access to, confidentiality of, and use of student educational records and other student data by school police.

- Provisions for required training and continuing education of school police in the following: child and adolescent development; cultural responsiveness; diversity, equity, and inclusion; working with students with disabilities; implicit bias and institutional racism; de-escalation; and school district psychological and physical safety policies. When appropriate, the school and district should include school police in relevant professional development offered to school staff.
- Provisions for how school districts will ensure that all police personnel who are working in a school building ensure physical and psychological safety while also respecting students' civil and educational rights.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP will work to empower school psychologists to center the voices and perspectives of those from historically marginalized communities and those with lived experience of oppression by school police in all efforts to develop and advocate for evidence-based school safety and climate policy and practice.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP will intentionally engage with members of historically marginalized communities, and those with lived experience of oppression, in the generation of school safety policy and practice recommendations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP will advocate for robust data collection and public reporting related to school police at the federal, state, district, and school building levels, including data on school-initiated arrests and student discipline data disaggregated by race, gender, ethnicity, and disability status, as well as membership in other marginalized groups, and the intersection thereof.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP will work to empower school psychologists to use these data to inform decision making and to engage in system change efforts that promote equity, as well as physical and psychological safety for students, particularly for minoritized and marginalized students.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP will advocate for high-quality research, conducted using socially just and culturally responsive approaches, regarding police in schools including efforts to examine:

- The role of cultural, racial, and ethnic concordance of police in schools, students, and the surrounding local community.
- School climate, school staff and administrator attitudes about discipline, and the role of police in schools as interconnected variables.
- Lived experiences for various groups of students, specifically minoritized students, regarding psychological and physical safety that includes consideration of school level and community contextual variables such as school size, available school resources and supports, and community levels of resources and crime.
- Student academic and behavioral outcomes associated with the presence of police in schools.
- Evaluation of specific training components provided to police in schools and the impact of training on student academic and behavioral outcomes, including disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline for students of color, students with disabilities, and students with other minoritized identities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP advocates for school psychologists to have active roles in early education to support developmentally appropriate instruction and interventions for behavior displayed by young children, with attention to addressing current and historical disproportional representation of students of color and those from historically minoritized backgrounds in disciplinary and educational placements.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP will work to improve school psychologists' promotion of student resilience and support of student wellness through asset-based and trauma-informed interventions embedded within a culturally responsive system of increasing levels of support through healing practices.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP will support school psychologists' efforts to actively dismantle systemic racism and white supremacy in education and to empower youth and families whose voices, experiences, and outcomes have thus far been muted or dismissed in consideration of law enforcement in schools.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, NASP opposes federal funding for the purposes of increasing the number of police in schools.

IN CONCLUSION, NASP is committed to efforts that promote safe and affirming school environments for all students. In order to mitigate the historical and systemic negative impacts of police in schools, NASP supports increased focus on preventive and responsive measures, such as multitiered systems of support, and increased access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services as provided by school psychologists and other school mental health professionals. As such, NASP supports increased federal investments in efforts to increase the number of school psychologists, counselors, and social workers to fortify preventive measures and systems of increasing levels of support for all students.

Given the data regarding the harmful effects of police in schools, especially the disproportionate negative impact on students of color and students from historically minoritized populations, NASP opposes federal funding to increase the number of police in schools. If local entities utilize police in schools, NASP only supports this under the specifically defined circumstances described herein.

Finally, NASP acknowledges that, regardless of the system, the basic premises of seeking school and community engagement (e.g., families, policy makers) in the development of disciplinary systems; utilizing data-based decision-making; maintaining quality relationships among professionals, families, and children; and providing ongoing professional learning opportunities around bias are crucial to promoting equitable discipline, which is a critical component of equitable educational experiences.

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