

Background on Ad Hoc Committee

The Education Coalition Ad Hoc Committee on Racial Justice was established in the fall of 2020 in response to the murder of George Floyd. The Coalition's Leadership committee determined that our collective must dedicate time, funding, and resources to produce structural change. To that end, the leaders of the Education Coalition's member organizations directed staff to identify opportunities for the Coalition to provide leadership in dismantling the systemic and structural racism that exists in California public schools.

The Ad Hoc Committee considered different opportunities to begin uprooting structural racism in schools and improve student experience and outcomes, particularly for students of color. After careful deliberation, the Ad Hoc Committee decided to focus most of its time and energy on the topic of school policing. The Ad Hoc Committee believed the topic provided real opportunity to make meaningful change given the urgency of the issue, its relevance in the national conversation, and its impact on school climate. While school policing was the Ad Hoc Committee's focus, it also identified several other areas needing examination and reform. These areas include applying a racial justice lens to teacher training and preparation programs, school curriculum, mental health, discipline that disproportionately affects students of color, and school finance. As it is throughout society, racism is interwoven into every aspect of our educational system and it is the responsibility of our respective organizations to remain committed to the identified areas and others in order to advance racial equity.

Findings on School Policing

The Ad Hoc Committee engaged many stakeholders on the topic of school policing, including the West Ed., the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Black Organizing Project, various student organizations, the Advancement Project, the California Community College Chancellor's Office, and the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST). After months of robust dialogue and careful deliberation, it is clear that improvements to school police officer training, the role of school police, and data and transparency are needed to improve the safety and educational experience of all students, particularly those who are disproportionately targeted by over policing, including Black and Latinx students, and students with disabilities. These reforms will improve student outcomes by boosting attendance, facilitating positive school culture, and increasing engagement, all of which will also contribute to improved academic performance.

Robust Training that is Relevant to K-12 Settings

Establish Minimum Education and Training Requirements

There is often a significant disparity in the number of hours police officers receive in training specific to working in K-12 school settings. For example, municipality police officers with school assignments can work at a school site with no training specific to working with students in a K-12 setting. Conversely, there is a legislative mandate

that police officers hired directly by LEAs receive 40 hours of training specific to school settings prior to working on a school campus.

Recommendation: A minimum number of hours of K-12 specific training should be required of all police officers working in school settings, regardless of hiring agency. Further, the training should not only be required prior to assignment but should be an ongoing requirement to ensure police officers are aware of up-to-date practices, are current on laws, and new skills, especially as this relates to the school environment.

Improve Training Curriculum

Police officers working in K-12 school settings should receive training that is applicable to working with youth and equips officers with increased knowledge related to childhood development, mental health, de-escalation techniques, the history of school policing, restorative justice, and the unique lived experiences of the diverse populations within the school community. The Ad Hoc Committee learned that training provided to school-based officers combines curriculum that is applicable to both community college and K-12 settings. Working with students in K-12 settings is very different than working on a community college campus.

Recommendation: The POST approved training for school-based police officers should be bifurcated so K-12 school-based officers receive training that is fully applicable to the work they will be performing. Furthermore, the minimum standards for the course trainers should include competencies in diverse cultures, structural and systemic racism, race relations, mental health issues, youth development, implicit bias, etc. To further ensure that training for school policing is effective and a reflection of school needs, a task force of K-12 educators (school board members, administrators, teachers, classified staff, students, and community groups) should be established to make recommendations to and advise POST on the topics that should be included in K-12 school police officer training curriculum and ongoing professional development courses.

Clear Role of School Police

Clarify Roles and Ensure Local Adherence

Districts need to clarify and enforce the appropriate role of school safety officers. Too often, educators call upon law enforcement and school police respond to matters that fall outside the scope of police responsibility. School police should be responsible for enforcing penal code and not for enforcing student disciplinary matters, which are the responsibility of school administrators.

Recommendation: School district and police contract language should explicitly outline the role of the school police, including specifying limits and matters that are to be handled by other personnel. Furthermore, training and materials should be provided to school police officers, school administrators, and staff to ensure all stakeholders are clear on the defined roles and responsibilities of school police.

Need for Comprehensive Data and Transparency

Collect and Make Available Statewide Data

There is a lack of data on school policing. Specifically, there is no data available on the number of school resource officers or numbers of contract police staff that are hired by school districts. Neither is there comprehensive reporting on the number of arrests, referrals to law enforcement, and related information that would help in understanding how to improve safety practices. This lack of information makes it difficult to determine appropriate policy changes to improve school safety at local districts and schools.

Recommendation: The Department of Education needs to collect and make available comprehensive data related to school police hiring, and interactions between students and police. This data must be disaggregated by student demographics

Improve Transparency at the Local Level

Clear and consistent communication among the school board, administrators, teachers, police, school site staff, students, parents, and community members contribute to the success of school safety programs. Increased transparency on these matters will improve school safety and trust and confidence in the police amongst students, parents, and other community members.

Recommendation: School boards should regularly agendaize updates on school policing, which should include disaggregated data on student interactions with police.

Importance of Local Investments in Best Practices

Restorative Justice and Other Proven Alternative Strategies

The ad hoc committee heard from students most negatively and directly impacted by the presence of police officers on campus and about the harsh and disparate punishments given to African American students for things as simple as talking back to a teacher or bringing a cup of Starbucks coffee onto campus. Zero tolerance policies with harsh punishments increase the chances of students dropping out of school and feed the school to prison pipeline for so many of our children of color. We had an inspiring presentation by the administration, school board, school staff, student body and community of San Bernardino Unified School District, which highlighted the success that came from utilizing a community schools' model and a district wide restorative justice program to deal with student behavioral issues. Restorative justice resolves disciplinary problems in a cooperative and constructive way with a focus on mediation and agreement rather than punishment.

Recommendation: Schools need to invest more resources into programs that support student development and learning such as mental health supports, social emotional learning, restorative justice, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), and needed health and social services.

Conclusion

The role of police officers on K-12 school campus needs to be refined and clarified. School police officers must receive ongoing training specific to the K-12 setting from professionals with the right competencies. There also needs to be a collection of data regarding school policing and full transparency of that data at all levels. Lastly, schools need to invest in restorative justice

practices and other alternative to discipline strategies. We are confident that our recommendations, as a collective, will improve school climate and safety on school campuses for students of color which will ultimately result in improved academic performance and success.

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