

HIGH SCHOOL

Arrested Learning

A survey of youth experiences of police and security at school

Salem-Keizer Public Schools, Oregon

April 2021



Acknowledgements

This report was written by Kate Hamaji and Kate Terenzi (Center for Popular Democracy), in collaboration with staff and young people from Make the Road New York (MRNY), Make the Road Nevada (MRNV), Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS), the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC), and the the Research Hub for Youth Organizing at the University of Colorado Boulder.

We are deeply grateful to the organizers and youth leaders who shaped and fielded this survey and the young people who shared their powerful stories, experiences, and expertise. They are the true authors of this report.



The Center for Popular Democracy

The Center for Popular Democracy is a nonprofit organization that promotes equity, opportunity, and a dynamic democracy in partnership with innovative base building organizations, organizing networks and alliances, and progressive unions across the country.

www.populardemocracy.org



The Research Hub for Youth Organizing at the University of Colorado Boulder

The Research Hub for Youth Organizing supports young people's capacity to claim power and create more just communities through field-driven research. They advance youth participation and leadership by co-creating and sharing research and curriculum with youth organizers, teachers, education leaders and policy makers. Taphy T, Kathryn Wiley, Daniel Garzón, Joanna Mendy, and Ben Kirshner contributed significant research and writing to this report.

www.colorado.edu/education-research-hub



Make the Road Nevada

Make the Road Nevada (MRNV) builds the power of Latinx and working-class communities of color to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, and transformative education. MRNV's vision for Nevada begins with building a strong grassroots foundation in Las Vegas. It ends with elevating the power of working-class immigrant communities in every community around the state. They organize in Latinx and immigrant communities, and develop leaders who advocate for their families, their neighborhoods, and beyond.

www.maketheroadnv.org



The Urban Youth Collaborative

Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) is a coalition of students from across New York City fighting for transformative education reform that puts students first, with a focus on replacing harmful policing in schools with restorative justice and trauma-informed care. The UYC coalition is made up of members from the Future of Tomorrow of Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, Make the Road New York, and Sistas and Brothas United of the Northwest Bronx.

www.urbanyouthcollaborative.org



Latinos Unidos Siempre

The mission of Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS) is to work towards the educational, cultural, social and political development of youth of color, by empowering youth to take leadership roles in the community, advocating for social and political change and other forms of systemic and institutional oppression through grassroots organizing.



Make the Road New Jersey

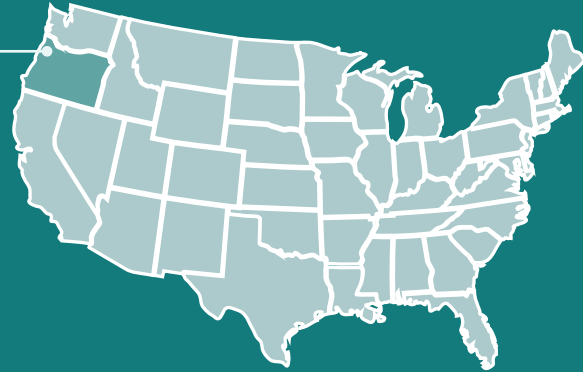
Founded in November 2014 in Elizabeth, Make the Road New Jersey (MRNJ) builds the power of immigrant, working-class and Latinx communities to achieve dignity and respect through community organizing, legal, policy innovation and transformative education. Every week, hundreds of immigrant families - young people and adults - come together to fight for dignity and respect in their communities.

www.maketheroadnj.org

Salem-Keizer Public Schools

Oregon

Salem and Keizer,
Oregon



On March 9, 2021 the superintendent of Salem-Keizer Public Schools (SKPS) announced that she would not renew contracts for School Resource Officers (SROs). This change is a direct result of the many years of Black and Brown young people fighting for safe and supportive schools free of police presence. Despite this victory, the superintendent went on to explain that there may be a “formal relationship with law enforcement or a contract with law enforcement moving forward.”¹ In fact, there is at least one current contract between police and the school district that was signed in February 2021.²

Recent survey data has demonstrated that police have no rightful place in SKPS and that their presence, in any form, subjects Black and Brown young people to an unrelenting racist and abusive system of policing and police culture. In addition to school police, the use of security guards to control young people, coupled with the lack of investment in support services, perpetuates the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline.

The school district has an opportunity to act now to truly re-imagine school safety. To do so, it must eliminate all policing of young people in schools, dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline, and invest in education services and supports that meet the real needs of SKPS students.

To uncover information about students’ experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school, Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS) fielded in-depth surveys with 150 young people at the end of 2020 and early 2021.

“ I just feel like things would be way better in schools if cops weren’t there—it would be a better experience for students of color. We already have to worry about other [stuff] outside of school, we shouldn’t have to deal with racist cops in a building where we need to be learning, not being policed.

Survey findings in Salem-Keizer Public Schools reveal that:



Overwhelmingly, students value more support and resources over police and security.



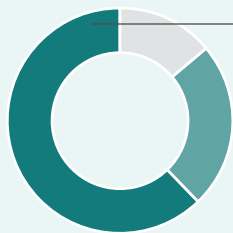
When asked to rank investments in order of priority, **most students ranked teachers and mental health supports as the highest priorities**



(33% and 48% ranking these options as #1, respectively).

By contrast, 92% of respondents **ranked police as the lowest priority.**

The vast majority of respondents think police should be removed from schools.



Of those with police at school, **86%** of respondents agreed (**24%**) or strongly agreed (**62%**) with the statement: “Police should be removed from my school and my school should have more support and resources for students.*”



Interactions with school police and security are common, frequent, and often harmful.

Of those with police at school, **88%** of respondents reported having had or knowing someone who has had at least one type of negative interaction with school police—for example, **being taken out of a classroom, being arrested, or being given a ticket to go to court.**

Of those with security at school, **87%** of respondents reported interactions with security guards (other than just seeing them in or around the school) at least once in an average month.

* This question was not limited to just those police called School Resource Officers.



Police and security at school do not make students feel safe.

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),

85% selected friends

53% selected teachers

3% selected police

16% selected security guards

The majority of respondents have been targeted by police based on an aspect of their identity.



63% of respondents have felt targeted by police based on race, primary language, sexual orientation, or gender identity, including identity as transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex.

“Police appear randomly at my school. It is a majority white school. I am the only Black student in my grade. I don’t feel safe with police in school because it seems that they like to intimidate me more than they do my peers. I feel like an easy target. When they make eye contact with my friends, they smile. When they make eye contact with me, it seems more scary. My friends mostly feel safe with police but I don’t.”

Background

District Demographics

The Salem-Keizer school system is made up of two cities: Salem and Keizer. Salem-Keizer Public Schools (SKPS) is the second-largest school district in Oregon, serving 40,438 students across 65 schools.³ The student body is majority people of color—white students represent 43% of the student body. Latinx students represent the largest group of students (44%).⁴ Seventeen percent of students are English language learners and 70% of students are considered to be “economically disadvantaged.”⁵

Policing in Salem and Keizer

The issue of policing in schools exists within the broader context of police abuse in the community. Salem’s Black residents have experienced harassment by the Salem Police Department (SPD) for years.⁶ A recent report found that Black residents were overrepresented in police stops—at a rate that was double their share of the total population.⁷ In the spring and summer of 2020, thousands took to the streets in protest against police brutality after the murder of George Floyd,⁸ generating even broader public awareness of the department’s racist culture. During the protests, Salem police used tear gas against protesters.⁹ In addition, substantial media attention was directed to a video of a street protest in which a Salem police officer discretely warned armed white men to vacate sidewalks before police began more harshly enforcing the curfew for protesters.¹⁰ Despite data and community testimonials about racist policing, the SPD lacks public accountability: a recent report found that the Salem Community Police Board, set up to review civilian complaints, has not completed a case since 2015, in which the officer involved was cleared of wrongdoing.¹¹

For Black and Brown young people, there is no escape from police abuse, whether in their communities or at school. Youth see no difference between the police who harass, oppress, and surveil them in the streets, and those doing so at school.



“ I feel traumatized by them and purposely avoid seeing them or interacting with them.

Policing in SKPS

Police and Security Presence in SKPS

Police presence in SKPS was first established in 1968. It began with one part-time officer, and expanded steadily through the 1970s. Many districts began school policing around this same time as a backlash to desegregation efforts and student organizing during the Civil Rights Movement.¹² In 1980, the school district began to pay for two sheriff’s deputies assigned to schools in the district, and more federal funding became available for additional officers.¹³ In the 1990s, as more Latinx families moved into the area, the district pushed through gang intervention policies which played on a racist trope that Latinx young people are in gangs. For example, a school district gang intervention manual included descriptions of clothing, slang, and symbols that they claimed were associated with gangs, which included many common Spanish words and Mexican cultural symbols.¹⁴ At this time, Latinx communities began organizing to remove police from schools.¹⁵

The SKPS SRO program, which was finally ended in March 2021,¹⁶ relied on contracts with the SPD and the Keizer Police Department (KPD) to station 11 police officers (known as SROs) within the district’s schools. Six of these officers were based at each of the district’s six high schools, while the other five were assigned to two local middle schools.¹⁷ Additional enforcement for SKPS was provided by the Marion County Sheriff’s Office, the county in which both Salem and Keizer are located.¹⁸ School board members have stated on record that SKPS spent \$1 million annually on the SRO program.¹⁹

While ending the SRO contracts will significantly limit the presence of police in schools, this is not sufficient to end the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline. SKPS already has at least one other contract with police²⁰ and the superintendent indicated there may be additional contracts with police departments forthcoming.²¹

In addition to SROs, SKPS employs security officers who make up the rest of the school district’s security and enforcement personnel infrastructure.²² The district does not provide information on how much it spends on school security guards or surveillance equipment.

Marion County Juvenile Department

When youth are arrested on school grounds they are sent to the Marion County Juvenile Department (MCJD), making it a key institution in the SKPS school-to-prison pipeline. Youth of color make up **48%** of those who have contact with MCJD.²³ According to the Marion County Juvenile Justice Information System, **53%** of all admissions to juvenile detention are due to probation violations.²⁴

MCJD provides juvenile support programming on a range of issues including family support, skilled work “opportunities,” substance abuse treatment and recovery, and shelter through the Guaranteed Attendance Program.²⁵ In order for youth to receive services through these programs they must be under the supervision of the MCJD and must agree to a strict set of conditions.²⁶ This places them at greater risk of criminalization and incarceration if they fail to meet the conditions, potentially limiting enrollment and access to these programs.

The Criminalization of Black and Brown Young People

In Marion County, Latinx young people consistently face harsher consequences in the criminal legal system than their white peers.²⁷ Their cases involve secure detention more frequently, they have charges filed against them at higher rates, and they are diverted from the criminal legal system at lower rates than their white peers.²⁸ Native American and Black young people are referred to juvenile court at startlingly higher rates than their white peers (3.9 and 2.2 times more often, respectively).²⁹

The public has been afforded a few glimpses into school-specific policing data that provide additional confirmation of these biased trends, even though no data has been made publicly available by the school district. A deputy police

chief recently provided Salem city councilors a summary of student arrests at schools from January 2017 to December 2018. News reports concluded that the data shows, “nearly all arrests have been at McKay and North, the most racially diverse and poorest high schools in the district... At McKay there were 25 arrests during that time period compared to one at Sprague [a majority-white school].”³⁰

Further, the US Department of Education’s civil rights data for SKPS shows that Latinx students comprise a disproportionate number of expulsions relative to their number in the overall student body: Latinx students make up **51%** of expulsions despite only accounting for **40%** of the school district’s student population.³¹

Child Abuse and Sexual Violence Response

SKPS often cites the need for police to respond to child abuse cases as an argument for continuing police involvement with the school district.³² This argument fails to acknowledge a few critical truths.

Police are often perpetrators of abuse.³³ Across the nation, “[a]fter excessive force, sexual misconduct is the second-most-common complaint against cops.”³⁴ In fact, a 2015 study found that, “over a 10 year period, an officer was caught in a case of sexual misconduct every five days.”³⁵ As the survey results reveal, this horrific dynamic exists within Salem-Keizer Public Schools as well. **One out of every 11 young people who responded to the survey had been sexually harassed by a school police officer or personally knew someone who had.** Of the four districts surveyed for this national report, SKPS had the highest rate of sexual violence at the hands of school police. In addition, nearly **40%** of respondents had been, or personally knew someone who had been, verbally harassed or made fun of by school police, and just over 1 in 6 respondents reported that school police had physically assaulted young people.

There are mountains of evidence that police and the criminal legal system are not effective in addressing cases of child abuse or sexual violence, let alone supporting survivors and their healing.³⁶ Instead, the methods used by community organizations are far more effective in supporting abuse survivors.³⁷ Community organizations that focus on supporting survivors of child abuse, sexual assault, and domestic violence can listen to what a survivor is seeking and match services to that need. Community organizations can support young people in navigating available resources, provide safe spaces for them to heal, and work to understand and respond in ways that are tailored to the individual circumstance.

Instead of funding police to respond to child abuse cases, the district should use those dollars to increase the number of school social workers, counselors, psychologists, and nurses trained to identify and support survivors of child abuse. They could also bring in qualified community organizations with expertise in child abuse issues. Both of these alternatives would prioritize the health and safety of young people rather than pushing them into a criminal legal system that is ill equipped to provide the support and healing they need.

Threat Assessments

Another reason often cited by the school district to justify their continued reliance on police is for “threat assessments,”³⁸ which “vary widely, but typically involve a small group of school personnel, including a school police officer, discussing a student whom someone has identified as a potential ‘threat’” before a violent act occurs.³⁹ SKPS created a process for “threat assessments,” which has been implemented by districts across the country.⁴⁰ These assessments often target Black and Brown young people.⁴¹ Referrals for threat assessments trigger an intensive investigation into a student’s life and can result in students being “ostracized, stigmatized and profiled without any explicit or believable threat.”⁴² In 2018 the Oregonian published the story of a high school boy on the autism spectrum who was targeted by the threat assessment investigation process, showing how misguided and harmful these threat assessments can be.⁴³ In this case, a casual non-threatening conversation with another student, the young person’s clothing (including a heavy coat which helped with the symptoms of his autism), his lack of friends (likely the result of bias towards young people with disabilities), his demeanor, and his benign interest in weapons apparently caused his district to begin a threat assessment. The student did not communicate a threat to anyone. After the long and arduous investigation process—which apparently followed the “gold standard” of threat assessments in Oregon—the young person dropped out of school.⁴⁴

Federal data also show a pattern of discrimination in the use of threat assessments. Schools with higher proportions of students of color were more likely than those with fewer students of color to report using threat assessment teams.⁴⁵ The federal government concluded in its 2002 report that there is “no accurate or useful ‘profile’ of students who engaged in targeted school violence.”⁴⁶ Despite this finding, Black and Brown students are repeatedly targeted for these threat assessments. Currently available data indicates that Black students are disproportionately referred for threat assessments. Similarly, students with disabilities are substantially more likely to be referred than other students.⁴⁷

“ [I] feel [I’m] in a box because [I have] a disability and always feel targeted.

“ I was in school for not even 30 minutes, I got called out of my credit recovery class and got sent to the behavior specialist and got called a gang banger because of my belt. I got racially profiled for how I dressed—while the white girls in my school would wear blue bandana and nothing would happen to them.



Community Organizing Context



One of the organizations fighting to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline in Salem is Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS), a community-based organization that is led by young people. LUS's membership consists of young people of color directly impacted by the presence of police and the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline in Salem-Keizer Public Schools. In recent years, LUS has been calling on SKPS leadership to end the presence of police in schools as the first step to dismantling the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline. LUS is also organizing against systemic racism and organized white supremacy in their community. LUS organizers have attended and testified at school board hearings, hosted marches and demonstrations, and are actively working with the community and local organizations to dismantle and abolish the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline.

LUS fielded in-depth surveys between December 2020 and January 2021 with 150 young people who attend Salem-Keizer Public Schools. The survey was designed to uncover information about students' experiences, interactions, and feelings about police and security at school. Findings show that police and security at school do not make students feel safe; that interactions and sightings of security guards and school police are common, frequent, and often harmful; and that students overwhelmingly favor additional supports and resources over more police and security.



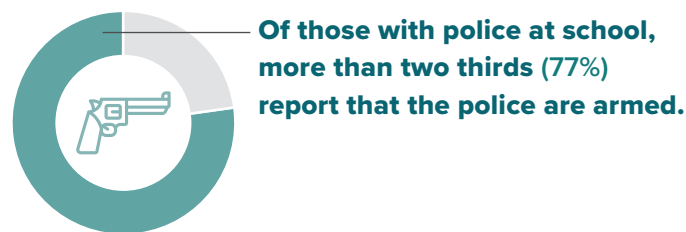
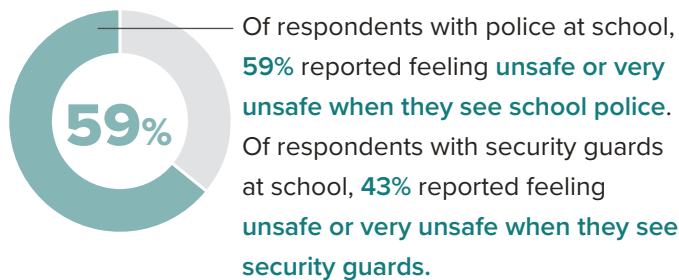
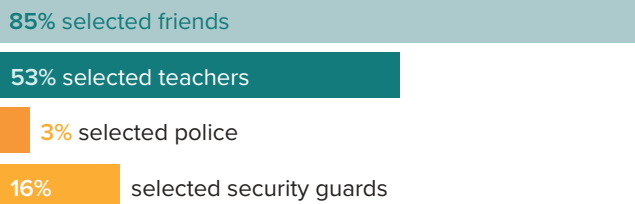
Youth Survey Results



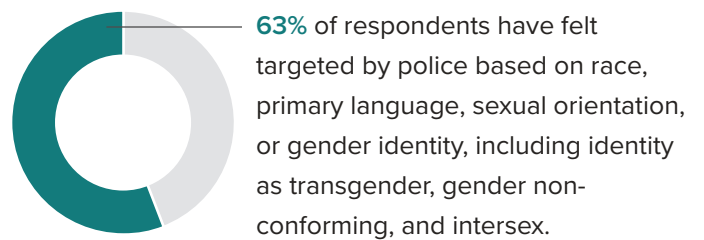
Police and security at school do not make students feel safe.

Police and security at school do not make students feel safe, especially compared to other people they interact with at school, like teachers and friends.

When asked what makes respondents feel safe (when physically attending school),



The majority of respondents feel targeted by police based on an aspect of their identity.



More than half of respondents (**54%**) have felt targeted based on race and more than a quarter felt targeted based on primary language (**28%**).

- “ Because of [my] gender [I feel] that cops are staring at [me] all the time.
- “ Once this security was harassing me and was mistaking me for another student named Juan. This was extremely racist, he kept insisting that I was that student and was asking me why I was lying when I wasn't.

2

Interactions with and sightings of school police and security guards are common, frequent, and often harmful.

Sightings and interactions with school security guards are common and frequent.

Of those with security guards at school, **87%** of respondents had interactions with security guards (other than just seeing them in or around the school) at least once in an average month. **75%** of respondents reported interactions at least a few times per month.



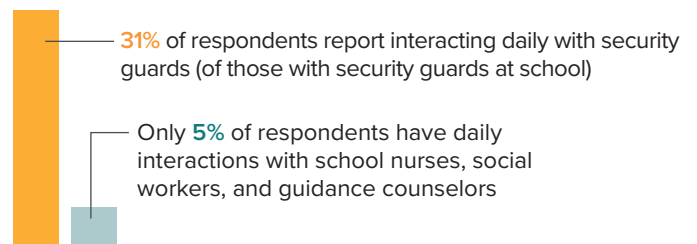
100% of respondents saw security guards in and around their schools at least once in an average month, with the majority of respondents reporting sightings multiple times each day.

(**20%** reported seeing security guards 2–5 times per day; **19%** reported seeing security guards 6–10 times per day, and **38%** reported seeing security guards *more than ten times per day*).

“ This one time the security called me into the office and the searched my backpack without even telling me that they were going to search it because they thought I had weed on me. The security guard physically pulled me and forced me out of the room when I told them I wasn’t gonna let them search me. That same security guard ended up getting fired later on. He always made false accusations against POC.

“ The presence of security guards is really heavy in my school. It’s obvious that police and security guards are racist and it shows on who they target. In middle school I got in trouble for something that caused me to get in and out of school suspension and instead of offering ways to help they just thought of punishment and I only got less punishment because a teacher advocated for me.

Respondents have more regular interactions with security guards than they do guidance counselors, social workers, and school nurses.



40% of respondents have no interactions with school nurses, guidance counselors, or social workers in an average month.

Respondents (with police at school) have experienced a pattern of disturbing behavior in which school police:*



Sexually harass young people (9%)



Bully, abuse, and traumatize young people, for example by:

- Verbally harassing or making fun of students (38%)
- Physically assaulting students (18%)
- Pepper spraying students (7%)
- Responding to a mental health crisis (16%)**



Prevent young people from learning while in schools, for example by

- Taking students out of a classroom (78%)



Invade young people's physical autonomy, for example by:

- Physically searching students (other than walking through a metal detector) (51%)
- Restraining students (39%)



Force young people into the criminal legal system and advance punitive techniques, for example by:

- Arresting students (40%)
- Responding when a student misses school (36%)
- Issuing juvenile reports (35%)
- Issuing tickets to go to court (31%)

“ A police officer at school once told me that he was gonna lock me and my friends up in juvenile, that he was just waiting for the perfect time to do it.

“ Security guards are very creepy. I have heard and seen them flirt with girls many times and it's disgusting!

“ They are just creepy. I think one of them got fired for snapchatting girls at school.

Of those with police at school, most respondents (88%) reported having or knowing someone who has had at least one type of negative interaction with school police.

Students see police constantly, including two thirds of respondents who see police at school on at least a daily basis.

Of respondents with police at their school, **99%** of respondents saw police at school at least once a month in an average month. Of these, **67%** saw police at least once daily.

Research shows that over time, the **mere presence** of police may have psychological effects on students' "nervous and immune systems that may result in anxiety, restlessness, lack of motivation, inability to focus, social withdrawal, and aggressive behaviors."⁴⁸ Community studies suggest these adverse consequences are compounded when a person perceives that the negative interaction is motivated by race.⁴⁹

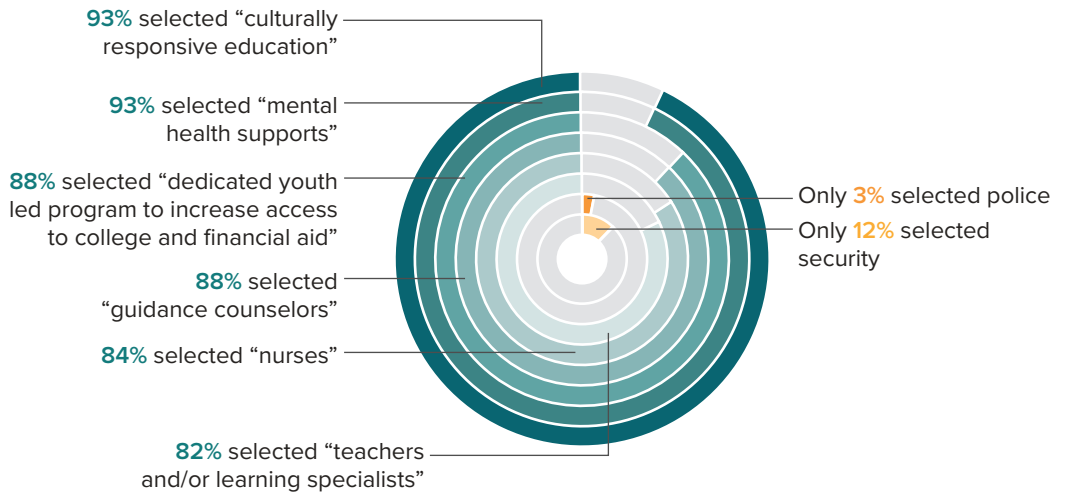
* Percentages refer to respondents who reported having experienced, or knowing someone who has experienced, negative interactions with school police.

** We believe it is always inappropriate for school police to respond to mental health crises.

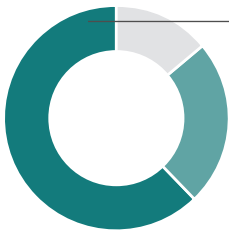
4

Overwhelmingly, students value more support and resources over police and security.

When asked what they would like to see more or better quality of at school, students overwhelmingly selected resources, programs, and supports—not police or security.



The majority of students think police should be removed from schools.



Of those with police at school, **86%** of respondents agreed (**24%**) or strongly agreed (**62%**) with the statement: “Police should be removed from my school and my school should have more support and resources for students.”

Students would rather increase funding for resources like teachers, nurses, social workers, and mental health supports over police.



When asked to rank investments in order of priority, **most students ranked teachers and mental health supports as the highest priorities** (33% and 48% ranking these options as #1, respectively).



By contrast, **92%** of respondents ranked police as the lowest priority.

Although the majority of respondents value other school personnel over police, most students think there are more police at school than nurses.

Of those with police at school, **82%** or respondents said they think their school has more police than school nurses.



Recommendations

The young people who are most at risk of harm due to harsh policing policies are uniquely situated to re-imagine school environments. This report highlights the vision for safe, supportive, and inclusive schools developed by youth leaders with *Latinos Unidos Siempre*.

This is Our Youth Mandate: Fund Education, Not Incarceration

I Divest from criminalization

- A** Indefinitely divest from police contracts, including SROs and all other relationships with the police, and reinvest those funds into the education of Black and Indigenous students, students of color, and students with disabilities.
- End zero-tolerance policies
 - End the system of expulsions
 - Reduce suspension rates
 - Remove all dress code requirements that target students based on race and gender
 - End criminalization and discipline based on school attendance and lateness
- B** End Day Time Curfew enforcement and contracts with police departments by ending criminal charges and fines for students who miss school.

II Invest in Our Education

- A** Adopt restorative justice models throughout the school environment, including when addressing disciplinary issues within schools.
- B** Implement a Salem Keizer Student Equity Success Plan that addresses racial and disability disparities in Salem-Keizer Public Schools and expands from the Student Investment Account which would include:
- Implementing a community-led process for reinvestment that allows social justice advocates, students, educators and experts to lead and inform the reinvestment of funds that went to school police.
 - Divesting all other funds that support systems and cultures of policing, and reinvesting these funds based on community priorities.
 - Reinvesting School Resource Officer and school policing funding into addressing the educational gaps to support:
 - Culturally responsive in-school counseling and mental health services
 - Hiring more staff and educators of color
 - Hiring more nurses
 - Hiring more teachers and learning specialist
 - Ethnic studies programs for middle school and high schools
 - Arts and music education in predominantly Black and Brown schools
 - Culturally responsive after-school activities
 - Culturally responsive services for students with behavioral and physical disabilities
 - Creating programs and partnerships with community organizations led by Black and Indigenous people and people of color
 - Culturally responsive mentoring and tutoring programs for predominately Black and Brown schools
 - Expansion of college prep programs for predominantly Black and Brown schools
 - Better transportation services and choices for students
 - Culturally responsive healthcare services
 - Support for queer students of color
 - Gender neutral restrooms
 - In-school support services geared towards queer and trans students, including counseling and health services

C Implement a student bill of rights

- Constitutional rights would apply to students while inside school grounds, which means that even if police are called, they cannot interrogate a student without a parent or legal guardian present.
- Students will be taught “know your rights”
- The bill will include a system through which students can report hate crimes within school grounds in connection with the human rights commission

D Improve data transparency and reporting. SKPS, SPD, and KPS must improve their public accountability by publishing institutional data regarding interactions with young people, and relevant budget data which is currently unavailable. Each institution should publish a quarterly report that includes:

- Data disaggregated by race, age, gender, disability, school, who referred the young person, the charge for all disciplinary or police interactions, and the sanction imposed, including:
 - Referrals to police or school administrators
 - Suspensions
 - Expulsions
 - In-school arrests
- Tracking of hate crimes based on race, ability, sex, and gender within schools.

E Bargaining with the teachers’ union contract using an equity lens.

F Hire, support, and invest in teachers, administrators, district leaders, and staff that reflect the racial and economic background of the students in the district.



Storybook

General Feelings about Police and Security

I felt unsafe because as a person of color I see what happens in the news and having cops in schools makes me feel unsafe. I see how racist they are and it worries me that they get to be in our schools

[Police/security guards] just pick on kids to get them in trouble and they just all seem racist.

[Police/security guards] were classist and racist. I saw that they were always targeting everyone. I'm half Arab and pretty white passing but I still felt scared.

Police don't belong in school. I get nervous when I see them because they've pulled my mom over and have been racist and rude. I don't get why they would be at school.

Security guards did not make me feel safe at all, because I didn't feel that there was a huge need for them...Security guards were often looking for things to punish students for. This made me feel less safe.

I don't feel safe with security or police, I felt intimidated [by] them and they didn't do anything good for students.

I have witnessed a lot of things being in an alternative school. A lot of police didn't understand the experiences of students that came from these schools. [There is] a lot of stigma and misperception.

[I] don't feel like police are there to help at all. I feel like they are there just to intimidate us.

I really don't feel safe around police because of historical racism towards people of color.

I don't feel safe with police and security. There have been stories where people have not been nice to students and I know a lot of who have bad experiences with them.

[I] feel [I'm] in a box because [I have] a disability and always feel targeted.

I always feel uncomfortable with [police/security guards] cause I feel like they harass people of color and I personally feel harassed based on my race.

I felt unsafe because police and security often just harass kids at school. I don't think they serve an actual purpose other than just making kids feel unsafe.

They are arrogant and there's a hierarchy. Cops are also very racist.

Security guards are often bullies to students and also criminalize us.

It's scary for them to have guns.

I feel unsafe when I see police and security because their interactions were unnecessary. They would pull people over in the parking lot and give them tickets. Before being in foster care, I had a lot of bad experiences with police and I have bad connotations with them.

I've just seen my BIPOC community get hurt and not [get] the support they are needing.

Police are often racist—more money for counselors.

I've never had positive interactions with them—they are not safe!

When I see police at my school I feel scared. It's always in the back of my mind that something bad is gonna happen with them there.

I've seen many of my friends and me get targeted by police for years. [My] school says that they want to make us feel safe but it doesn't feel like that until police are out of our schools!

I felt unsafe because they're mean and harass kids of color.

I don't feel safe with police because I've seen and heard about negative interactions with them and students, they felt unsafe, and I feel the same way with security.

The fact that they have weapons on them is intimidating and scary.

Too much money is put into their security systems.

[Police/security guards] always try to intimidate students, even though they are bigger built. They are typically there to escalate situations rather than deescalate the situation.

It looks like [police/security guards] just want to lock us up!

I definitely think more funding should be allocated to students instead of policing them.

I feel traumatized by them and purposely avoid seeing them or interacting with them.

Negative Interactions with Police and Security

Security guards are very creepy. I have heard and seen them flirt with girls many times and it's disgusting!

They are just creepy. I think one of them got fired for snapchatting girls at school.

Because of [my] gender [I feel] that cops are staring at [me] all the time.

I have been harassed by police [and] security from the age of 8. I have been arrested, pepper sprayed, searched, and neglected by the school.

I was in a situation where I was asked if I belonged in a school. I wouldn't have been asked that if I was white.

Once this security [guard] was harassing me and was mistaking me for another student named Juan. This was extremely racist. He kept insisting that I was that student and was asking me why I was lying when I wasn't.

I was in school for not even 30 minutes, I got called out of my credit recovery class and got sent to the behavior specialist and got called a gang banger because of my belt. I got racially profiled for how I dressed. The white girls in my school would wear blue bandana and nothing would happen to them.

A police at school once told me that he was gonna lock me and my friends up in juvenile, that he was just waiting for the perfect time to do it.

I was a sophomore in high school. I was on my way to the restroom and remember seeing a cop interacting with a low-income white student. This is a majority high and middle income white school, but this student was a low income. The student was being handcuffed by the cop and the cop was being very aggressive with him. The cop threw his backpack across the hallway. The cop was holding the student by the neck and led him out the school like this. The cop was over 5.9 feet and the student was much smaller. I didn't feel comfortable being around this situation.

I have been searched, because someone made up a rumor that I had a weapon. I was searched without the staff and cops calling my mom or anything.

This one time the security called me into the office and the searched my backpack without even telling me that they were gonna search it because they thought I had weed on me. The security guard physically pulled me and forced me out of the room when I told them I wasn't gonna let them search me. That same security guard ended up getting fired later on. He always made false accusations against POC.

One time in class, me and a friend were the only students of color. The class smelled like weed and when the class ended, we were asked to stay because we were the prime suspects. We were searched and patted and our lockers as well. Afterwards [we] were [driven] to a holding cell till my mom picked me up. We were not charged with any crime.

I don't feel safe with police at school. I don't think they are necessary. It seems like our district is just wasting resources. Whenever I needed support, SROs were never there to help, only to criminalize students. The only time I saw them was when they were intimidating us. Such as a time when students were walking from the building to an outdoor portable class and police parked inside unmarked black SUVs just to observe the students. Their presence was very intimidating. My school is majority Brown.

I just feel like things would be way better in schools if cops weren't there—it would be a better experience for students of color. We already have to worry about other [stuff] outside of school, we shouldn't have to deal with racist cops in a building where we need to be learning, not being policed.

Police do not belong at school. I know I went to a pretty white school but cops would always be classist and racist. They would "randomly" search cars for vapes and weed without a warrant. All the funding that is used for cops could also be more beneficial to go towards mental health- there is a huge suicide issue at my old high school.

The presence of security guards is really heavy in my school. It's obvious that police and security guards are racist and it shows on who they target. In middle school I got in trouble for something that caused me to get an out of school suspension and instead of offering ways to help they just thought of punishment and I only got less punished because a teacher advocated for me.

Police appear randomly at my school. It is a majority white school. I am the only Black student in my grade. I don't feel safe with police in school because it seems that they like to intimidate me more than they do my peers. I feel like an easy target. When they make eye contact with my friends, they smile. When they make eye contact with me, it seems more scary. My friends mostly feel safe with police but I don't.

While they haven't done anything to me personally I definitely noticed that they target my friends of color more than they target me and that makes me feel unsafe for me and my friends.

I always got harassed by school security because of the stuff I would wear.

Besides SRO's being racist towards Latinos and other POC I personally feel like they create a bad environment in general. Some parents do not feel safe taking their kids to school because cops are there.

When I see police at my school I feel scared. It's always in the back of my mind that something bad is gonna happen with them there.

I see police and security guard harass students of color and I see the district do nothing to stop it.

... A person got pushed in a locker by police and they got made fun of.

I have never had a positive experience with police. Every interaction I had they have been aggressive.

...When I think of police, they always racially profile and they should not be in spaces where POC students are. They are a threat to our safety.

...[I] felt unheard. [I] felt watched, uncomfortable and a cop ignored [me] when [I] asked for help.

They always discriminate [against] students [based] on how they look and dress.

When I got arrested they would racially profile me. They said I shouldn't act like that in the U.S.A. That they wouldn't let this stuff happen in the U.S.A.

Every time I interact with a security guard or police I end up suspended and they're really racist.

Police always treated us like animals.

When I was in high school, I was accused of stealing a phone, having weed on me. There was a constant violation of rights that now I understand was not ok. I also had a parole officer and that has really messed me up because I feel like that made me get into a cycle of just getting in trouble. In high school they also searched my locker and that made me feel paranoid and it was traumatic because I just didn't feel safe at school.

I attended an alternative school/program, which is for students who need to get their GED, or who have gotten expelled out of their school. Police often target students here because of the stigma, especially older students. [My school] is a majority Brown and Black school and students of low income.

My friends and I got searched by SRO's ... We were all minors at the time and no parents were present. They basically violated our rights. I would also always get in trouble by security in middle school for skipping, no resources were offered or anything I just got punished.

One time I was walking near the school field after a football game and this cop just pulled up and accused us of egging their car. It was really scary, they just pulled up behind us and started harassing us. In middle school I also heard a security guard say that he liked ruining kids' days.

Security guards were always policing students all the time, even for the little-est things. They would even police me where I would eat.

Methodology and Survey Sample

Salem-Keizer Public Schools

Survey findings were based on a 55-question survey conducted by LUS staff and youth leaders from November 2020 to January 2021. The survey sample included 152 young people living in Salem and Keizer. To take the survey, respondents had to be 21 years old or younger and have attended a SKPS public school within the last year and a half. Incomplete responses were removed from the sample, except responses that were complete except for the demographic questions (two responses).

Respondents were asked to answer questions based on their experiences prior to COVID-19 school closures.

Student Demographics

Respondents identified as: Latinx (77%); white (13%); Black (5%); Native American (3%); Asian or Pacific Islander (3%) and other (7%). (Note: respondents were able to “check all that apply.”)

Respondents’ most commonly spoken languages were English and Spanish. For the majority of students, Spanish was their primary language spoken at home (61% of respondents), followed by English (37%).

Respondents identified as female (59%), male (37%) and non-binary/gender non-confirming (3%).

Respondents were in 6–12th grade or currently not in school (but had attended school within the last year and a half). The majority of respondents were in 10th, 11th, or 12th grade (17%, 15%, and 29% of respondents, respectively). 18% of respondents were not currently in school.

School Demographics

22% of respondents characterized their schools as having “majority Black and Brown students,” 21% as having “majority Brown students,” 34% as having an “equal mix of students of color and white students,” 23% as having “majority white students.” 52% of respondents characterized their schools as having a “majority of students from homes with low incomes” and 35% as having an “approximately equal mix of students from households with low, middle, and high incomes.”

This data reflects respondents’ assessment of their schools. The report authors did not validate this with demographic data provided by schools or the district.

Endnotes

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