

YOUTH JUSTICE PROJECT

Recommendations on School Policing

On April 6, 2019, the Youth Steering Committee (YSC) of the Southern Coalition's Youth Justice Project hosted a Town Hall on School Safety ("Students Reaching Out Town Hall") that brought together students, parents, community members, and policy makers to discuss school safety and policing in Durham Public Schools (DPS). Based on feedback gathered at the Town Hall, as well as a review of current practices in DPS, existing research, and national best practices, the YSC makes the following recommendations for DPS's School Resource Officer (SRO) program.

1) Increased Transparency and Accountability

During the Town Hall, there were numerous questions raised about how the SRO program is funded, how SROs are selected and trained, and the way that SROs interact with students. Neither DPS officials nor law enforcement representatives were able to clearly answer these questions. Further research indicates that neither DPS nor the Durham County Sheriff's Office (DCSO or Sheriff's Office) is consistently collecting data or evaluating the SRO program. As a result, we recommend:

a) **DPS and the Sheriff's Office immediately adopt procedures to regularly collect and publicly report data about the DPS SRO Program.**

- Data should be collected for each school-based incident involving an SRO, including but not limited to, type of offense, school response, law enforcement response, name of officer involved, type of charge (if referred to court) and outcome of criminal case, type of diversion (if diverted) and outcome, and student demographics (gender, race/ethnicity, age, grade, school, disability status, limited English proficiency status).
- Data should be collected on each SRO position including but not limited to officer demographics, school assignment, and funding source.

b) **DPS and the Sheriff's Office conduct a comprehensive SRO Impact Assessment by the end of the 2019-2020 school year.**

- The SRO Impact Assessment would analyze qualitative and quantitative data, as well as all costs and benefits associated with the program, to determine effectiveness and areas for improvement.

2) Increased Student Feedback and Oversight

One of the goals of the Town Hall was to give students an opportunity to give feedback on the SRO Program and make suggestions on how DPS can make schools and students safer.

Unfortunately, students currently have very few opportunities to share their experiences and provide feedback to policy makers on these issues. As a result, we recommend:

a) DPS establish a “Student Council on Discipline and School Safety” for the 2019-2020 school year.

- Superintendent Mubenga currently has a “Student Advisory Committee (SAC)” which he meets with monthly to discuss current climates and practices within the district’s high schools. We recommend extending this current model to include a separate advisory council comprised of DPS middle and high school students to report directly on their interactions with and observations on school discipline and SROs. This Council should include at least one student from each middle and high school that has direct experience with school discipline or the SRO program.
- The primary duty of the Council would be to deliver a list of recommendations on school safety and discipline to the Superintendent and Board of Education at the end of their term.

b) DPS adopt a student-friendly SRO complaint process.

- In speaking with DPS students, very few were aware of any protocol to report SRO misconduct they witness or experience. DPS should establish a clear procedure, similar to the Text-a-Tip service that gives students the opportunity to have their concerns heard quickly by DPS personnel, and gives them updates on the progress of their complaint.

3) Consistent Guidelines and Training

At the Town Hall, some students expressed that they had not experienced or observed any issues with their SRO while other students identified instances of feeling targeted or harmed by their SRO. This inconsistency among officers and schools is troubling. As a result, we recommend:

a) DPS and the Sheriff’s Office clearly define the limited role of the SRO and develop clear guidelines to govern what types of incidents do not require SRO involvement.

- This should include specific types of minor offenses that SROs should not be involved in and should, instead, be treated solely as a school discipline matter (e.g. fighting that does not involve a weapon or result in serious injury).

b) DPS and the Sheriff’s Office require all SROs to complete annual trainings to improve their effectiveness and interactions with students.

- This should include trainings on adolescent brain development, diversion opportunities, de-escalation and crises intervention, working with students with disabilities, and racial equity.