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Statement on School Safety in Boston Public Schools

Jakira Rogers, Program Lead of MAC's Racial Equity and Access Program

On January 6, four City Councilors [took to social media](#) with an open letter to Mayor Michelle Wu and BPS' Superintendent Skipper to promote the need for metal detectors and police in Boston Public Schools (BPS), and in the process, perpetuated dangerous narratives about school safety. In this politically-motivated effort to advance school hardening and punitive practices, four White City Councilors organized to advocate for ineffective intervention strategies that will only further criminalize and traumatize Black and Brown Children.

Every student deserves to be in a school that is safe from physical and psychological harm. While there is an opportunity to address safety in schools, the approach does not need to be punitive or criminalizing. Relying on police and surveillance technology may feel like an immediate solution, but these measures merely create an illusion of safety. Evidence-based approaches and strategies that rely on data, centering the lived experiences of those impacted and promoting restorative justice practices are necessary to address school safety.

[A recent study](#) published in the National Library of Medicine concluded that “There is insufficient data in the literature to determine whether the presence of metal detectors in schools reduces the risk of violent behavior among students, and some research suggests that the presence of metal detectors may detrimentally impact student perceptions of safety.” [A July 2020 mega-analysis](#) titled “Effects of School Resource Officers on School Crime and Responses to School Crime” compared schools utilizing police with those that do not. According to the study, the presence of school police increased the likelihood of school arrests, especially for special education students, and recommended alternatives such as restorative justice which support positive school climate solutions.

A 2022 report by Citizens for Juvenile Justice (CFJJ) titled [Fail: School Policing in Massachusetts](#) includes a comprehensive review of literature along with data to support the true impact of school policing, metal detectors, and other law-enforcement based measures:

1. “There is little convincing evidence that the presence of an armed police officer has much effect on school safety at all.”
2. “There is considerable evidence that the presence of a police officer increases school-based arrests for low-level, non-violent behaviors that have traditionally been the domain of school disciplinarians.”
3. “There is also considerable evidence that Black and brown students and students with disabilities are disproportionately singled out for arrests and criminal citations for these relatively minor school-based offenses.”
4. “There is a growing body of research that regular interactions with police officers both in and out of school have a harmful effect on students’ academic performance. This is particularly true for Black students, who are more likely to exhibit signs of trauma as a result of these interactions.”

5. “The placement of police in schools can have a detrimental effect on overall school climate. This is especially true for Black and Latinx students, whose sense of safety is not increased by the presence of SROs.”

Research, data, and disparities demonstrate that police in schools and metal detectors aren't effective. What has been proven to be effective are interventions such as, resources, strategic supports, counselors, after school programming, equitable literacy, mental health services, and representation in schools. These alternatives are nowhere to be found in that letter. This letter is not aimed towards addressing school safety equitably. It is a letter that is rooted in racism and White Saviorism. We know who surveillance, metal detectors, and police are for. It is not for all, it's for some.

Last month, EdLaw Project, in coordination with community partners, [wrote a letter](#) to Superintendent Skipper, aimed at addressing concerns of two proposed positions addressing “school safety.” Their letter was informed by recent advocacy efforts of Black Advocates for Educational Excellence and community partners, centered around elevating community voice and community perspective. Their letter offered **alternative, evidence-based, community-centered ways to approach school safety**, such as turning to trauma-informed approaches defined by community involvement, restorative justice, and increased appropriate mental health supports. The letter also encouraged BPS to establish alternative mechanisms for supporting students, such as “meaningful restorative justice; effective and inclusive special education programming; leveraging and expanding structured after-school programs; expanding arts, music, and athletic programs; peer mentoring; job placement programs; and dual college enrollment.”

Research proves that what Councilor Murphy is encouraging directly impacts Black and Brown families, students with disabilities, immigrant families, and low-income families, the same populations that continue to be inadequately served. There is no coincidence that these populations are being targeted by White City Councilors. Police do not serve as a support or resource to all, due to systemic racism, bias, and anti-Blackness. When these factors are not explicitly named and acknowledged, one demonstrates a gap in understanding that racism perpetuates disproportionate outcomes for Black and Brown populations.

City Councilors serve as advocates for all Bostonians, which means that their advocacy efforts should be centered around those directly impacted. Prior to writing the open letter, the four Councilors failed to engage with the BPS community across various platforms, such as the December BPS Community Equity Roundtable, the Boston Education Justice Alliance’s December School Safety Townhall, and recent youth led efforts by Teen Empowerment. Disconnected from the numerous recent opportunities to hear directly from the BPS community, these Councilors organized to promote harmful “interventions.” Neither Councilor Mejia, Chair of the Committee of the Education Committee, nor a single person of color on the Council signed Councilor Murphy’s letter. Councilor Murphy, Flynn, Flaherty, and Baker collectively formulated the letter without authentic community engagement, evidence-based strategies, racial equity, and non-punitive alternative approaches to addressing school safety.

Racism is embedded into educational systems, law enforcement systems, and state and local government. City Council is not exempt. False narratives further exacerbate racial disparities.

All schools need an individualized plan to address safety, not a one size fits all approach that will create a school to prison pipeline for Black and Brown youth. Rather than invasive technology, such as metal detectors and police (the same methods used in jails and prisons) that are proven to be ineffective in schools, we should seek to implement research and evidence-based alternatives that protect all of Boston's students.

Statement Signatories,
Black Advocates for Educational Excellence, LLC
Black Mass Coalition
Boston Education Justice Alliance
Boston Teachers Union
Citizens for Juvenile Justice
Citizens for Public Schools
Greater Boston Legal Services
Louis D. Brown Peace Institute
Massachusetts Advocates for Children
Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Maverick Landing Community Services
Sociedad Latina
Teen Empowerment

