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An Examination of Chicago Public School Security

Funding of Surveillance, Discipline Policies, and Funneling Juveniles
into the Criminal Legal System.

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Statement of Purpose

The allocation of public school funding towards the sustained securitization of schools – characterized by the dramatic transformation of school safety practices driven by social and political forces, producing moral panics around youth violence and the subsequent criminalization of students – poses a serious threat to the long-term trajectories of Chicago Public School (CPS) students through increased exposure to the criminal legal system.¹

Although recent efforts have yielded meaningful results, notably the removal of School Resource Officers (SROs) from Chicago Public Schools in 2024, the architecture of school securitization remains intact via CPS's continued relationship with the Chicago Police Department.² The presence of police officers in schools coupled with the persistence of surveillance technologies and the funding of security infrastructure continues to govern the lives of CPS students, disproportionately exposing them to disciplinary mechanisms that funnel juveniles into the criminal legal system. The interaction and convergence between these aspects raises two critical questions: a) Has the previous progress been significant in addressing the ways in which the securitization of schools channels students into the criminal legal system, and b) How far must the de-securitization process go to prevent these outcomes?

The purpose of this research is to examine the historical context of surveillance implementation in Chicago Public Schools, critically assessing existing frameworks and approaches that have attempted to address this issue; additionally, to interrogate the gap between these approaches. Building on this analysis, this research aims to propose new measures that will more effectively redress the harms imposed on students by the securitization of the school environment.

Introduction

In 2024, the Chicago Board of Education voted to end the presence of SROs in district schools. This marked one of the most significant structural shifts in CPS school safety policy, illustrating the district's commitment to ending reliance on visible law enforcement as a response to student behavior. Alongside this change came a commitment to reinvest SRO funding into

¹ Eric Madfis, et al., School Securitization and Its Alternatives: The Social, Political, and Contextual Drivers of School Safety Policy and Practice, 50. Sch. Psychol. Rev. 191,191-205 (2021).

² Res. 24-0222-RS1, Board of Education of the City of Chicago, 2024, https://www.cpsboe.org/Content/actions/2024_02/24-0222-Action.pdf.

alternative safety frameworks, formulated in Policy 704.5, the Whole School Safety Plan.³ Rather than equating safety with police presence, the policy establishes a model built around restorative practices and student support. The district's approach to limiting police involvement extends beyond the removal of SROs. Policy 705.1, the Reciprocal Record Agreement Between CPS and CPD, explains the set of circumstances under which the Chicago Police Department may engage with schools and student records.⁴ The policy's intent is transparent in its goal to restrict CPD involvement, framing it as an exception. Combined with the SRO removal, 705.1 reflects a district-wide effort to diminish the boundary between educational institutions and the criminal legal system.

Within that boundary, CPS's disciplinary framework is aimed at reducing reliance on exclusionary practices. Policy 705.4 governs the use of behavioral interventions, physical restraints, and time-outs, specifying which staff may use which interventions and under what conditions.⁵ Central to CPS's disciplinary policy, however, is Policy 705.5, the Student Code of Conduct. The policy rejects zero-tolerance approaches and positions suspension and separation as last resorts.⁶ Moreover, 705.5 introduces SAFE Schools Alternative programs as structured pathways for students whose behavior might otherwise result in removal. The Code of Conduct also incorporates restorative education practices, particularly in response to bullying, illustrating a shift toward repairing harm rather than simply punishing it within CPS.

While these policy reforms represent a true departure from punitive approaches, they do not fully tackle the issue of securitization of CPS schools. Securitization operates beyond the presence of uniformed officers. Metal detectors, security cameras, investment in invasive security and digital monitoring systems, and personnel all reproduce a logic of threat management that has the potential to funnel students into the criminal legal system. Students are still moving through environments designed around suspicion. As long as CPS schools retain the physical and procedural markers of securitized spaces, the district's commitment to restorative, student-centered safety cannot be upheld.

³ Report 22-0622-PO3, Board of Education of the City of Chicago, 2022, <https://www.cps.edu/sites/cps-policy-rules/policies/700/705/705-4/>.

⁴ Chi. Pub. Schs., *Reciprocal Records Agreement Between Chicago Public Schools and Chicago Police Department*, Bd. Rep. No. 97-1217-PO2 (Dec. 17, 1997) <https://www.cps.edu/sites/cps-policy-rules/policies/700/705/705-1/>.

⁵ Chi. Pub. Schs., *Behavioral Interventions, Physical Restraints, Time Outs, and Momentary Physical Intervention for Students*, CPS Policy § 705.4 Bd. Rep. No. 22-0622-PO3, at 1 (June 22, 2022) <https://www.cps.edu/sites/cps-policy-rules/policies/700/705/705-4/>.

⁶ Chi. Pub. Schs., *Student Code of Conduct*, CPS Policy § 705.5, Bd. Rep. No. 24-0627-PO7, at 6 (June 27, 2024) <https://www.cps.edu/sites/cps-policy-rules/policies/700/705/705-5/>.

Roadmap

This paper will address the history leading to the current disciplinary landscape within CPS and surveillance implementation within the district, weaving in testimonies from previous Chicago Public School students. Finally, our research will conclude by considering alternatives to the current system.

History and Other Context

The securitization of Chicago Public Schools did not emerge suddenly, but developed over decades through policy decisions, federal legislation, and local responses to perceived youth violence. As early as 1966, CPS formalized its relationship with the Chicago Police Department by hiring off-duty police officers to patrol schools.⁷ What began with only six officers expanded rapidly to approximately 500 within six years, establishing a long-standing precedent of law enforcement presence in educational spaces. These officers were armed and had authority to arrest students, embedding criminal legal enforcement into the daily lives of young people.

This local expansion of school policing coincided with broader national trends. Federal policies such as the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990 and the rise of “tough-on-crime” approaches in the 1990s contributed to the normalization of surveillance and punishment in schools. In Chicago, the Chicago Gang Congregation Ordinance further enabled the surveillance and policing of youth—particularly young Black and Latino men—based on perceived gang affiliation. During this period, exclusionary discipline sharply increased; CPS expulsions rose from 81 cases in 1995 to nearly 1,000 by 1998, reflecting a shift toward punitive responses to student behavior.⁸

By the early 2000s, these practices became institutionalized through zero-tolerance discipline policies, influenced in part by federal education laws such as the No Child Left Behind Act. Although CPS officially moved away from zero-tolerance in 2006, research and student advocacy groups like Voices of Youth in Chicago Education documented the continued use of punitive disciplinary practices well into the following decade. These approaches disproportionately impacted students of color and students with disabilities, contributing to what is widely described as the school-to-prison pipeline.

⁷ Yana Kunichoff, *Where the Pipeline Begins: A History of Police in Chicago Public Schools*, South Side Weekly (Oct. 31, 2017), <https://southsideweekly.com/where-the-pipeline-begins-history-police-chicago-public-schools-cps/>.

⁸ Anna Gurolnick, *Youth of Color with Disabilities in Chicago: Criminalization as a Violation of Human Rights*, *Advocates' Forum*, <https://crownschool.uchicago.edu/student-life/advocates-forum/youth-color-disabilities-chicago-criminalization-violation-human>.

At the same time, CPS significantly expanded its investment in school security infrastructure. By 2010, the district allocated over \$50 million toward School Resource Officers (SROs), prioritizing policing over student support services such as counseling or college readiness programs.⁹ National data reflects similar trends, with the majority of U.S. students reporting the presence of surveillance cameras, security personnel, and other monitoring systems in their schools.

In recent years, CPS has shifted its approach in response to public pressure and growing evidence of harm. Following the 2020 murder of George Floyd and subsequent national protests, the Chicago Board of Education committed to phasing out SROs.¹⁰ This culminated in their full removal by the 2024–2025 school year and the introduction of alternative frameworks such as the Whole School Safety Plan.¹¹ However, despite these reforms, substantial investments in surveillance technology and ongoing collaboration with CPD indicate that the underlying infrastructure of school securitization remains in Chicago Public Schools, which continues to disproportionately affect students of color.

Surveillance Implementation in CPS

This section examines the implementation of surveillance and security systems within Chicago Public Schools and how these practices reflect broader national trends in school safety policy. Research conducted by the National Association of School Psychologists illustrates that schools have historically responded to safety concerns by increasing visible security measures, including armed personnel, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras.¹² National data reflects the widespread adoption of these practices: noted trends from a report from 2015 that found that nearly 70% of students aged 12-18 reported the presence of security guards or police officers in their schools, 83% reported the use of security cameras, and more than 12% reported the use of metal detectors.¹³ These trends are reflected within CPS, where security has become a significant

⁹ Yana Kunichoff & Sarah Karp, *CPS Agreed To Pay School Police Officers' Full Salary and Pensions—Up To \$150,000 Per Year*, WBEZ Chi. (July 31, 2020, 5:00 AM), <https://www.wbez.org/education/2020/07/31/cps-agreed-to-pay-school-police-officers-full-salary-and-pensions-up-to-150-000-per-year>.

¹⁰ Nat'l Ass'n of Sch. Psychologists, *School Security Measures and Their Impact on Students* (2018), [<https://perma.cc/HJQ4-EFRM>].

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Chi. Bd. of Educ., Off. of Fin., *Annual Comprehensive Financial Report: For the year ended June 30, 2022*, at 194 (2022), <https://www.cps.edu/globalassets/cps-global-media/banner-images/annual-financial-report/fy22-cps-acfr.pdf>.

area of financial investment and many students have been impacted by this extensive presence of surveillance.¹⁴ According to CPS’s Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, the district allocated approximately \$79.9 million toward school security personnel and an additional \$5.97 million toward school safety services.¹⁵ While these figures represent only a portion of CPS’s total budget, they reveal a substantial commitment to surveillance and enforcement-based approaches to school safety. Notably, many surveillance-related costs, like camera systems, monitoring technologies, and infrastructure, are often embedded in broader technology and facilities budgets, making the full scope of surveillance spending difficult to fully quantify.¹⁶ In February of 2023, CPS announced a plan to upgrade their surveillance systems in a \$ 76.3 million project. The main companies involved in this project were Sentinel Technologies, Level-1 Global Solutions, and Dell Technologies. Both Sentinel Technologies and Level-1 Global Solutions¹⁷ are nationally operating companies headquartered in or local to Chicago. Sentinel has a management team of 17 people, all white-presenting and only three female-presenting, with several members appearing to be related in ways that raise questions about nepotism and corruption.¹⁸ Level-1 is a consulting firm specializing in government and education technology.¹⁹ Dell is a multinational, Fortune 500 technology company.²⁰ Given that CPS schools serve a majority of students of color, this raises questions about whether these companies, with such little demographic overlap with the communities it monitors, are well suited to make surveillance decisions. The existence and involvement of these three companies in public school surveillance showcases the existence of the educational industrial complex, regardless of what other problems may be considered.

Jadine Chou, the former Chief of Safety and Security at Chicago Public School during this project has since moved on from CPS and into a safety consulting role at a company called PAX Group.²¹ Prior to her employment at CPS, Chou’s resume does not describe experience relevant to safety or security, though it does showcase involvement in other governmental positions at the Chicago Housing Authority, leading to concerns about her qualifications for the role. Her LinkedIn bio describes that, “during her tenure [at CPS], the district saw a 79% reduction in out-of-school suspensions and 68% reduction in police notifications,” which points

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ Chicago Pub. Sch., *Annual Comprehensive Financial Report: Fiscal Year 2022* (2022).

¹⁶ Id.

¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ See *Management Team*, Sentinel, <https://www.sentinel.com/about/management-team>.

¹⁹ *About*, Level-1 Glob. Sols., <https://level-1.com/the-firm/>.

²⁰ *Dell Technologies*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dell_Technologies.

²¹ Jadine Chou, LinkedIn, [linkedin.com/in/jadine-chou-5558372](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jadine-chou-5558372).

to great success.²² However, some community leaders refer to her as a “total disappointment” who “never investigated accusations.”²³ This invites skepticism about whether these systems she put into place really work, or if she ignored problems to paint a favorable picture of her achievements.²⁴

Since its introduction and initial implementation, surveillance and security practices within Chicago Public Schools (CPS) have undergone notable policy shifts, particularly in response to national calls for racial justice following the murder of George Floyd in 2020.²⁵ In the years that followed, the Chicago Board of Education directed CPS to phase out School Resource Officers (SROs), a process that culminated in their full removal by the 2024-2025 school year.²⁶ In place of SROs, CPS adopted a “Whole School Safety” approach, which emphasizes physical safety, emotional well-being, and the development of relational trust between students and school staff rather than reliance on law enforcement presence.²⁷ While this shift appears to signal a move away from policing-based models of discipline, financial data suggests a more complex reality. According to CPS’s Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Comprehensive Report, the district allocated approximately \$104.5 million toward school security personnel, \$10.0 million toward school security services.²⁸ These figures represent a substantial increase from prior years, revealing that, despite the removal of SROs, CPS continues to invest heavily in surveillance and security infrastructure. This pattern suggests that while the visible presence of police has been reduced, the underlying systems of monitoring and control remain deeply embedded within the district, casting doubt on whether meaningful structural change ever occurred.

Personal Experiences

Since 1966, SROs have been given even more authority in schools and hold a high level of importance to CPS. CPS allocated \$51.4 million to SROs in 2010, which is much more than was allocated for college and career services, illustrating a higher inclination to punish students

²² *Id.*

²³ Telephone Interview with Baltazar Enriquez, President, Little Village Community Council (May 1, 2026).

²⁴ Jadine Chou, Nw. Inst. for Pol’y Rsch.,

<https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/documents/events/policy-making-panel/jadine-chou.pdf>

²⁵ Amy Arneson et al., *Removing Police Officers from Chicago Schools: Trends and Outcomes*, U. Chi. Consortium on Sch. Rsch. (June 2024),

<https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/removing-police-officers-from-Chicago-schools>.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Whole School Comprehensive Safety Plans*, Chi. Pub. Schs.,

<https://www.cps.edu/services-and-supports/student-safety-and-security/whole-school-safety-plans/>.

²⁸ Chi. Bd. of Educ., Off. of Fin., *Annual Comprehensive Financial Report: For the year ended June 30, 2025*, at 192 (2025) <https://www.cps.edu/globalassets/cps-global-media/banner-images/annual-financial-report/fy25-acfr-final.pdf>.

than to aid them in career and educational choices.²⁹

Kharyi Wells, a member of our group, interviewed a student named Theo Damita, a current student at Northwestern. Damita went through the Chicago public school system his entire life and was raised in the West Side Humboldt Park area. This is what he had to say about what he learned as a result of his experiences in CPS. **Damita mentioned the “Ausl-Academy for Urban School Leadership - Program partnered with CPS to help underrepresented communities/schools.”**³⁰ Damita noticed that school shutdowns were “Designed and targeted against POC and lower school areas.”

Following the shutdowns, “the replacing act pushed for charter schools, charter schools more privatized” and there was “no accountability with CPS.”³¹ Yet Damita observed, “Lifespan of charter schools and high schools are short.” It became clear that school areas where adolescents and children of color were residing were being forced into unstable educational environments. Their education was constantly being uprooted and ended. After years of this, Chicago Public Schools enrollment rate also decreased and simultaneously the youth homeless population drastically rose with significantly higher numbers than most of the country. None of this is coincidental. The youth’s educational and residential resources were being stripped away from them. Damita explained, “Success for students in lower and black and brown areas to get into high school in CPS is like getting in college.”³² From Damita’s experience, students became numbers, and their backgrounds reflected how big of a number they could become. Socioeconomic status still played an important role throughout the testing period because “The scoring brackets in CPS you’re allowed to score less because you come from low resources, rather than the district giving you the resources to succeed.”³³

Damita critiqued that the students from the more impoverished neighborhoods were placed into the higher tiered schools only because the administration attributed their low score from their destitute background as some way of balancing the odds rather than giving those students the academic resources they need to actually pass the enrollment test. Moreover, if a student from lesser resources would get into those higher tiered schools they may not be

²⁹ Anna Gurolnick, Youth of Color with Disabilities in Chicago: Criminalization as a Violation of Human Rights, Advocates’ Forum, <https://crownschool.uchicago.edu/student-life/advocates-forum/youth-color-disabilities-chicago-criminalization-violation-human>.

³⁰ Interview with Theo Damita, Northwestern Student, Former CPS Student (Feb. 20, 2026, 11:52 AM ET).

³¹ Id.

³² Id.

³³ Id.

adequately prepared for the education there.

When discussing the structure of the schools, Damita noted, “the superintendent of CPS is referred to as CEO” and “in this current mayoral administration people can now vote for the school board, prior to mayor Brandon Johnson, it was up to the mayor's discretion on how to handle schools.”

Within CPS itself, students are subject to the politicization and economics of their education by political and educational officials.³⁴ Chicago’s public schools are built off a tier system. This system labels areas on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 indicating that the school is in an area/neighborhood where people are lower-income, usually under the poverty line, and 4 indicating a school in an area of high affluence. This indicator does not just reflect the economic backgrounds of the school and its students but also illustrates the type of education and resources that are provided to the students. Students in tier 1 schools receive a lower quality of education and fewer resources to contribute to their success. As for tier 4 schools, such as Lane Tech College Prep and Whitney Young Magnet High School, students here are provided a top-notch education. Because of the abundance of resources and the type of education provided by these tier 4 schools, going to high school in CPS has become the equivalent of getting into college. Students are required to take enrollment exams, and the high schools they will be accepted into are based on their respective scores. This process quite literally traps students into perpetual cycles of disinvestment; students coming from lower-ranked neighborhoods pursue educational paths vastly different from their peers in higher-ranked neighborhoods. A constant disinvestment like this has quite literally shown that the more disinvested groups often fall into the wrong paths of adulthood. This includes crime, low-paying jobs, no higher education, and a lack of financial stability.

Despite seemingly being a fair evaluation of students, the discrepancies that stem from the limit or abundance of resources provided to the K-8 schools, which is based off of the surrounding area’s median income, limit the choice of what school these students could get into. Some students are forced to go to their local tier 1 or 2 high school because of an inability to score high enough on their enrollment exam. This inability is not due to a lack of smarts or talent — students are unable to get into a good high school because they do not have the resources to study well enough, nor are they able to get a good education because of where their K-8 school is located. Students are not given the resources they need to succeed because of the

³⁴ Id.

economic makeup of where they live. Despite selective enrollment schools being required to intake lower-tiered students, other challenges present themselves that force students to go to their designated tier school, such as transportation to the school, distance from home, family responsibilities, and schedules.³⁵

Previous Approaches to Issue

A Chicago-based organization, Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) played a pivotal role in exterminating the zero-tolerance policy of discipline in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). They cited a specific issue that they found concerning: a 50% graduation rate for CPS.³⁶ For a year and a half, VOYCE collected primary and secondary data utilizing their unique perspective as CPS students to identify specific policies and practices that lower the graduation rate in CPS. A main conclusion from such research was that the zero-tolerance policy, officially removed from CPS in 2006 but still heavily practiced, was a driving force for the ridiculously low graduation rates.³⁷ Not only did VOYCE find that the zero policy practices were still in effect in CPS, but also that they were having opposite intended effects. That is to say, the discipline practices that CPS implemented increased dropout and incarceration rates, increased costs for taxpayers, and decreased the rate of measurable school safety in the form of deterring unwanted behaviors.³⁸

After researching and citing the adverse effects of zero-tolerance discipline in CPS, VOYCE became an integral part of dismantling the practice. The organization made insightful suggestions through calls to action, memos, and specific use of student voice. For example, one call to action that VOYCE gave was economic. They advised CPS to reallocate investments away from discipline and toward student support and instruction.³⁹ They also provided a useful framework, including visuals like charts and graphs, to help display the intended effects of their suggestion. VOYCE's model of call to action was effective not only because of the research they did but also because of the extent of depth of their recommendations. They made their recommended calls to action, like economic reallocation, easier to digest for readers and easier to implement by legislatures by providing a clear visual and economic pathway. Our group will

³⁵ Yana Kunichoff, *Where the Pipeline Begins: A History of Police in Chicago Public Schools*, South Side Weekly (Oct. 31, 2017), <https://southsideweekly.com/where-the-pipeline-begins-history-police-chicago-public-schools-cps/>.

³⁶ Voices of Youth in Chi. Educ., *Failed Policies, Broken Future: The True Cost of Zero Tolerance in Chicago*, at 1 (July 2011), <https://voyceproject.org/wp-content/uploads/Failed-Policies-Broken-Futures.pdf>.

³⁷ *Id.* at 3.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.* at 31.

model and take cues from VOYCE's model of call to action because their formulated plan was significant and provides the framework for how much work is left to complete in terms of SROs in Chicago Public Schools.

Beyond discipline policies, school funding decisions play a critical role in shaping how schools respond to student behavior. Research from the American Civil Liberties Union shows that many schools invest heavily in surveillance measures, including police and security infrastructure, while failing to provide adequate counseling and mental health services.⁴⁰ This imbalance encourages schools to punish rather than support students, increasing the likelihood of early contact with the criminal justice system. When schools lack the resources to address behavioral issues through counseling, restorative practices, and other support systems, they often rely on exclusionary discipline and law enforcement intervention, pushing students closer to involvement with the criminal justice system.

Evidence from the University of Chicago Education Lab demonstrates how schools can reverse these outcomes by reallocating resources. Their study of Chicago Public Schools found that schools implementing restorative practices, an approach focused on conflict resolution, accountability, and relationship-building, experienced significant reductions in school-based arrests, out-of-school arrests, and suspension rates.⁴¹ These findings suggest that schools can reduce student criminalization when they invest in supportive interventions rather than punitive infrastructure. Much like VOYCE's campaign against zero-tolerance discipline, these reforms recognize that punitive approaches often worsen the very outcomes they aim to prevent.

Chicago Public Schools has recently embraced this approach. CPS eliminated School Resource Officers (SROs) and adopted a "Whole School Safety" model centered on mental health services, restorative justice, and community-based supports.⁴² Rather than simply removing SROs, CPS redirected resources toward programs designed to address the root causes of student conflict and behavioral challenges.⁴³ By defining school safety through support rather than surveillance, CPS has begun to address the structural conditions that contribute to early criminal justice contact. This shift matters because early contact with the justice system remains

⁴⁰ ACLU, *Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students* (Mar. 4, 2019) <https://www.aclu.org/publications/cops-and-no-counselors>.

⁴¹ Press Release, U. Chi. Educ. Lab, *University of Chicago Education Lab Study Finds Restorative Practices Decrease Student Arrests In and Outside School*, (Sept. 8, 2023) <https://educationlab.uchicago.edu/2023/09/university-of-chicago-education-lab-study-finds-restorative-practices-decrease-student-arrests-in-and-outside-school/>.

⁴² *Whole School Comprehensive Safety Plans*, Chi. Pub. Schs., <https://www.cps.edu/services-and-supports/student-safety-and-security/whole-school-safety-plans/>.

⁴³ *Id.*

a strong predictor of future involvement, including the likelihood that students will face formal charges during or shortly after their educational careers.⁴⁴ As a result, resource reallocation represents more than a policy change. It serves as a structural intervention that can disrupt pathways into student criminalization.

Calls to Action

Research conducted by the UChicago Consortium on School Research found that the removal of SROs from CPS did not significantly affect students' or teachers' perceptions of school safety or student-teacher trust. The study also found that schools that removed SROs experienced lower rates of high-level disciplinary infractions than schools that retained them, suggesting that school safety can be maintained without permanent police presence.⁴⁵

These findings, coupled with CPS's embrace of a Whole School Safety Plan, demonstrate that as CPS continues to shape the future of student safety, district leaders must take concrete steps to align spending goals of the Whole School Safety Plan. In fiscal year 2025 alone, CPS allocated approximately \$114.5 million toward security personnel and security services.⁴⁶ Rather than continuing to devote substantial resources to surveillance, CPS should direct a greater portion of its funding toward restorative justice programs, counselors, social workers, behavioral health teams, and other student support services. Doing so would strengthen the district's ability to address the root causes of conflict within the lives of students, improve student well-being, and build stronger relationships within school communities. If CPS is serious about creating safe and equitable schools, it must move beyond simply removing SROs and fully invest in evidence-based supports outlined in the Whole School Safety Plan. The district has already established a framework for a more supportive vision of school safety, and now it must commit the resources needed to build upon that vision.

To address the harms imposed on students by the securitization of the school environment, the environment must change. The culture must be reexamined, and students must be recentered in place of security and data. Schools should be a place for students to learn and grow, not a machine for separating children thought to be unredeemable from their

⁴⁴ Shriver Ctr. on Poverty L., *Handcuffs in Hallways: The State of Policing in Chicago Public Schools* (Feb. 1, 2017) <https://www.povertylaw.org/article/handcuffs-in-hallways-the-state-of-policing-in-chicago-public-schools/>.

⁴⁵ Amy Arneson et al., *Removing Police Officers from Chicago Schools: Trends and Outcomes* (Handout), U. Chi. Consortium on Sch. Rsch. (June 2024), <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/removing-police-officers-from-Chicago-schools>.

⁴⁶ Chi. Bd. of Educ., Off. of Fin., *Annual Comprehensive Financial Report: For the year ended June 30, 2025*, at 187-88 (2025) <https://www.cps.edu/globalassets/cps-global-media/banner-images/annual-financial-report/fy25-acfr-final.pdf>.

communities. Students should be and feel valued and respected, with access to mental health resources and interventions, and without labels. Students shouldn't feel that they are in a dangerous environment that requires excessive metal detecting, surveillance, and policing, and they shouldn't be treated like they are dangerous. Spending on security should never outweigh spending on college and career prep. Safety plans shouldn't be implemented by outside corporations who have no ties to the success of students.

Conclusion

For decades, increased surveillance in schools, primarily through SROs and an increase in zero-tolerance policies within schools, has led to an increase in more students in CPS being punished through arrests and detention outside of their schools. The surveillance has led to the funneling of students of Black, Latino, and/or low-income backgrounds into the criminal justice system, with many unequipped to leave it due to their socioeconomic backgrounds and the cyclical punitiveness of the criminal justice system.

Students in CPS are forced into schools that aren't given the adequate resources to accommodate college and career readiness, any IEP necessities, or to enact proper disciplinary practices. These students are then subject to frustration, which many times manifests into security issues within the school, and later, stringent solutions such as jail time and a criminal record. Because of how much money has been put into funding more surveillance within Chicago's public schools, said schools are able to fall back on using excessive force and arrests to discipline students over even the most minor of infractions. Again, this leads to the funneling of juveniles into the system as a result of funding the wrong aspects in schools.

Because of issues regarding reinforcing "tough-on-crime" policies in schools, the corporatization of schools, and a lack of diversity within the group trying to enforce increased surveillance, concerns regarding the ethics of surveilling schools and students within CPS increased. Parents, students, staff, and administrators felt as though their schools became more prison-like, and for many, these notions manifested into increased misconduct on the part of the students. This misconduct and the resulting responses led countless students into a criminal justice system that was already overbooked and underfunded, leading to it being increasingly difficult to get these students out of the criminal justice cycle.

By shifting funding away from surveillance and changing the culture around student misconduct, schools and the district itself would have the opportunity to better their schools through the type of education provided and the resources given to said students, as opposed to the

notion that bettering schools would come from being harsher on students. By stepping away from punitive approaches and choosing restorative justice approaches, schools could eliminate or minimize their role in funneling students into a cyclical criminal justice system by fixing behaviors rather than simply punishing them. Increasing funding towards college and career readiness programs sets up students who are already marginalized for a better pathway in life. By changing the culture around student behaviors, schools could become safer places for students who may or may not come from already under-resourced communities, and with that, could become places into which students pour more energy, which subsequently could allow students to create better pathways for themselves and their futures.

Glossary of Terms

CPS: Chicago Public Schools

POC: People of Color: Individuals who are not classified as white. Black or African American people; Latino or Hispanic people; Asian and Asian American people; Native American and Indigenous peoples; and Pacific Islanders.

Chicago Board of Education: Governing body that oversees Chicago Public Schools (CPS) It sets policy and direction for the public school system in Chicago.

SRO: School Resource Officer

A police officer assigned to a school to support safety and respond to incidents. **CPD:** (Chicago Police Department): The law enforcement agency for the city of Chicago.

ESSA: (Every Student Succeeds Act): A 2015 federal law that sets education accountability rules and requires annual student testing while giving states more control than previous laws.

NCLB: (No Child Left Behind Act): A 2001 federal education law focused on standardized testing and school accountability, replaced by ESSA in 2015.

Zero Tolerance: A school discipline policy that applies automatic punishment for specific rule violations, regardless of context.

School-to-Prison Pipeline: A pattern where school discipline practices (like suspensions or police involvement) increase the likelihood of students entering the justice system.

Whole Child Approach: An education model that supports students academic, social, emotional, and physical development.

Whole School Safety Plans: A comprehensive framework created by Chicago Public Schools (CPS)—that shifts from traditional security to a holistic approach focusing on physical safety, emotional safety, and relational trust.

MTSS / Tier 1–4 Multi-Tiered System of Supports: A framework that provides increasing levels of academic and behavioral support based on student need.

Tier 1: Universal support for all students

Tier 2: Targeted small-group support

Tier 3: Intensive individualized support

Tier 4: Highly specialized or external services (in some systems)

SAFE Schools Alternative Program: A structured program that provides temporary academic instruction and behavioral support for students who are suspended, expelled, or otherwise not attending their regular school due to disciplinary or placement reasons.

Sentinel Technologies: An IT services company that provides cybersecurity, cloud computing, and technology support for organizations.

Level-1 Global Solutions: A technology consulting firm that provides IT infrastructure, cybersecurity, and technical staffing services for organizations.



Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts is a collaborative 501(c)(3) non-profit organization advocating for fair, accessible, and anti-racist courts in Chicago, Cook County, and across the state of Illinois.



The Chicago Council of Lawyers is Chicago's public interest bar association, advocating for the fair and effective administration of justice.



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