



FAQ: Shifting police funding to student needs

Why is UTLA talking about eliminating the school police and shifting funding to student needs?

Students in LA have been organizing against over-policing for years. UTLA has been a part of this, working in coalition to end truancy ticketing, to stop the LA School Police Department from attaining federal weapons like tanks, and to stop discriminatory searches.

The historic movement for Black Lives and racial justice has sharpened the focus on issues of policing, and many districts across the country have eliminated school police. On June 3, the UTLA Board voted 35-2, and on June 25, the UTLA House voted 154-56 to call for the elimination of the LA school police budget and to instead spend those funds on staffing and programs that address student mental/social/emotional health and real safety for all. The UTLA Board and House are the highest decision-making bodies of our union.

How does the presence of school police negatively impact our students?

School policing serves to funnel young people, mostly Black and Brown, into the school-to-prison pipeline. Behaviors that should be addressed within the school community are instead outsourced to police, and such infractions create a record that follows a young person throughout their educational career and can limit the scope of their opportunities. If our goal is to educate young people, then we must create an environment of love, trust, and respect.

Here is some of the research that informed the UTLA Board and House policy that calls for the elimination of the LA school police budget and to instead spend those funds on student supports:

- Tens of thousands of LAUSD students have a police officer on campus, but no full-time counselor, social worker, or nurse (ACLU 2019)
 - Between 2005 and 2019, crime went down and LAUSD enrollment dropped by over 18%, yet the LA school police budget increased by 48% (UCLA Black Male Institute 2020). Some of the budget increase happened while educators were being laid off because the district claimed there was no money to save teacher jobs
 - Black students make up 8% of LAUSD's student population, but are 25% of LA school police arrests. 25% of arrests are of elementary and middle school students (UCLA Bunche Center 2018)
 - The presence of school police does not stop school shootings (Bowling Green University 2020)
 - Schools are less safe with school police. Students of color feel more unsafe, and students are less likely to confide in adults (Howard University 2018 and University of Tennessee 2016)
 - The presence of school police has a detrimental impact on the achievement of students of color, especially Black students (UCLA Department of Public Policy 2019 and Harvard University/Columbia University 2019)
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Will UTLA members be voting on this policy?

A group of UTLA members is collecting signatures to have an all-member vote on UTLA's policy that calls for the elimination of the school police budget and instead investing in student services, staffing, and Community Schools. Per the UTLA Constitution, an all-member vote can be triggered if 500 of our 34,000 UTLA members challenge elected leadership's decisions on policy. This would be the first time since 1998 that this section of the UTLA Constitution has been triggered to overturn UTLA policy. Back then, also related to a racial justice issue, some teachers tried to organize *against* the formal union position in support of bilingual education.

In 2020, in this crucial moment for racial justice, we must support our students and be on the right side of history. We must commit now to vote "yes" to uphold UTLA's policy, in the event of an all-member vote. Please sign the petition at www.utla.net/defund-school-police-petition to commit to vote "yes."

What are alternatives to school police to make our campuses safer?

We can and we must reimagine school safety for all. Imagine what it is like to be a student who has seen police brutality and intimidation of self, family, or friends in their neighborhoods, as so many have, and imagine the constant presence of the police – as you walk to school, as you take the Metro, and so on. We must imagine the impacts. And, then we must imagine what a structurally racist society has not wanted us to imagine – real safety for all people. In your school, imagine:

- Instead of calling police when a fight starts, your school has trained campus aides, hired from the community and respected by students, who come quickly. The fight is broken up and students get support.
 - When a student is disruptive, instead of calling the police, you text a number and an unarmed HHS urgent responder trained in de-escalation comes within 5 minutes to help. The student is safe and supported.
 - When a student is experiencing a mental health crisis, instead of calling school police, a first responder trained in mental health comes quickly. One hour later, the student is in a safe place with plans for follow-up.
 - When a student is selling drugs, the student is connected to a specialist to stop it and to link the student to programs on substance use and jobs.
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What is a better use of the LA school police budget to reimagine safety for all?

The \$70 million LA school police budget could pay for all of the following:

- 130 additional Psychiatric Social Workers
 - 130 additional Academic Counselors
 - 130 additional School Psychologists
 - 130 additional Pupil Services and Attendance Counselors
 - 130 additional Campus Aides
 - Investment in 10 additional schools to be transformed into Community Schools, with wrap-around services for families, broadened curriculum, parent engagement, fully-funded restorative practices, and more
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If LA school police are eliminated, won't calls to LAPD and the sheriff increase?

First, it is important to be clear that school police are just as much "police" as LAPD or sheriffs. They have the same training, culture, and mandates. More importantly, they approach potentially volatile situations with the same mindset of dominance that has proven to be a failure, particularly in schools, over and over. PSWs have their own training and mandates and may not be the most appropriate to intervene in every situation. That is why we need a "restorative culture team," including other trained professionals like gang intervention workers, peacekeepers, peer mediators/counselors, and so on – folks who are skilled in de-escalation and harm reduction, and more importantly, already have the trust and respect of students. Given our current climate, a police officer is much more likely to make a volatile situation even more dangerous for everyone.

LASPD is another union. Shouldn't we be united with our union brothers and sisters?

The school police union – like the Fraternal Order of Police – is not a union. The role of police has always been to protect managers and property. They cross picket lines and break up strikes.

What if we view the school police as part of our school community?

Of course, there are some school police with whom we get along well and like as people. This is not about individual school police officers. This is about the institution of policing and how it traumatizes our students. We are for a just transition for school police officers into other jobs, including training, support, and opportunities to take on other work.

We have to remember that not everyone has the same experience with police. The issue is the system. Often, behaviors that should be addressed within the school community are instead outsourced to police, and such infractions create a record that follows a young person throughout their educational career and can limit the scope of their opportunities. The UTLA Board and House believes that we do not need armed police roaming our halls – we need counselors who are provided with resources, nurses with sufficient medical supplies, and librarians loaded up with books.

Shouldn't UTLA be focused on school-site issues and funding instead of advocating for police-free schools?

We know that our schools are in desperate need, but the massive underfunding we are experiencing is directly connected to the issue of racial justice. The students of LAUSD are more than 88% students of color, and LAUSD serves more Black students than any school district in the state of California, and more than most districts across the country. For years, our schools have faced cuts while local police departments have been expanded. In a school district like LAUSD, a school budget is in many ways a snapshot of the amount of racism in our society. The budget is a moral document. A just society would increase school funding, not police funding.