

Public Comments for Virtual School Board Meetings #13

My public comments are related to: * ACPS 2025 Strategic Plan

Topic * Divesting from the police

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What is your relationship to ACPS? * Community Member

Enter your comments here which will be included under Public Comments on the Agenda:

As you may have heard, following the police murder of George Floyd the Minneapolis School Board terminated its contract with the police department. Portland, OR followed suit and ended funding for SROs in schools and reallocated budget to school counselors or social workers.

Police have no place in our schools, and their presence endangers students of color. A 2019 study in the American Sociological Review found that police presence in schools decreased both the test scores and attendance rates of Black male youth. (1) The likely cause was fear of arrest with increased police presence in schools, which is wholly justified. As this piece from PBS demonstrates, in Virginia a staggering 75% of school-based arrests were of Black students.(2) Yet, in 2016 African-American students made up less than 25% of the student population.(3) Now is the time to make real strides towards racial justice for our Black and Latinx students in Alexandria, to divest from the Alexandria police, and to remove SROs from schools.

Divesting from partnership with the police leaves budget for increased mental health and wellness resources for students and restorative justice practices rather than subjecting students to the trauma of punishment by policing. Investing in mental health and community care for students will do significantly more to protect students than having SROs on campuses. In fact, while there has never been a school shooting in Alexandria, in 2018 an SRO at George Washington Middle School "accidentally" fired his gun.(4) The fact that officers are in schools with deadly weapons that they "accidentally" fire should give ever parent, teacher, administrator, student, and community member pause.

The 2025 Strategic Plan states:

"In fact, it is our duty to carry on their legacy. We must refuse to give up on any student and continue to fight for an equitable education for all regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, ZIP code, family circumstances, and/or educational ability.Our goal in this strategic plan is to make equity a pillar in our community. To

do that we must acknowledge our in-equities and also understand the history within our city that has contributed to the barriers that many of our young people still face today.”(5)

Students of color are not receiving an equitable education if they fear coming to school because of a police presence, or if they have to fear that their behavior will be misconstrued and met with violence. In order to "fight for an equitable education for all students regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, ZIP code, family circumstances, and/or education ability," ACPS must remove the threat of violence from our schools, which starts with divesting from the police.

In the words of Dream Cannon, a student petitioning for police divestment from her school in Chicago, “I’ve always felt unsafe and uncomfortable around police, especially within my schools,” she says. “Maybe now the message is being amplified because we’re seeing how much police brutality is going on in the world. People are maybe starting to realize that it doesn’t stop at schools. It doesn’t stop when you walk in those doors. It continues.”(6)

So let's stop that police brutality in our schools, and ensure that schools are safe and comfortable learning environments for all Alexandria students. Equity in learning will never be achieved if students of color enter the environment with fear of being overpoliced.

Thank you,

Katherine O'Connell
Alexandria City Resident

1. <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/rdchf/>
 2. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/analysis-reveals-racial-disparities-school-arrests>
 3. <https://www.justice4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Racial-Disparities-in-Va.-Public-Schools-Feb.-2016.pdf>
 4. <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/school-resource-officer-accidentally-fires-weapon-inside-school/163160/>
 5. <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/cms/lib/VA01918616/Centricity/Domain/1330/Strategic.Plan.2020.2025.pdf>
 6. <https://time.com/5848959/school-contracts-police/>
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