

**Conference Proposal Funded by the Spencer Foundation**  
**School Security: Identifying and Addressing Sources of Inequity**

November 18, 2017

The provision of a safe and healthy environment in which teachers can teach and students can learn is a fundamental requisite of American schools. In recent years, protective efforts have grown to the point where virtually every school takes visible and/or expensive steps to control student behavior and prevent violence and crime. The protective efforts include practices such as strict rules of discipline, clear codes of conduct, zero-tolerance policies, and the use of school security measures.

Taken to an extreme, these practices can create a “prison-like environment” with further unintended consequences (Bracy, 2011). Disciplinary actions that exclude students from school (i.e., suspensions and arrests) separate students from the learning environment and, potentially, leave them without adequate supervision in out-of-school settings. When excluded students return to school, they may be met with suspicion or hostility by teachers and principals (Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2009). School exclusions are also often followed by academic failure, dropout, and juvenile delinquency. (Hirschfield, 2009; Skiba et al., 2014). *These adverse consequences are particularly detrimental to minority and low-SES students who bear the greatest burden of the disciplinary system* (Kupchik & Ellis, 2007; Losen & Skiba, 2010).

For these reasons, the education community has been working on developing alternatives to exclusionary discipline (Losen, 2015). However, research on the contribution of security practices to school and student safety, misbehavior, discipline and academic performance is sorely lacking. The limited published work on the topic has been appropriately characterized as presenting “a mixed, complex, and sometimes contradictory picture” (Hankin, Hertz and Simon,

2011, p. 104).<sup>1</sup> Questions regarding security as a source of racial or gender inequity have been examined even less.

The proposed conference will convene experts to address this knowledge gap, as they:

- (1) Bring together conceptual models and scientific findings about security measures in American schools, with particular attention to gender and racial disparities in implementation, usage, and outcomes.
- (2) Advance the field by providing a detailed agenda for further research.
- (3) Produce a document accessible to practitioners about what is known and not known about security measures with respect to overall effectiveness and disparate outcomes, and theoretically or empirically-based refinements or alternatives for reducing disparities.

### **Significance**

Security measures have been burgeoning at high cost to schools and districts, including those that can afford them least (Addington, 2009; DeAngelis, Brent & Ianni, 2011; Porter, 2015).

Nationwide, these investments spike precipitously and widely every time a major violent event occurs (Gallup, 2017).

Research on individual security measures has shown a small positive impact if any,<sup>2</sup> but multiple measures are common in American schools (Bracy, 2011). Research does not show accompanying improvements in student behavior or safety (Greene, 2005; Hankin, Hertz, & Simon; 2011). In fact some students feel less safe in a high-security environment (Gastic, 2011; Mayer & Leone, 1999; Servoss, 2013). Further, until recently, few if any studies examined

---

<sup>1</sup> These include 20 or more measures of which some are relatively innocuous (e.g., ID badges; locked doors; sign-in for visitors) and others are more invasive (e.g., armed security officers; metal detectors; backpack or locker checks).

<sup>2</sup> One noteworthy exception is the presence of police or civilian guards in school (see below).

whether security measures are related to students' academic success (Tanner-Smith & Fisher, 2016).

Published reports indicate that security measures follow the *same pattern of racial disparities as exclusionary discipline*. Toldson (2011) reported that African-American students are about 6 times more likely than white students to walk through a metal detector when entering school. Our own research using national data found that the percentage of black students is the single highest correlate of the degree of security implemented in high schools (controlling for SES and misbehavior or crime in the school). However, little quantitative or qualitative research has documented the ways in which security measures are implemented or used.

To be clear, we do not assume that security measures have no beneficial effects. Indeed, potential benefits are recognized by administrators and stakeholders. But the absence of a solid research base makes it difficult to know the balance of positive and negative effects of these investments on some or all students.

***Police presence.*** Police presence in schools (school resource officers, or SROs), has received a fair amount of research attention. Administrators feel that SROs are helpful in a number of ways (McDevitt & Paniello, 2003). However, despite non-definitive findings, many journalists and scholars take a one-sided position (e.g., “The Case Against Police in Schools” - Justice Policy Institute, 2011). This argument is supported by research findings that police presence can lead indirectly to student suspensions (Servoss & Finn, 2014) and directly to the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Finn & Servoss, 2016; Fisher & Hennessy, 2016; Petrosino, Guckenburg, & Fronius, 2012; Teske, 2012). Moreover, *students of color are overrepresented among those suspended and arrested*, implying that a police presence contributes to disparities in school exclusions. These issues will receive particular attention at the conference.

***Data to study school security.*** Most quantitative studies have involved secondary analyses of survey data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)<sup>3</sup>. The data sets can be rich sources of information on state and national trends, and school outcomes. However, these sources are often limited in *depth and* do not shed light on the antecedents, outcomes, and processes involved in the use of security measures within schools. For example; no questions about the decision to implement security measures are asked on any of the surveys. Moreover, with most data collections, it is difficult or impossible to merge school policies with students' perceptions of them. None of the datasets provides information on schools or students before and after security measures are implemented (or just about any other intervention). The conference will propose refinements in the NCES surveys and recommendations for additional data that are needed.

### **Participants' Expertise**

We anticipate attracting approximately 20 attendees whose work focuses on the intersection of school security and racial disparities, including quantitative and qualitative researchers; school or district administrators; an SRO administrator; and persons involved in collecting school and national data (i.e., representatives of NCES and other agencies). The researchers (including early-career and senior academics) are recognized for their expertise in education, leadership and policy, law and criminology, sociology, psychology, and statistics (List Attached).

Over the past year, we have contacted all individuals listed; all expressed enthusiasm for attending (with or without honoraria). We also have a roster of backup participants.

### **The Curriculum**

The group will meet for two days on October 22 and 23 of 2018 to:

---

<sup>3</sup> For example, the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS2002), the School Survey of Crime and Safety (SSOCS), the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), and the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC).

- Summarize knowledge about security measures in American schools, and their connection with racial/ethnic or gender disparities.
- Identify current knowledge gaps and produce a research agenda including designs and data needed to move the field forward.
- Propose and discuss alternatives to a high-security environment, and/or to police presence.
- Produce a report accessible to policy makers and practitioners with the pros and cons of school security measures especially as they may contribute to inequitable treatment of students. Questions that remain unanswered will be made explicit.

The full project will include (1) pre-conference work, (2) a two-day face-to-face meeting, and (3) products to be generated during and after the meeting. We will focus on the following guiding sets of questions.

- **Implementation** – Why and how do schools decide to implement one or several security measures? Who makes security decisions and based on what criteria? Are different levels of security implemented based on the composition of the student body or the amount of misbehavior and crime in the school or the surrounding neighborhood?
- **Function** - How are security measures used in day-to-day functioning of schools? Are minority students subject to different levels of security screening compared to white students? How are security measures used in conjunction with disciplinary rules and practices to make infraction-based decisions?
- **Impact/Outcomes** – What do different stakeholders (policy makers; school leaders, parents, teachers) expect security measures to accomplish? How do they define

“effective” outcomes? How does a high-security environment shape the school climate and students’ perceptions?

***Differential Impact*** – Are the effects of a high-security environment experienced equally by students of different racial or gender groups? Are students at risk, or those who have been excluded in the past, more vulnerable to its alienating effects?

- ***Data Needs***– What limitations are posed by current data on the study of school security? What additions and improvements are needed?

**Pre-conference tasks.** The University at Buffalo (UB) Graduate School of Education will create and sponsor a web page for all conference materials. This repository will be accessible to attendees and others provided with the link.

Approximately 6 participants will be asked to prepare short summary papers of their own work as related to racial/ethnic and gender disparities and school security. Authors will be asked to address some of the guiding questions (above). Papers will be uploaded to the website and used as a basis of discussion at the conference.

The organizers are compiling an annotated research bibliography on to inform discussion and future research. Currently containing 92 references (see Appendix), it will be augmented before and after the conference. A suggested outline of discussion points (including those with the Agenda), and an example of a summary of needed research will be distributed.

**Two-day meeting:**<sup>4</sup> Two potential venues have been offered in Washington, DC (with teleconferencing if needed): a not-for-profit organization and a university. Experts will convene

---

<sup>4</sup> Tentative schedule in attached Agenda.

to synthesize information and share their perspectives about school security measures and related inequities. We will encourage debate and deliberation within the context of our focal questions. The first day will begin with an overview of conference tasks. Short presentations (approximately 15 minutes) of prepared papers will begin the morning and afternoon sessions.

Following the presentations, attendees will be assigned to small groups tasked with identifying research completed and research needed with regard to each of the guiding questions (above). Specific questions from the Agenda may be used for further direction. To provide structure, a written example of identified and needed research will be distributed. A designated leader at each roundtable will keep the discussion on topic and a recorder will summarize the discussion.

The second day will begin with the same format. Late in the morning, the full group will re-assemble to review the main points of the small-group discussions. Feedback will be solicited by the organizers and points of agreement and disagreement discussed. The primary outcome of the two-day meeting will be detailed outlines of completed and needed research and the research designs and data required.

At the end of day 2, a committee (including the PIs and all other interested participants) will determine plans for synthesizing and communicating outcomes.

### **Expected Outcomes and Deliverables.**

Three reports are planned:

- (1) An annotated bibliography of research on security measures and their direct and indirect connections with gender and racial/ethnic disparities in impact (see Appendix). Conceptual models a provided by the authors will be included.

- (2) A report for the scholarly community on gaps in the knowledge base and a research agenda of questions regarding school security, school climate, and disparate impacts. The report will discuss designs and quantitative and qualitative data needed. Together with the annotated bibliography, it can comprise a publishable monograph, a paper for a journal such as the *Review of Educational Research* or a special issue of *Leadership and Policy in Schools*<sup>5</sup> or similar publication.
- (3) A broadly accessible report will be prepared for policy makers, school leaders, and others, summarizing the conclusions of the conference, the mechanisms that can lead to inequities, and recommendations for correcting them or experimenting with corrective practices.

The reports will be completed by the committee with help from the graduate assistant(s) (Completion target February 2019). Feedback will be solicited from the full group before open dissemination on the UB website and elsewhere.

---

<sup>5</sup> This journal is edited at the University at Buffalo and has published previous work on these topics. .



## References

- Addington, L.A. (2009). Cops and cameras: Public school security as a policy response to Columbine. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52(10), 1426-1445.
- Bracy, N.L. (2011). Student perceptions of high-security school environments. *Youth and Society*, 43(1), 365-395.
- DeAngelis, K.J., Brent, B.O., & Ianni, D. (2011). The hidden cost of school security. *Journal of Education Finance*, 36(3), 312-337.
- Espelage, D. L. (2014, December). Using NCES surveys to understand school violence and Bullying. Presented at *National Academy of Education Workshop to Examine Current and Potential uses of NCES longitudinal surveys by the education research community*, Washington, DC:
- Feierman, J., Levick, M., & Mody, A. (2009/10). The school-to-prison pipeline . . . and back: Obstacles and remedies for the re-enrollment of adjudicated youth. *New York Law School Law Review*, 54, 1115-1129.
- Finn, J. D., & Servoss, T. J. (2016, April). *Student suspensions and arrests. The role of school security*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.
- Fisher, B.W., & Hennessy, E.A. (2016). School resource officers and exclusionary discipline: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Adolescent Research Review*.
- Gallup. (17 August 2017). *Parental fear about school safety. Back to pre-Newtown level*. Washington, DC: Gallup, Inc. Retrieved 11/17/2017 from <http://news.gallup.com/poll/216308/parental-fear-school-safety-back-pre-newtown-level.aspx>
- Gastic, B. (2011). Metal detectors and feeling safe at school. *Education and Urban Society*, 43, 486-498.
- Greene, M.B. (2005). Reducing violence and aggression in schools. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, 6, 236-253.
- Hankin, A., Hertz, M., & Simon, T. (2011). Impacts of metal detector use in schools: Insights from 15 years of research. *Journal of School Health*, 81(2), 100-106.
- Hirschfield, P. (2009). Another way out: The impact of juvenile arrests on high school dropout. *Sociology of Education*, 82. 368-393.
- Justics Policy Institute (2011, November). *Education under arrest: The case against police in schools*. Retrieved 11/17/2017 from [http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest\\_fullreport.pdf](http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest_fullreport.pdf)
- Kupchik, A., & Ellis, N. (2007). School discipline and security: Fair for all students? *Youth and Society*, 39, 549-574
- Losen, D. J. (Ed.). (2015). *Closing the school discipline gap. Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Losen, D., & Skiba, R. (2010). *Suspended education: Urban middle schools in crisis*. Birmingham, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center.
- Mayer, M.J. & Leone, P.E. (1999). A structural analysis of school violence and disruption: Implications for creating safer schools. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 22, 333-356.
- McDevitt, J., & Paniello, J. (2005). *National assessment of the school resource officer programs: Survey of students in three large new SRO programs*. National Institute of Justice final report. Retrieved March 22, 2012 from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED486271.pdf>.
- Petrosino, A., Guckenburg, S., & Fronius, T. (2012). 'Policing schools' strategies: A review of the evaluation evidence. *Journal of multidisciplinary evaluation*, 8 (17), 80-101.
- Porter C. (2015, May 21). Spending on school security rises. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/spending-on-school-security-rises-1432180803>
- Servoss, T. J. (2013, November). *School security, student victimization, and perceptions of safety: A multi-level examination*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Tallahassee, FL.
- Servoss, T.J., & Finn, J. D. (2014). School security: For whom and with what results? *Leadership and Policy in the Schools*, 13, 61-92.
- Skiba, R.J., Chung, C., Trachok, M., Baker, T.L., Sheya, A., & Hughess, R. L. (2014). Paring disciplinary disproportionality: Contributions of infraction, student, and school characteristics to out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51, 640-670.
- Tanner-Smith, E.E., & Fisher, B.W. (2016). Visible school security measures and student academic performance, attendance, and postsecondary aspiration. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45, 195-210.
- Teske, Hon. Steven C. (December 12, 2012). Testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights Subcommittee hearing on "Ending the School to Prison Pipeline."
- Toldson, I. A. (2011). *Breaking Barriers 2: Plotting the Path Away from Juvenile Detention and toward Academic Success for School-age African American males*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc.