



Clearly Define the Role of Law Enforcement in Schools Officers Should Not Be Called on to Handle School Disciplinary Matters

Testimony of IDRA presented for the Senate Education Committee on SB1707 relating to the duties of school district peace officers, school resource officers and security personnel – Morgan Craven, J.D., National Director of Policy, March 26, 2019

I have spoken with a number of school-based police officers who have said that it is challenging when they are called in to classrooms or cafeterias to handle routine discipline issues that have nothing to do with crime or safety.

This is not only an inefficient use of resources, but, more fundamentally, it can negatively impact school climate and important relationships that need to exist between students and the teachers, administrators, and other professionals in order to create a safe campus.

When teachers and administrators are able to rely on law enforcement to address issues that used to be handled in a classroom or by an assistant principal, they are often not using the skills they have, or are not developing the skills they need, to effectively manage their classrooms or resolve conflict. They are not using research-based techniques, building relationships with students, or demonstrating how to effectively work through problems. Rather, they are saying that even relatively minor behaviors should be addressed in an extreme, punitive way.

For students, it can be incredibly frustrating, traumatic, embarrassing, and demoralizing to have an adult call the police in to address a relatively minor issue. We know that these overly-punitive approaches can cause students to disengage from school, possibly resulting in poor academic performance. And we know that the students who are most likely to have disproportionate contact with police, despite not being more likely to misbehave, are students of color and students with disabilities.

I think it is important to emphasize that this bill is consistent with the approach of many professional organizations, including school policing organizations, which emphasize a clearly defined and limited role for police in schools.

I'll end now by asking you to just imagine what it would be like if we called the police for routine discipline issues in any other context. It would be an absurd and inefficient use of resources if police were called whenever someone had a cellphone out at an inappropriate time or failed to comply with the dress code. We wouldn't take such an approach here and we shouldn't do it in schools.

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