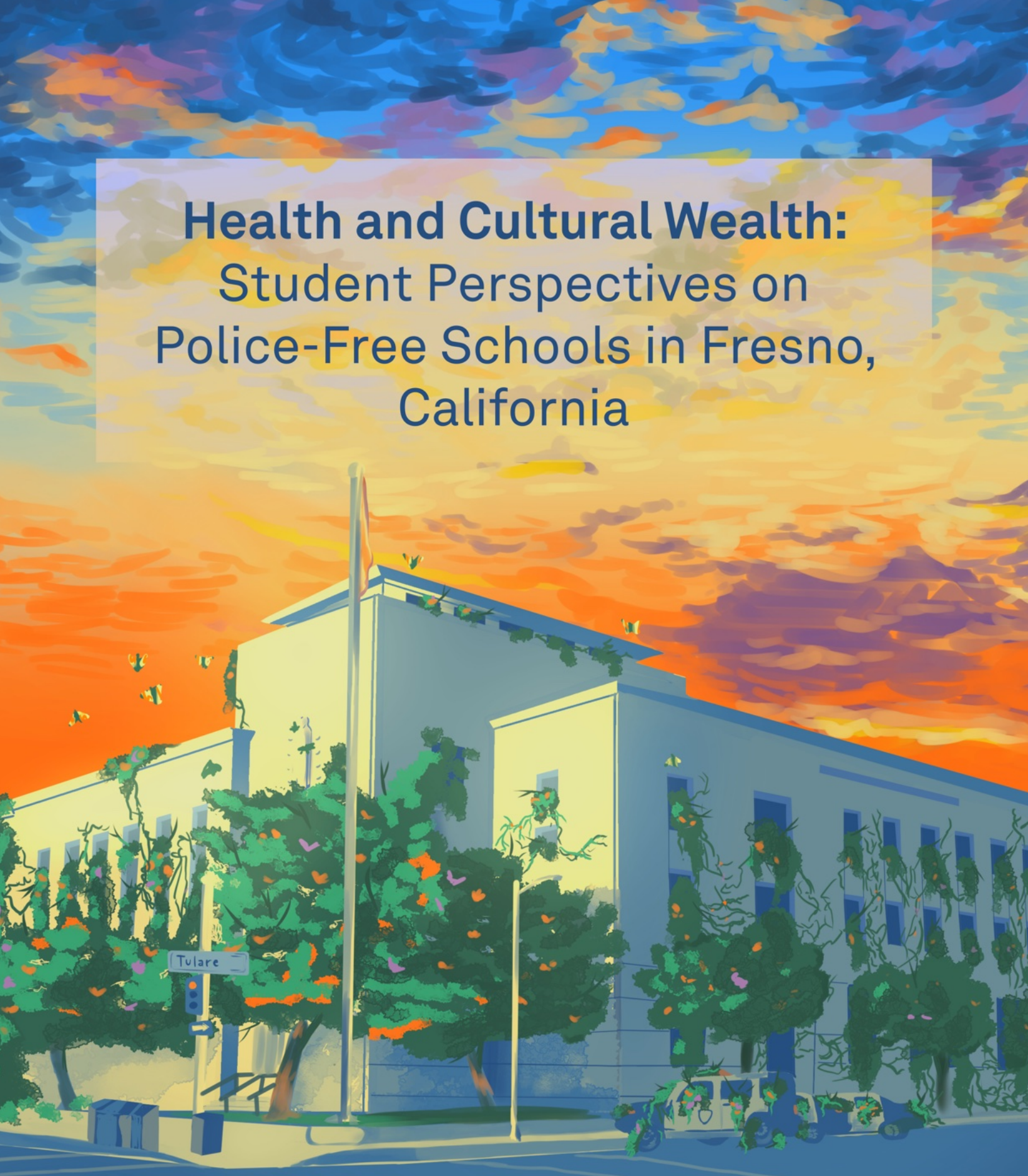
Health and Cultural Wealth: Student Perspectives on Police-Free Schools in Fresno, California



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Now is the time for Fresno to end school policing contracts

In the summer of 2020, in response to the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and countless other Black people in the US, people around the country rose up to demand Black liberation. In downtown Fresno, young Black organizers and the Fresno State chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) organized a march of more than 3,000 people. Shortly after, Fresno Mayor Lee Brand and the Fresno City Council formed the Fresno Commission for Police Reform, which spent 90 days gathering information from stakeholders across the city. The final report put forth a set of recommendations on police reform and community safety for the mayor and city council to implement.[1] One of the 73 recommendations was:

> **The City should not enter into contracts for policing with school districts. The City should encourage school districts to engage in investments that will provide a more positive experience leading to positive outcomes for students.**

In response to this recommendation, Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) tabled their contracts with School Neighborhood Resource Officers (SNROs) and School Resource Officers (SROs). The school district, in partnership with California State University, Fresno, is evaluating the impact of police presence on campus as described by teachers, parents, and school police officers. Yet the most critical perspective on school policing — that of students themselves — is not included in the evaluation.

This research brief, created in partnership with Fresno Barrios Unidos, intentionally centers the experiences and perspectives of students, who are most directly impacted by school policing. In this brief, we evaluate the health impacts of divesting from police contracts and investing in healing-centered practices and spaces on school campuses in FUSD. We examine this question by exploring the public health research on school policing and its alternatives, and by incorporating student voices via interviews with Fresno students on ways to best support their health, safety, and learning at school.

Our city budgets reveal what the city values. Fresno invested more than $200 million into policing in 2020 alone, a $22 million increase from 2019. Meanwhile, FUSD lost about $79.3 million in the summer of 2020, with major cuts to the Special Education department and English Learner Services, among others.[2] Reallocating the $3 million that FUSD currently has invested in SROs and SNROs could mitigate a great deal of the harm done by those cuts to the city's education budget. Given the available evidence, we conclude that FUSD should cancel the contract for SROs and SNROs with the Fresno Police Department, remove SROs and SNROs from campus, and invest those funds in healing-centered resources for students.

What is a school resource officer?

According to the National Association of School Resource Officers, a school resource officer (SRO) is "a career law enforcement officer with sworn authority who is deployed by an employing police department or agency in a community-oriented policing assignment to work in collaboration with one or more schools."[3] SROs are usually armed and have undergone specialized training on the school setting prior to their deployment. School districts then often contract with the local police department to have SROs on campus.

In Fresno Unified School District, 14 middle schools, one continuation high school, and one elementary school also employ School Neighborhood Resource Officers (SNROs), funded by a three-year Community Oriented Policing Services grant. Functionally, there is no significant difference between SNROs and SROs. In this brief, *SROs* and *school police* will be used interchangeably, in opposition to school security guards, who are usually not armed and not sworn police officers.

Because of structural racism, SROs are disproportionately concentrated in Black and Latinx school communities

When I become friends with a White person, I tend to be known as a bad influence. And I'm not sure if that's because of the color of my skin or just because people judge me, but it's always when I'm friends with a light-skinned person. But if I'm with a person of color, then we're both known as the bad kids.

—Stacy, 16-year-old FUSD student

The number of SROs employed across the US is not known because there is no national database of SROs; neither schools nor police departments are required to report how many SROs they employ.[3] However, in a 2015 national study, 70% of students reported having police or security guards in their schools — a marked increase from the 54% of students reporting police in their schools in 1999.[4] Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics show that 43% of schools reported having a police officer on campus in 2014.[5] Police are disproportionately employed by schools with large numbers of Black and Latinx students. High schools with a population comprised of 25-50% Black or Latinx young people had a higher proportion of SROs compared to schools with fewer than 10% Black or Latinx young people.[5]

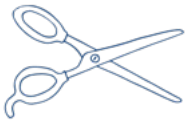
Young people at schools with SROs are more likely to be criminalized. For example, when statistically controlling for poverty, disorderly conduct arrests were double at schools with SROs compared to schools without SROs on campus.[6] Because of systemic racism, SROs are disproportionately prevalent at schools with more students of color — meaning Black and Latinx students are disproportionately arrested on campus. Black and Latinx students made up 70% of school arrests and referrals to law enforcement during the 2009–10 school year.[7] These numbers are increasing: nationwide, there were 44,370 school-based arrests during the 2013–14 school year, which increased to 51,780 arrests in the 2015–16 school year.[8] In the long term, even a short period of incarceration as a young person is correlated with reduced high school completion rates and increased adult incarceration rates, due to disruption in schooling and social relationships, increased likelihood that biased

police will suspect and arrest the student, and barriers to employment due to having a conviction record.[9]

A range of actors criminalize students in multiple ways in the school setting, from suspensions and expulsions to metal detectors at the doors to a requirement to wear clear backpacks. Teachers, counselors, school administrators, and SROs all contribute as individual actors to the criminalization of students. Such criminalization often occurs through school policy. For example, “zero tolerance policies” in schools are based on the same principles as 1980s-era “broken windows” policing — the debunked and harmful theory that strict policing of low-level offenses will prevent more serious offenses from occurring.

Such policies begin criminalizing students at a young age by setting predetermined consequences or punishments for specific rule infractions, regardless of individual or situational circumstances. One example of a policy like this is the Gun-Free Schools Act, which passed in 1994. This policy mandated a yearlong out-of-school suspension for any student caught bringing a weapon to school, leaving no room for consideration of the conditions that might drive a student to bring a weapon on campus.

Despite recent pushes to ban these suspensions, state law in California still allows schools to suspend students above the 8th grade for “willful defiance” — defined as “disrupting school activities or otherwise willfully defying the valid authority of school staff.” While Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles have all banned “willful defiance” suspensions completely at the local level, the state of California still maintains this policy for some higher grade levels. In 2013, Governor Brown banned “willful defiance” suspensions for students from kindergarten through 3rd grade, and in 2019, Governor Newsom extended that ban to students up to 8th grade.[10]



Divest from School Resource Officers

If I see [police] parked and they're still in their car, it kind of gets my heart pumping. Like they're going to stop me or whatever. I don't know, I just get — my heart just starts speeding every time I see that.

—Lauryn Thomas, 22-year-old former FUSD student

Young people are harmed by interactions with police

There is a growing evidence base for the multiple ways in which young people in particular are harmed by interactions with police — including when students are surveilled, stopped, searched, and/or arrested by police, and when students witness family members or other community members interacting with police. In 2018, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported 5,600 emergency department visits by young people aged 15 to 19 were due to police interactions.[11] In fact, one study found that interactions with police are one of the main reasons young people aged 15 to 34 are treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries.[12]

Another study captured the mental health impacts of young men's interactions with police, taking into account frequency of stops and levels of police intrusion, calculated as a measure of how often and where the young men had been stopped and how the police officers conducted themselves during the encounter. The study found that young men who were stopped more frequently by police and who reported higher levels of police intrusion also reported higher levels of anxiety. Similarly, young men with higher levels of lifetime stops and higher reported levels of police intrusion during those stops also reported higher levels of trauma.[13]

The harm of policing on young people extends beyond direct encounters with police: witnessing the violence of policing in their homes, schools, neighborhoods, and communities also impacts young people's health and well-being. Across the country, the frequency of police violence is staggering. An average of 1,000 people are killed by police each year, and the CDC estimates that there were over 82,000

injuries due to police encounters across all ages in 2018. Young people who have witnessed violence have higher levels of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, depression, poor self-rated health, attentional impairment, poor school performance, and school suspensions and expulsions.[14]

Young people report that being policed sets them on a path of further criminalization. One study that surveyed Black and Latinx teenagers found that contact with police increased their psychological distress up to 18 months later. Young people who reported increased psychological distress also reported later increased participation in criminalized activities.[15] This research shows how criminalization primarily and exponentially harms, rather than helps, the holistic well-being and success of young people.

Students speak out on school policing

On the harmful things teachers and SROs in FUSD said:

- *"They recommended me going to a continuation school because I was one of 'those kids' that wasn't going to accomplish whatever it was in a traditional high school because I carried a pocket knife for my safety."*
- *He was like, 'Do you want to fail? Do you want to be a fuck-up your whole life? Do you think this is going to be a slap on your wrist or whatever? This is a major issue.*
- *"We can arrest you because you're under age. You're a 14-year-old little girl that's going to fail in life because of the way you are."*
- *"We get threatened by teachers, mostly, 'If you don't sit down and be quiet, we're going to call Officer so-and-so on you.' That just feels wrong, and it is wrong."*
- *"An SRO on campus said to me, 'I arrested two girls yesterday and I wouldn't mind making it three.'"*
- *"[One SRO] was very very outspoken about how he was placed there and how he didn't want to be here and how unlucky he was to be at our site. And so, all of those attitudes really come out when they're interacting with the students."*

On experiencing the hostile school environment SROs create:

- *"I guess the cops [thought] our group was the most wanted. I guess we were 'dangerous.' So everywhere we would walk, the cop would follow us. They would just follow us around and everywhere, just making sure we're not up to anything bad."*
- *"While being on campus, my first day there, all you see are the police cars outside, and it's just really gross psychological use of power to tell the kids, 'We're here, and if you mess up, guess what, we're here.' There've been students who have had ankle monitors on our campus, and they're middle schoolers."*
- *"They looked at me different[ly] because they knew I had trouble in school. I felt like they were a threat to me. The way they would look at me and talk to me made me feel like I was doing something bad all the time."*
- *"A lot of [students] said that the police officer slapped them for talking back to them, and I'm like, these kids are just 11. This is terrible."*

SROs create an unhealthy, unsafe environment for students

Seeing [police] at school, I just felt like it just yelled 'Danger! Danger!' — that something's going on. The cops used to always be in my home. And it would just always make me think of the times — I had a couple anxiety attacks just seeing cops on campus. Because it made me straight up think about the stuff and I just felt really unsafe.

—Anonymous 17-year-old FUSD student

Research shows that when students encounter SROs in their schools, their interactions result in specific and magnified harm to students. One study found that young people stopped by the police in any context were more likely to report greater emotional distress and more PTSD symptoms — but those stopped by police *in their schools,* in particular, reported the greatest levels of these symptoms during the stop, when compared to young people stopped in any other location.

Young people in this study also reported high levels of social stigma after the stop, indicating that students stopped by police in school were likely to experience negative psychological impacts of that interaction beyond the duration of the stop itself.[16]

The harmful mental health impacts of SROs cannot be addressed by encouraging students to build better relationships with police officers — the same flawed logic that underlies community-oriented policing. Research does not support the idea that community-oriented policing reduces police violence or rates of harm.[17] Rather, research focuses on whether community-oriented policing improves community members' attitudes and feelings toward police — outcomes that don't necessarily correlate with improved health.[18] For students — especially Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students — being asked to build relationships with SROs is being asked to build relationships with people they know do harm to them and their communities.

The presence of SROs on campus is associated with higher rates of suspension for students overall. One study found that schools that employed police had around 21% higher rates of school-based disciplinary incidents — including suspensions and expulsions — than they had before employing police.[19] The study notes that in a 180-day school year, that equates to roughly one additional student being either suspended or expelled per week, compared to the same school prior to the employment of school police.

The presence of SROs also initiates and exacerbates inequities in criminalization for young people. Schools with SROs have greater racial inequities in suspension rates: students with disabilities and Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students are all overrepresented in school discipline cases involving SROs across the US.[20] One national study of 10th graders found that Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students were between two to five times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers.[21] Black students in California, for example, were suspended at four times the rate of White students in California in 2017.[22]

Police in schools exacerbate and perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline

They say cops are for safety, but if it was really for safety, really protecting us, then why do they handcuff children? Why do they just put them down and stuff, and yell in their face? Treating them like they're criminals? Having cops on campus, it feels like you're doing time, but you're not doing time. You're going to school to learn.

—Anonymous 17-year-old FUSD student

The criminalization of students via suspensions and expulsions is the starting point of the school-to-prison pipeline, the process by which predominantly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students are funneled from schools into the criminal legal system, with long-term impacts on their lives and health. For example, estimates suggest that young people who were suspended even once are twice as likely to be arrested than those who had not been disciplined at school.[23]

SROs feed the school-to-prison pipeline by more than just suspensions and expulsions. Having police in schools creates the opportunity for more contact between young people and police officers, and thus, for increased criminalization of students. Schools that employ SROs have 3.5 times more student arrests than schools without police, bringing young people into early contact with the criminal legal system.[4] A 2017 study calculated that after schools started receiving federal grants to employ police in 1999, each additional officer employed at a school led to about 2.5 additional in-school arrests annually.[24] In the 2015–16 school year, Fresno was the district with the third highest number of school-based arrests in California, with 159 arrests.[25]

Nationwide, students of color are disproportionately targeted, with Black and Latinx students making up 70% of students arrested in school or reported by school staff to law enforcement during the 2009–10 school year.[7] These inequities bear out in FUSD as well, where Black students are 9% of the student body, but make up 25% of students referred to law enforcement and 23% of students arrested.[25] Incarceration, in turn, is deeply harmful to health: when compared to non-incarcerated people, those who are incarcerated experience a higher

prevalence of HIV and other infectious diseases, mental health diagnoses, hypertension, heart-related problems, diabetes, asthma, stroke, and overall lower life expectancy.[26]

Do SROs make schools safer? No — here's why:

In the wake of mass shootings on school campuses, such as those at Columbine High School in 1999 and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018, a common argument for police presence on school campuses has been that it protects students from school shootings. In truth, evidence does not show that SROs keep students safer from shootings, bullying, or other harms young people might encounter at school. For example, one review found no significant reduction in bullying after SROs were instituted as a bullying intervention.[27]

In fact, SROs likely do more harm than good. Nationwide, there were 290,600 school-based arrests or referrals to police in the 2015–16 school year[28] — arrests that create emotional distress, anxiety, and PTSD for students.[16] On the other hand, school shootings are quite rare and significantly less frequent than students experiencing harmful interactions with police on campus.[29]

Trauma impacts students' well-being and ability to fully participate and succeed in school

All the staff, teachers, principals, and the cops made me feel criminalized. These experiences had me mad a lot. I was always mad because of it and then I wouldn't do my work. I'd be too busy being mad about the staff and what's their problem, and I wouldn't be focused on my work, and that caused me to fall back, to fall behind.

—J.D., 17-year-old FUSD student

The impact of trauma on students' well-being, their ability to fully participate and succeed in school, and their increased future criminalization is well documented. Much of this research begins with the concept of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) — a set of ten experiences a child might have that could create trauma, including sexual, physical, or emotional abuse, and/or having an incarcerated family member. These experiences correlate with adverse health outcomes, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Pregnancy complications
- Cancer
- Substance use[30]

Higher scores on the ACEs survey correspond with poorer health outcomes. More recent research on ACEs has addressed concerns with the original ACEs study by including community-level adversities and more diverse populations of participants.[31] For example, while the original ACEs survey did not include experiences of racism as a source of trauma, research clearly shows that racism creates toxic stress and negative health outcomes.[32] Students experience racism within their schools not only through biased perceptions of "misbehavior" from teachers, administrators, and police, but also through systemic segregation, which dictates class sizes, teacher qualifications, and instructional resources.[32]

Aside from negative health outcomes, trauma can also negatively impact young people's ability to emotionally and behaviorally self-regulate, as well as their

organizational, comprehension, and memorization skills.[33] Research also suggests that exposure to traumatic events and the experience of toxic stress symptoms can hurt young people's academic capabilities and brain development, and negatively impact their social, emotional, and cognitive skills.[34]

Many young people come to school having already experienced trauma in their homes and communities. Their trauma is criminalized when it is responded to with policing rather than supportive care. Young people who have been incarcerated are more likely to have experienced trauma earlier in their lives, leading to self-blame, decreased mental health, and interruptions to social development.[35] One study of young people in Los Angeles found that students who were criminalized had previously experienced systemic barriers that interfered with their education, including experiences of trauma, violence, discrimination, and education instability from attending different schools.[36]

When the trauma that students have experienced outside of school is answered with more trauma via interactions with SROs, the harm compounds. Research on ACEs demonstrates a dose-response relationship between trauma and negative health outcomes: the more trauma a child has experienced, the worse their health outcomes.[37] As previously noted, interactions with police — and specifically, school police — is correlated with higher levels of trauma and post-traumatic stress symptoms. Students are healthier when their trauma is met with understanding and care, not with policing and criminalization. The school environment has great potential to be a place of caring and support for students. By divesting from policing and punishment, and investing in trauma-informed staff and healing-centered practices and programs, schools can cultivate supportive, healthy learning environments that better serve their students.

Invest in Student Wellness

Lots of trauma-informed educators, administrators, everybody who works on campus needs to know. Because sadly, when we talk about these things that kids are getting criminalized for, if you were to get to the root of that, you would understand that it's not the behavior. Something has happened that you need to be able to understand and work through with that child instead of making it worse. And that is really missing at our sites everywhere.

—Natalie, FUSD teacher

What does "trauma-informed" mean?

Nearly half of young people in the US have experienced some form of childhood trauma,[38] launching nationwide efforts to incorporate trauma-informed practices into curricula and school culture. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration defines *trauma-informed* as a practice or system that: "realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization."[39]

A review of two decades' worth of studies on trauma-informed school interventions found that the most effective method of implementation was to ensure that trauma-informed practices were incorporated throughout the school system.[40] When all teachers, school administrators, support staff, parents, and students themselves work together through a trauma-informed, healing-centered lens, students experience the most benefit.

Recognizing, addressing, and healing students' trauma should be a focus of educational systems

Rather than harmfully responding to trauma with police and criminalization, many schools are hiring trauma-informed mental health counselors, providing training to teachers, and incorporating trauma-informed practices into their day-to-day workings across all levels. Research has begun to evaluate the different ways that schools are addressing and healing trauma effectively.

Some are implementing specific programming to give students strategies for coping with trauma. One study evaluated a school-based, trauma-informed intervention called RAP Club that was led by a mental health counselor and a young adult community member, and incorporated programming that included mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral strategies. The study found that this intervention improved teachers' ratings of students' emotional regulation, social and academic competence, classroom behavior, and discipline.[41]

Other schools are implementing a program called Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS), also delivered by mental health counselors. The program uses cognitive-behavioral techniques to help students cope with trauma and to help parents and teachers support them. The intervention has been tested with Black, Indigenous, Mexican, and Central American students, as well as low-income students and students in rural communities. Evaluations have found that CBITS is successful in reducing PTSD and depressive symptoms in students from each of these study populations.[42]

Research has also examined the impact of school-based mental health counselors on students' health, well-being, and academic performance. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 students to one mental health counselor.[43] California has one of the highest student-to-counselor ratios in the US, with 682 students to one counselor on average statewide.[4] One study found that schools that implement a comprehensive school counseling program and reduce the student-to-counselor ratio see lower rates of suspension and other disciplinary incidents, and better attendance and graduation rates.[44] For example, schools with

more than 298 students to each counselor had over twice the amount of suspensions for every 100 students compared to schools with 158 to 204 students per counselor.[4]

Because students are 21 times more likely to receive mental health care through school-based counseling than anywhere else, data show that schools that provide mental health services to young people not only improve the health outcomes for those students, but also improve school safety — which, again, reinforces student health and learning outcomes.[4]

One way of creating a healing-centered environment for students of color is by better understanding the ways their cultures, families, and communities support and empower them toward educational achievement. The community cultural wealth model, described by Dr. Tara Yosso in 2005, emphasizes the particular knowledge, skills, and experiences that students of color bring into the school setting.[45] Implementing a cultural wealth model in schools means acknowledging the power of counter-narratives and directly countering institutional White supremacy by uplifting the stories, experiences, and narratives of students of color. Such a model also empowers students of color to navigate, resist, and oppose systems — systems that were not designed with communities of color in mind — in a way that enriches the educational experience for all students. Schools can better operate from a model of community cultural wealth by recognizing the skills and knowledge that students of color bring to the classroom and reshaping curricula, pedagogy, school culture, and school policy around that cultural wealth.

Restorative and transformative justice practices in schools address harm without the use of punishment

I feel like, without having SROs on campus, a lot of us — then we're obligated to learn the new ways of coping with drama, not always saying, 'Oh, I'm gonna call this cop to threaten you.' Then we're obligated to be like, 'No, let's sit, let's talk this out — we don't need a big man involved to threaten y'all. We can work this out in a healthy way without putting trauma in a kid's life.

—Stacy, 16-year-old FUSD student

Restorative justice is a non-punitive process of addressing interpersonal harm that brings together the individual or group who is harmed and the individual or group who caused harm, in order to encourage healing and repair for both people in a supportive and facilitated space. A growing body of research evaluates the academic and health-related impacts of restorative justice programs and training for teachers and school staff.

One study found that teachers who use restorative justice practices had more positive relationships with their students and issued fewer suspensions — especially among Black and Latinx students — compared to those who did not use these practices. Students also perceived teachers using restorative justice as more respectful and more fair — to both the person harmed and the person who caused harm.[46] One study of a middle school in Oakland, California, that implemented restorative justice practices showed an 87% drop in suspensions and a complete elimination of expulsions in the first two years of implementation, compared to the previous three years.[47] Almost all of the research on restorative justice in schools suggests that it must be incorporated into the entire school culture in order to be effective.[48]

Transformative justice complements restorative justice processes by focusing not only on the individuals involved in an incident, but also on the larger systems and structures that created the conditions for harm to occur. As schools attempt to understand and respond to challenges in the school setting, a transformative justice framework can help teachers, counselors, and administrators support

student health and well-being more holistically by addressing the systemic root causes of those challenges. Though some schools, including several in Southern California, are beginning to implement transformative justice explicitly, evaluative data are still being collected.[49]

School-based health centers or wellness centers improve students' academic outcomes and connectedness

For me, my dream school — there would be no cops. Everybody got along. There was no discrimination towards any of us. No racism. Keep the environment healthy. Everybody had their own opinions, but we all didn't judge them or give them shit for it. Supporting one another would be the biggest thing.

— Anonymous 19-year-old former FUSD student

Schools that have a central place on campus where students can receive a variety of services — including physical and mental health care, career advising, mentorship, and wellness education — create a healing-centered environment for students. More and more schools are creating such spaces, with 2,315 school-based health centers in operation across 49 states in 2015.[50] Research shows that schools with health centers positively impact students' academic outcomes and school performance, including:

- Increased rates of high school completion, including for students who are pregnant or have children[51]
- Increased school attendance for students who receive physical health care from a health center[52]
- Increased grade point average for students who receive mental health care at school[52]
- Increased school connectedness, a measure of students' feeling that adults at the school care about their learning and about their lives as individuals. School connectedness is then associated with improved health outcomes, including decreased emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, violence, and substance use[50]

What does a student's dream wellness center look like?

Something I had in my middle school. It was a room where kids can just go and relax and de-stress yourself. You could ask for a pass to go during class, take your test there. It was such a beautiful place. It had couches, it had game consoles for kids to play during lunch. You had little tables where you could take your test. . . You just went and felt so relaxed and peaceful, and they had pictures from past students on the wall, and you could donate your artwork to them and they'd put it on the wall. It was like a huge living room.

There were two offices in there where you could go just to talk to somebody if you just needed to vent, so you could talk to counselors and stuff. And for us broke, poor folks, if you didn't have food to eat in the morning, you could just go in the 'Bear Cave' and they'll give you good food.

—Stacy, 16-year-old FUSD student

School-based health centers or wellness centers have a positive impact on student health and well-being

School-based health centers and wellness centers also positively impact students' health outcomes — both physical and mental. These health centers prevent major causes of youth mortality, including suicide, homicide, and accidental injury, by increasing access to physical and mental health care.[53] They also improve health along a wide array of outcomes, including:

- Improved delivery of vaccinations and other preventive services
- Decreased rates of asthma
- Decreased emergency department and hospital admissions
- Increased contraceptive use among sexually active young people
- Improved prenatal care and birth weight
- Lower rates of substance abuse

For students in rural areas or areas that are not well served by medical centers, school-based health centers improve access to health care for students. This, in turn, increases the amount of time students can spend learning in school by reducing the need to travel to health appointments. Nearby care also helps improve students' follow-up compliance, which is needed to maintain health.[53]

Photo by Nataly Barajas

Recommendations to the FUSD School Board and Superintendent

FUSD has a critical opportunity to join the movement for student wellness by removing police from Fresno school campuses. Given the experiences of students we interviewed for this brief, the hundreds of public comments submitted to Fresno City Council during the budget cycle, and the available evidence on school practices that *harm* student health and well-being compared to those that *promote* student health and well-being, we recommend that FUSD:

1. **End Fresno Unified School District's contract with the Fresno Police Department.**
2. **Remove all SROs from school campuses in Fresno.**
3. **Invest the funding from the school police contract into student wellness and support, including trauma-informed practices, restorative and transformative justice processes, and health and wellness centers, working in collaboration with students and community organizations.**

It is important that the process of divesting from school police and investing in healing-centered programs and services for students be led by community organizations and students who have been calling for this change for years. Students know best what they need for their own safety and well-being at school. With this report and with the years of organizing that came before it, FUSD now has an opportunity to hear and respond to those student perspectives, to prioritize the health of students in the district, and to invest in services that support and care for students.

These steps are not without precedent. In the summer of 2020, the Oakland Unified School District passed the George Floyd Resolution to Eliminate the Oakland Schools Police Department, after almost a decade of organizing led by the Black Organizing Project. The resolution eliminated the entire school-based police department and directed the Oakland Superintendent to reallocate the funds from

the police department to student wellness, including restorative justice programs and school counselors.[54] In early 2021, the Los Angeles School District Board of Education decided to cut one third of the school-based police officers and reallocate $25 million to service for Black students, including expanded access to counseling and mentorship.[55] By removing police from schools, FUSD will be joining a national movement to support and invest in student health instead of punishment.

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About Fresno Barrios Unidos

Fresno Barrios Unidos provides unconditional support, love, and guidance for youth, young adults, and their families in Fresno.

About Human Impact Partners

Human Impact Partners transforms the field of public health to center equity and build collective power with social justice movements.

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