

Reimagining School Safety Without Resource Officers:
Discussing Alternative Programs and Practices



(Jones, 2018)

Tara Bartlett^{1,2}, Lara Law², Daniel Schugurensky^{1,2}, Marisol Díaz², and Wendy Wolfersteig²

¹Participatory Governance Institute & ²Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center

Arizona State University

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Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
School Safety and SROs	3
Methodology	5
Beyond SROs: 17 Alternative Programs to Promote School Safety	7
Punitive Approaches	8
Surveillance Strategies	8
Zero Tolerance	11
Social Psychological Approaches	14
Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	14
Social Emotional Learning	16
Instructional Interventions and Youth Development Programs	17
Trauma-informed Schools	18
Mindfulness Programs	20
Mental Health Support	21
Community-based Approaches	22
Community Schools	23
Parent and Family Engagement	24
Inclusive Policies and Practices	26
Anti-bullying	28
Self-governance Approaches	30
Democratic Schools	31
Peace Education and Conflict Resolution	32
Restorative Practices	34
Peer Mediation	35
School-Based Teen Courts	36
Concluding Remarks	37

Abstract

Prior research indicates that school safety approaches emphasizing the presence of school resource officers (SROs) on campus are not very effective in making schools safer and are often associated with negative outcomes, including lower academic performance and higher levels of school violence, dropout rates, antisocial behavior, and interactions with the criminal justice system. Such approaches disproportionately affect historically marginalized students (racially and ethnically minoritized students, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, and students of low socioeconomic status). In this context, some school districts are exploring school safety alternatives to SROs. For this study, we undertook a comprehensive review of those alternatives and the recent research literature on their impacts, particularly on school safety and students' wellbeing, paying special attention to meta-analyses and studies that used randomized controlled trials. We identified 17 promising programs and organized them in four approaches (punitive, social psychological, community-based, and self-governance) and three levels of intervention (universal, intensive, and targeted). While not entirely comprehensive, this review provides school leaders, researchers, and community members with research findings on 17 promising school safety alternatives to promote a healthy and equitable school climate, reduce violence and trauma, and maintain a safe learning environment for all students.

Keywords: school safety, school resource officers, police in schools, school to prison pipeline, school violence prevention

Reimagining School Safety Without Resource Officers: Discussing Alternative Programs and Practices

Introduction

In the summer of 2020, the Phoenix Union High School District decided not to renew its contract with the local police department to hire school resource officers (SROs) and instead reallocate those funds to a participatory budgeting process in which the school community (staff, students, and parents) would recommend policies, programs, and initiatives to promote school safety. This is not an isolated case. Since the killing of George Floyd in May 2020, over 30 U.S. states have passed more than 140 new police oversight and reform laws, and several school districts (from Seattle and Portland to Oakland, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis) voted to gradually remove police from their schools (Eder et al., 2021). These events represent the most recent expression of a long process towards community involvement in safety programs that had a pivotal moment in the Cincinnati Collaborative Agreement two decades ago. This agreement had three distinct features, it: framed policing as an exercise in cooperative problem-solving; put the community at the center of the diagnosis, design, and implementation of public safety programs; and enabled the community to identify problems and propose solutions (Hood, 2020).

Another significant moment occurred in 2015 after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson when President Obama's task force on policing generated 59 recommendations with 92 action items. Among them, three were particularly relevant to schools. The first was a recommendation to review school policies and practices and advocate for early intervention strategies that minimize the involvement of youth in the criminal justice system. The second was a call to collect data to monitor the use of school disciplinary practices (detentions and expulsions), including demographic data on students and the nature of the offenses to develop

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more developmentally appropriate strategies for youth. The third, which is the launching point for our paper, was to review the use of SROs and examine policies to ensure that their presence was not increasing the school-to-prison pipeline but providing effective alternatives to incarceration through constructive interventions (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015). In this historical context and animated by the intention of assisting schools and school districts seeking effective alternatives to SROs, we undertook a comprehensive literature review with two goals in mind. The first was to identify the most common and/or promising initiatives and programs to promote school safety that do not require the physical presence of SROs. The second was to examine prior research findings on the effectiveness of these practices to promote a healthy and equitable school climate, reduce violence and maintain safety. We hope that the analysis of the 17 programs and initiatives discussed in this paper provides valuable input to current community deliberations on school safety.

School Safety and SROs

School safety has been a long-standing topic of conversation in the educational community. As schools are expected to reopen after an unforeseen period of online learning, the effectiveness of SROs is at the epicenter of current debates. SROs are sworn law enforcement officers assigned to a school or a group of schools during the school year with authority to enforce the penal code, carry firearms, engage in searches of students and their possessions, enforce school dress codes, and enforce arrest or removal from school property without parent consent. Since the first programs in the 1950s, SROs expanded their school presence decade after decade, and by 2018 over two-thirds of high school students in the U.S. had an SRO on their campus. Moreover, because SROs often fulfill different and multiple titles within schools, including emergency responder, mentor, teacher, and law enforcement officer, their role is often not usually clearly defined. Likewise, the reported numbers of SROs on campus may be lower

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than the true number of officers in schools considering hired private security guards and neighborhood patrol officers also operating as SROs without formal agreements and training on how to handle student discipline and crises (Henning, 2021).

While the literature on the topic reveals some disagreement, most of the empirical research on the impact of SROs shows that they do not improve school safety or school climate, and that in many cases they have harmful effects, especially for students of color and students with disabilities. These students are more likely to be disciplined for committing minor offenses and more likely to experience exclusionary discipline as well as measures like removals, arrests, suspensions, and expulsions that have long-term consequences and contribute to reinforcing the school-to-prison nexus. SROs enjoy a high level of authority and discretion to sanction students, but their lack of sufficient or adequate training often results in disproportionate contact with the justice system and an unnecessary escalation of conflicts. Prior studies have not found evidence that the presence of SROs prevents mass shootings, bullying, disorder, and disrespect, but found that students with more frequent interactions with SROs feel less connected and supported in their schools (Anderson, 2006; Brady et al., 2007; Crawford & Bodine, 2001; Devlin & Fisher, 2021; Donnell, 2016; Fisher & Hennessy, 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2016; James & McCallion, 2013; Javdani, 2019; Jones et al., 2018a; Kupchik, 2020; Marchbanks et al., 2018; Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018; Shedd, 2016; Theriot, 2016; Theriot & Orme, 2016; Tillyer et al., 2011; Warnick & Kapa, 2019; Weisburst, 2018; Zhang, 2018).

Since a positive and safe school climate is essential to promoting students' learning, achievement, and engagement, many school districts are revisiting the presence of SROs and are exploring alternative programs that emphasize prevention over punishment and are more pedagogically informed, inclusive, and cost-effective (Cowan et al., 2021; Leticia, 2020; Loukas,

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2007). In other words, school districts are asking: what are the most effective ways to invest limited resources to promote health and safety for all students? Recognizing that school safety is a \$2.7 billion dollar industry, school districts have a renewed opportunity to rethink the status quo and make important decisions to support students. Indeed, reimagining school safety implies reconsidering school budgets.

In exploring this issue, it is pertinent to note that school safety is a complex, multilayered concept that includes the physical, social, and emotional welfare of all members of the school community. It can refer to objective measures such as incidences of harassment, bullying, violence, and substance use in schools or to subjective variables such as the feeling of protection that people experience when they are in a place that is free of danger (American Institutes for Research, 2021; Díaz-Vicario & Gairín Sallán, 2017). School safety encompasses both the freedom *from* bodily infringement or harm and the freedom *for* physical, emotional, and social safety, i.e., the creation and upkeep of spaces where *all* students can be “authentically themselves” (Arizona Department of Education, 2020). This approach recognizes the bias that has permeated and resulted from many of the still widely practiced school safety approaches and seeks to identify equitable practices.

Methodology

In this umbrella study we examined school safety alternatives to SROs by exploring two questions: a) What are the most common and/or promising alternatives to SROs to promote school safety? and b) What do we know so far about the effectiveness of those alternatives? To answer these questions, we undertook a three-prong approach. In the first step, we conducted a comprehensive search of articles, books, and reports published in the last two decades on the topic of school safety alternatives to SROs to identify the most relevant programs and initiatives. In this

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phase, we identified 17 programs. The second step consisted of a search of empirical studies on those 17 alternative programs, with special attention to research findings on their effectiveness in promoting a healthy and equitable school climate, reducing violence, and maintaining safety. In addition to journal articles and books, the literature search included governmental and organizational reports and recent news articles. The search was conducted using databases available through Arizona State University's library search engine, including ERIC, SAGE, JSTOR, Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, PsycInfo, and Family and Society Studies Worldwide. Articles that did not present research-based evidence of effectiveness or had no direct connection to school safety measures were excluded from the search. In the third stage, we analyzed the research findings, examined the research evidence on the effectiveness of those programs, and produced a report for each one. Then, we grouped the programs into four broad approaches: a) punitive; b) social psychological; c) community-based; and d) self-governance.

In terms of scope, we built on previous conceptual models (e.g., Cowan et al., 2013; Horner et al., 2010) by identifying three methods of program application: universal, targeted, and intensive. Universal programs seek to impact the whole school community by improving safety and preventing violence. These programs deal with several aspects of the school environment, including disciplinary procedures, curriculum, and nonacademic skills (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Gottfredson, 2001; Payne et al., 2003; Welsh, 2000). Targeted interventions focus on sub-populations of youth needing extra support, preventative strategies, and guidance due to being more likely to experience victimization and/or acts of aggression (Astor et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2020; Rahey & Craig, 2002). These programs nurture behaviors through knowledge, skills, and dispositions and employing social and instructional interventions to deter violent or risky behaviors (Afkinich & Klumpner, 2018; Hahn

et al., 2007). Intensive interventions are customized for high need students and focus on youth who have been involved in an incident of harm and/or need serious, significant support and guidance (Wehby & Kern, 2014).

Beyond SROs: 17 Alternative Programs to Promote School Safety

Among the 17 alternative programs identified, 9 are more likely to be universal, 4 targeted and 4 intensive (see Table 1). In schools' day-to-day reality, however, there are significant overlaps as some programs may belong to more than one category, and some programs may be implemented at different levels, sometimes involving only a few students, a large group, the entire student body, and occasionally the entire educational community. Likewise, while most alternative programs identified tend to follow a wellbeing-based approach, punitive interventions are more ubiquitous, particularly in low-income communities.

Table 1.

School Safety: Approaches and Programs (U: universal; T: targeted; I: intensive)

<i>Approaches</i>	<i>Programs</i>	<i>Scope</i>
<i>Punitive</i>	1. Surveillance	U
	2. Zero tolerance	U
<i>Social psychological</i>	3. PBIS	U
	4. Social Emotional Learning (SEL)	T
	5. Instructional programs for youth development	T
	6. Trauma-informed programs	U
	7. Mindfulness	T
	8. Mental health support	I
<i>Community-based</i>	9. Community schools	U
	10. Parent & family engagement	U
	11. Inclusive policies and practices	U
	12. Anti-bullying	T
<i>Self-governance</i>	13. Democratic schools	U
	14. Peace education and conflict resolution	U
	15. Restorative justice	I
	16. Peer mediation	I
	17. School-based teen courts	I

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Punitive Approaches

Punitive approaches to school safety seek to monitor students and potential threats and deter unwanted behavior and violence in schools using punishment. Grounded in the concept of retributive justice, the aim of these practices is to punish the rule breakers proportionally to their wrongdoing. The two main interventions schools utilize are surveillance strategies and zero tolerance. Although these practices are used extensively, research does not support their effectiveness. Indeed, in a literature review that included 72 publications, Jean-Pierre and Parris (2018) found a growing consensus that punitive approaches are counter-productive and detrimental; they also found increasing evidence that alternative school discipline approaches are more effective in fostering a healthier school climate and the academic achievement of marginalized students (see also Salole & Abdulle, 2015; Simmons, 2009; Strelan et al., 2011).

Surveillance Strategies

Pervasive in U.S. schools, these strategies seek to deter unwanted behavior using technologies and data-sharing including surveillance monitoring, emergency alert systems, shared communications systems, and identification measures. As of the 2016 school year, 94% of



U.S. schools reported having controlled access to buildings, 81% using security cameras, and 68% requiring school personnel to wear badges (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). In some schools, traditional search and seizure activities like locker and backpack checks, body and car searches, and military style “SWAT team” rehearsals have given way to technologies such as airport-style scanners and metal detectors (Beger, 2002; Casella, 2006; Gastic, 2011; Ma, 2018; Mowen &

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Freng, 2019; Musu-Gillette et al., 2018; Robers et al., 2014; Schildkraut & Grogan, 2019; Schwartz et al., 2016).

Surveillance measures use a variety of technologies to secure school environments, including constant observation and monitoring. These measures exist in two forms: deterrence and response (Hatten, 2018; Xaba, 2014). Deterrence measures focus on preventing and disincentivizing threats and violence within the school setting and can be observed in the form of fences and gates systems surrounding campus perimeters, bulletproof glass in place of windowpanes, metal detectors and scanners, keyless door locks and area accesses limited through passcodes and security badges, panic button alerts, and video camera systems (Casella, 2006; Musu-Gillette et al., 2018; Partner Alliance for Safer Schools, 2020; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013). Many schools have dedicated efforts behind deterrence campaigns such as tip lines and other anonymous reporting measures (Planty et al., 2020; Schwartz et al., 2016). Additional monitoring is often conducted online, with school officials shadowing social media accounts, school sponsored emails, and other forms of communication (Schwartz et al., 2016). More recent deterrence measures involve monitoring biometrics like facial recognition and geolocation tracking systems (LoSardo, 2020; Tucker & Vance, 2016). In comparison, response measures are often enacted as a reactionary intervention to a crisis and tend to focus on timely elimination of threats and the provision of crisis support (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Hull, 2011). A number of schools participate in datacasting systems with local law enforcement and medical support teams sharing student information, campus layouts, and school building floor plans (Sanchez, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2016). Additionally, some schools are equipped with multimedia operability and access to radio communications and databases shared with law enforcement.

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While the technological triangulation of deterrence measures, response measures, and the post-threat dependency on local law enforcement officials has become more commonplace in the school safety movement, no conclusive evidence exists on whether reliance

on technologies and cross-data systems accessibility increases school safety (Kupchik, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2016; Tanner-Smith et al., 2018). Instead, recommendations to utilize technologies exist within a multilayered approach to school safety (DeVos et al., 2018; Partner Alliance for Safer Schools, 2020). Research has shown that overreliance on school safety technologies can lead to unintended consequences. Despite the intention of these measures to increase perceptions of safety and decrease incidents of violence at schools, including attacks and fights, altering or “target hardening” the school's physical structure has instead become associated with increased incidents of school violence. Indeed, some studies have documented higher discipline rates, including arrests among historically marginalized students, and lower levels of student extracurricular participation (Cuellar, 2018; Fisher et al., 2018; Mowen & Manierre, 2017; Theriot, 2009).

Other studies have documented a relationship between these measures and reduced levels of some forms of parental involvement (Dunning-Lozano, 2018; Mowen, 2015; Mowen & Manierre, 2017). Recent research has also shown that the usage of technological tools for school safety has either a negative or no effect on students’ perceptions of their school’s safety (Tanner-

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Smith et al., 2018; Turanovic et al., 2019). Several studies have reported that the panopticon-like presence and use of metal detectors, security cameras, and other visible preventative security measures have a negative impact on students' perceptions of safety in their school environment (Bachman et al., 2011; Bracy, 2011; Gastic, 2011; Johnson et al., 2018; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013). Further, the increasing use of technologies in the name of school safety has raised issues of student privacy and equity consequences (LoSardo, 2020; Tucker & Vance, 2016).

Zero Tolerance

Zero tolerance policies, also known as exclusionary school discipline measures, outline predetermined consequences, often severe and punitive in nature, intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). These retributive consequences include mandatory suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to the justice system for school-based offenses (Heitzeg, 2009). The origins of zero tolerance policies stem from the U.S. government's War on Drugs and the "broken windows" theory, which has been challenged by empirical research (Harcourt, 2009; O'Brien et al., 2019). The term "zero tolerance" was first used within a school setting in 1989 to describe a no-nonsense, prescriptive response to drugs, fighting, and gang related activities taking place on school campuses (Lombardo & Lough, 2007; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). By the mid-1990s, almost every U.S. state had adopted zero tolerance policies within K-12 school systems, in part due to the 1994 Gun Free Schools Act that tied federal funding for schools to whether zero tolerance policies were being implemented (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Zero tolerance policies quickly expanded beyond concerns about drugs, fighting, and gangs with new descriptors like "disruption" or "disrespect" being used to disproportionately punish students for a wide range of minor disciplinary concerns, including the

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wearing of hats, possession of aspirin and cough drops, or incomplete homework (Skiba, 2010, 2014).

While both in- and out-of-school suspensions are usually assigned for incidents like fighting or drugs, under zero tolerance policies, suspensions have been assigned to milder infractions like swearing or disrespect. Expulsions have now become the result of fighting, substance abuse



infractions (even for the first time), and threats (Dupper, 2010). Although zero tolerance policies are framed as an equalizing approach to school discipline, decades long patterns of racial and socioeconomic inequalities in schools point to inherent bias and subjectivity in how zero tolerance suspensions and expulsions are assigned, enforced, and referred to law enforcement (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Heitzeg, 2014; Skiba, 2014; Skiba et al., 2002). One of the main impacts of zero tolerance policies is the school to prison pipeline construct, also known as the pathway from the schoolhouse to the jailhouse, that has laid bare the discriminatory treatment of historically marginalized and minoritized students (especially African American, Native American, and Hispanic students) and students with disabilities. Indeed, African American, Native American, and Hispanic students and students with disabilities are often suspended and expelled from schools at higher rates than their peers, thus resulting in higher push out (drop out) rates and referrals to juvenile justice (Darling-

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Hammond, 2007; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], 2018; Novak, 2019; Skiba et al., 2002).

The inequitable use of exclusionary school disciplinary practices widens the achievement gap between students of color and students with disabilities, on the one hand, and White students on the other (Gregory et al., 2010). A meta-analysis that involved approximately 85% of all students enrolled in U.S. public schools found disparate suspension rates among racial groups and students with disabilities: 1 of every 4 Black students with disabilities was suspended at least once during the 2009-2010 academic school year, while for White students with disabilities the rate was 1 in about 10 (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). In effect, zero tolerance policies act as exclusionary practices and have been found to be intentionally used to increase a school's overall tests scores and public ratings by removing students viewed as problematic (Hirschfield, 2008; Na & Gottfredson, 2013). Other studies of zero tolerance policies report that these strict measures only provide schools with short-term relief in dealing with disciplinary concerns, and that by failing to address underlying concerns, these policies set forth subsequent risks for poor student behavior (Shaw, 2004). Furthermore, it has been argued that zero tolerance policies transfer the responsibility to provide behavior supports and the associated costs unto other sectors like the incarceration system and health and social services, effectively “rob[bing] youths of their right to a public education” (Skiba, 2000). Zero tolerance policies may be defensible when the rules and the consequences are communicated effectively to the school community, when strict punishment is used sparingly and equitably, and when these practices are part of a comprehensive anti-violence system (Bickmore, 2011). Still, these three conditions are seldom present simultaneously in the real world of schools. In sum, zero tolerance policies in combination with the other exacerbating factors such as cultural biases and school accountability

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measures, lay the groundwork in removing students from school through disciplinary punishments of suspension and expulsion, wherein students are pushed into dropping out, or depending on the disciplinary infraction, are charged in the court system, and funneled into the prison pipeline.

Social Psychological Approaches

Social psychological approaches to school safety aim to address a myriad of student needs through social and instructional interventions to deter violent or risky behaviors. Many school violence prevention programs draw on social psychological approaches, emphasizing social skills, behavioral management, school climate, and positive youth development (Astor et al., 2010). Of the school safety alternatives we found, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), instructional programs for youth development, trauma-informed programs, mindfulness programs, and mental health supports were some of the most common social psychological approaches. These programs focus on shaping or changing student behaviors through imparting knowledge and skills and fostering healthy dispositions. While social psychological approaches often exist as optimized school-wide safety programs, they can also be found as stand-alone models or in unique combinations with other school safety programs.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a data-driven support system that relies on both social and academic interventions to address and guide student behaviors and outcomes (Alter, 2018; Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Having first appeared in the 1997 reauthorization of the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, PBIS draws from behavioral psychology, social learning, and organizational design research with a focus on students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Gresham, 1991; Sugai & Horner, 1999). PBIS implements a variety of

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evidence-based tiered interventions to enhance academic and behavioral outcomes for all students (Sugai et al., 2000). Tier one focuses on universal prevention of unwanted behaviors with an emphasis on social skills. Tier two consists of a targeted prevention approach for students who need extra support systems to address behavior and positive reinforcement. Tier three is an individualized, intensive program structure with wrap-around supports of a cross disciplinary support network (Horner et al., 2010). The PBIS framework relies on centering student outcomes within school-wide support systems and draws on a continuum of best practices for collecting and using data and teacher professional development.

The research literature considers PBIS as a promising practice to address issues related to school climate, student discipline, and bullying. Prior studies have found that PBIS reduces office discipline referrals for violent and general offenses, out-of-school suspensions, and teacher-reported bullying in elementary and middle schools (Bradshaw, 2013; Sprague et al., 2007; Waasdorp et al., 2012; Warren et al. 2006). Moreover, a recent meta-analysis of twenty-nine studies found that PBIS resulted in statistically significant reductions in student discipline and improvements in academic achievement (Lee & Gage, 2020). There is relatively less research available on the impact of PBIS in high schools, but some studies have found that it decreases student office discipline referrals and increases attendance (Flannery et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2015; Freeman et al., 2016). Moreover, these two outcomes are associated with reductions in drop-out rates (Center on PBIS, 2021). Although high schools have been adopting this approach at a slower rate than elementary and middle schools, a recent systematic review of sixteen studies found that student outcomes at the high school level can be improved in PBIS efforts by engaging students in planning efforts, providing developmentally appropriate

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reinforcements, and partnering with other high schools (Estrapala et al., 2020; see also Freeman et al., 2016).

The popularity of PBIS has been growing significantly. In the last decade, its implementation has doubled. Currently, it is estimated that more than 21,000 schools across the U.S. utilize PBIS to support student social and emotional needs. However, the level of implementation is uneven. Because trained school personnel are vital to the success of a PBIS program, and low-income schools experience higher teacher and school administrator attrition, these schools face greater challenges in implementing PBIS (Childs et al., 2016; Horner et al., 2010; Peguero & Bondy, 2020).

Social Emotional Learning

Social emotional learning (SEL) programs have been sporadically employed within schools in response to mental well-being and school safety concerns. The interest in SEL has grown because, although nearly one in six U.S. adolescents suffer mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders, only 40% of schools provide mental health or social services (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2015; Whitney & Peterson, 2019). SEL programs aim to strengthen communication skills, self-control, and collaborative problem-solving practices to reduce aggression, increase social competencies and develop positive relations between students as well as students and teachers (Prevention Institute, 2001). While some of these programs (e.g., Open Circle, Second Step) are formalized, others are less structured.

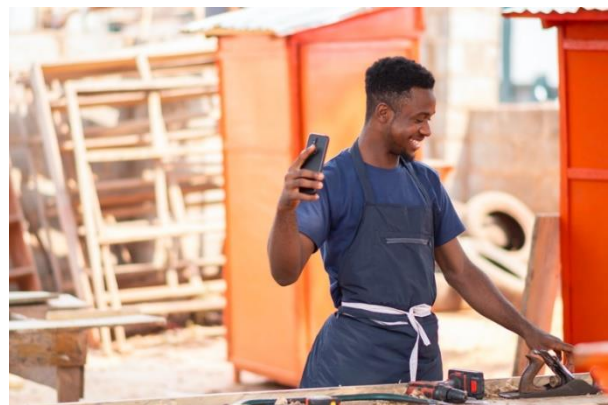
The research on SEL consistently reports positive results. An analysis of 213 school based SEL programs found improvements across an array of skills, attitudes, and behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011). Other studies report that social emotional and mental health programs and strategies assist students with coping skills, self-esteem, and emotions management to curb aggressive or violent behaviors (Grossman, 1997; Paolini, 2015). In a recent study that included

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30,462 students, 4,273 teacher respondents and 12,216 parents, Kautz et al. (2021) found that SEL programs that focus on self-management (how well students control their emotions, thoughts, and behavior) might have the most potential for improving student outcomes. Other emerging studies have found the use of therapy dogs with SEL programs in schools to yield positive psychological, social, and academic outcomes, and improve the school climate (Friesen, 2010; Gee et al., 2017; Sloan-Oberdier, 2018; Zents et al., 2017).

Instructional Interventions and Youth Development Programs

Instructional interventions within school safety programs aim to inform and provide factual information to students in order to bring greater awareness of social issues and influences.



Instructional interventions can be formal or informal and focus on teaching and modeling strategies to avoid dangerous, risky, harmful, or violent situations (Gottfredson et al., 2002).

Instructional intervention skills include personal self-management, social competencies, and peer resistance (Hawkins et al., 2015). Common instructional intervention programs include keepin' it REAL (an evidence-based alternative to D.A.R.E), LST (Life Skills Training), and LRE (Law-Related Education). Instructional interventions have also been woven into school curricula to counteract the implicit “hidden curriculum” and the stigmatizing language many students experience (Kayama et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2006). The literature reports that when these instructional programs, materials and strategies are culturally relevant and student-centered they

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are more likely to provide a lens of representation, validate students' feelings of being seen and heard, and increase overall student engagement (Autry, 2015; Ravitch, 2010; Timoll, 2017).

Youth development programs seek to prevent risky behaviors and build positive, relational frameworks and experiences between students and adult role models like teachers, coaches, counselors, and club advisors in school settings. These programs focus on interpersonal relationships within the school community. Sometimes known as mentoring programs, positive youth development programs manifest themselves in a myriad of ways such as sports, performing arts, extracurricular clubs, and programs (e.g., 4-H), social events (e.g., dances, picnics, gatherings), and civic engagement and volunteering opportunities. Prior studies have found that youth development programs provide the space and experience for entertaining alternatives to risky behaviors and bring together diverse student groups and adult role models to collaborate on shared goals, and that positive school relationships in turn have a positive impact on student self-esteem, school community building, and school safety outcomes (Beier et al., 2000, Dean & Galloway, 2008; Patall et al., 2008).

Trauma-informed Schools

Trauma-informed training and practices were adopted by many schools in response to the “America’s hidden health crisis” (ACEs Connection, 2016), and stemmed from the clinical diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorders. Recognizing cognitive impairment and behavioral function limitations following catastrophic events and chronic exposure to stressful circumstances, trauma-informed care has become a well-documented treatment approach to address trauma-related disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1980; Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014). The connection between trauma and childhood experiences began to be documented in the late 1990s, with the large-scale Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study revealing that more than half of adult participants reported at least one form of traumatic stress

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during childhood that affected their health and wellbeing into adulthood (Anda et al., 2006; Felitti et al., 1998). It is estimated that about half to two-thirds of all K-12 students experience some form of trauma during their childhood, with children and adolescents in urban settings experiencing higher rates of violence (Campbell & Schwartz, 1996; Copeland et al., 2007; Felitti et al., 1998; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Trauma-informed schools recognize this reality and aim to address the negative impact of traumatic experiences on the academic, social, and emotional dimensions of students' lives (including the adoption of risky behaviors) by promoting a safe environment. Five practices guide trauma-informed care within schools: 1) supporting staff development and training, 2) creating a safe and supportive environment for students, 3) assessing needs and planning services for students and their families, 4) involving key stakeholders and community partnerships, and 5) adapting policies and practices to better meet the needs of students and families. Some trauma-informed care frameworks also include culturally appropriate treatments and academic instruction strategies for students who have experienced trauma (Beehler et al., 2012; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, n.d.)

Amidst the growing adoption of trauma-informed approaches by schools, some authors have pointed to a greater need to assess the effects of these practices, in part to address the variance of programming approaches and implementation and the current focus of studies more on adult outcomes than on student outcomes (Berger, 2019; Cohen & Barron, 2021; Fondren et al., 2020; Maynard et al., 2019; Perfect et al., 2016). Some case studies on trauma-informed schools have revealed specific aspects of the approach being effective in addressing student mental health, academic performance, behavior, and socioemotional functioning (Beehler et al., 2012; Herrenkohl et al., 2019). These aspects include providing staff with the tools and training

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necessary for trauma-informed care and implementing trauma-informed practices through a systems-wide, multi-tiered, transdisciplinary approach (Dorado et al., 2016; Purtle, 2020; Thomas et al., 2019).

Moreover, recent research on trauma-informed care in schools found that this approach is most effective when implemented alongside the student's family and key community partnerships to offer expanded resources (Herrenkohl et al., 2019; Listenbee et al., 2012). It has also been found that trauma-informed care practices are particularly impactful when they extend beyond a universal, school-wide approach to support targeted and intensive practices for students with specific needs (Fondren et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2019). Additionally, an evaluation by the American Institutes for Research on a project to promote trauma-sensitive practices in five schools found positive changes in school climate (Jones et al., 2018b). Teachers from these schools reported fewer crises, decreased office referrals and disciplinary incidents, better communication, more cohesion, consistent implementation of policies, improved relationships between staff, students and families, more parental engagement and increased feelings of safety and calm. The study also found that the program built a sense of shared ownership for school climate and culture change and produced changes in practices and long-lasting shifts in the school culture.

Mindfulness Programs

Mindfulness programs draw on health and wellness and focus on an awareness of the mind, the body, and emotions to foster the development of the whole individual (Ager et al., 2015). Mindfulness is often considered a way of being that includes prescribed characteristics, activities, and programs. It is also considered a reflective practice guided by ancient meditation techniques rooted in various religious traditions that provide coping mechanisms for mental and emotional health problems (Albrecht et al., 2012). In school settings, it is used at an individual

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level in place of detention or isolation from others or at the classroom level with students engaging in breathing exercises, reflective walks, yoga, or thought activities (Ager et al., 2015; Burnett, 2011; Saphthiang et al., 2019).

Though its practice in school is becoming increasingly popular, research on mindfulness program outcomes is still nascent. However, in a recent meta-analysis on mindfulness interventions, Zenner et al. (2014) found significant improvements in cognitive performance and resilience to stress. According to Carsley et al. (2018), these interventions seem to have the greatest impact on mental health and well-being outcomes when implemented in high schools. The Balsz School district in Phoenix, Arizona, the fifth most economically segregated district in America, has partnered with the nonprofit Mindfulness First to infuse mindfulness programming into students' daily routine. This district is embedding mindfulness in its curriculum with the goal of helping students during times of emotional dysregulation and, often, in place of punishment. District leaders also see the program as a way to improve all students' well-being, interpersonal skills and relationships, academic growth and personal development. A study conducted by Krein (2021) showed improvements in students' attitudes, engagement, and academic achievement, and an overwhelming decrease in school suspensions. In one school, for instance, yearly suspensions fell from 45 to 3 and the school's letter grade improved from C to a B.

Mental Health Support

Mental health support consists of intensive interventions for students in need of consistent mental health or acute behavioral support. This includes individual and group therapy as well as connected support systems at school and in the community provided by counselors, community mentors, social workers, and advisors, among others (Cowan et al., 2013). In 2021, the L.A. County Unified School District adopted another school safety support system model, the

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

school climate coach model, composed of community members specifically trained to de-escalate heightened situations on school campuses (Champlin, 2021).

Because school-based mental health support systems range along a continuum, have not been subject to systematic evaluations, and are prone to unsustainable outcomes due to inadequate funding and lacking administrative support, research on these interventions varies greatly (Massey et al., 2005; Teich et al., 2008). However, a recent study of forty schools implementing an Emotional and Behavioral Health–Crisis Response and Prevention (EBH-CRP) intervention to address student emotional and behavioral health showed significant effects on decreasing bullying, referrals, and suspensions (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021). Another recent study of 49,941 elementary school-age children who received both targeted and curriculum-integrated mental health treatments in school found decreased mental health issues and externalizing behaviors (Sanchez et al., 2018). A major challenge faced by these support systems is the need for specialized human resources due to the ratio of students to supporting adults. Although the American School Counselor Association recommends a 250:1 ratio of students to school counselors, in 2018-2019, the national average was a 430:1 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). According to Leticia (2020), the recommended ratio is justified because schools with more mental health support show an increase in attendance, graduation rates and academic achievement, and a decrease in reliance on retributive practices such as suspensions and expulsions.

Community-based Approaches

Community-based approaches seek to include community stakeholders such as parents and families, community organizations and agencies, and policy experts in school and district decisions concerning student achievement and well-being. Since schools play a central role in most communities, these approaches position school safety as not a separate endeavor to

academic and social learning. Examples of community-based approaches to school safety found in the literature include community schools, parent and family engagement, inclusive practices and policies, and anti-bullying programs. Research has found that the inclusion of community stakeholders to address school safety measures increases trust among diverse community groups and members, fosters parental and family engagement, and streamlines access to social services (Cowan et al., 2013).

Community Schools

Community schools, sometimes called “full-service” schools with “wrap around services” or communal learning centers, frame the school community as a bonded ecosystem that goes beyond traditional school fences and walls (Gottfredson et al., 2002; Oakes et al., 2017). In terms of school safety, community schools foster a shared set of goals and norms, value inclusivity and collaboration, and offer a range of community services for students and their families, including expanded learning opportunities, conflict resolution training, mental health services, substance abuse counseling, and job training (Meggie et al., 2001). Influenced by the work of pioneers like Jane Addams and John Dewey, community schools began in the US during the 1990s as a response to better serve new immigrant families and address social ills through community partnerships and philanthropic organizations (Lubell, 2011). Today, community schools’ function under an alliance of national, state, and local organizations, including the founding Children’s Aid Society (CAS). Their mission is “to change the role of education in the lives of students, families, and communities, so that underserved youth may be empowered to overcome obstacles and become happy, healthy and productive adults” (Lubell, 2011, p. 6).

Community schools address school safety in a holistic manner with a concentration on student-teacher relationships, community collaborations, and opportunities for extracurricular involvement (Kao et al., 2013; Kozol, 2006, 2012). While opportunities like community liaisons,

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

PTO/PTA, and school committees with parent volunteers have existed for a long time, the community school practice has a broader focus on a participatory framework for community and family involvement. In community schools, the greater school community functions as intervention teams and is actively involved in the school's decision-making processes and authority structures (Gottfredson et al., 2002). These processes and structures can include school personnel, students and their families, and community members establishing school rules, setting the discipline code, and handling rule enforcement (Bryk & Discroll, 1988; Maier et al., 2017). Inclusive participation in school safety and discipline lays a groundwork of shared values and fosters a sense of belonging among all community school stakeholders, especially within historically minoritized school populations. For community schools, "it takes a village" to promote school safety.

Research has shown that community schools have positive outcomes in terms of school climate, student engagement, attendance, and teacher retention and morale. They also increase student bonding to schools, improve relationships and decrease delinquency (Gottfredson et al., 2005; Payne, 2008; Payne et al., 2003). Moreover, a meta-analysis of empirical and causal studies of community schools found promising results when community organizations, parental involvement, and extracurricular activities are present within the model (Heers et al., 2011). Additional research findings on the cost-benefit of community schools have found community partnerships and wrap around services to yield positive long-term social outcomes and economic benefits (Maier et al., 2017).

Parent and Family Engagement

While community schools seek to integrate community members and services into the fabric of their schools, some schools specifically emphasize early and regular engagement of parents and family members. Enlisting the engagement of parents and family members in school

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

decision-making and partnership, especially of students from marginalized populations, is a promising strategy that has arisen in recent literature as associated with increased feelings of safety and reduced violence at schools (Berg et al., 2017; Cuellar & Theriot, 2015; Espelage, 2014; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Ishimaru, 2019; Weiss et al., 2009). Several studies have shown that early interventions with parental partnerships, such as fully funded kindergarten, home to school connection programming like Head Start, and programs for elementary schools like Project ACHIEVE, reduce risks of violence and crime later in life (Dwyer & Osher, 2000; Higgins & Katsipataki, 2015; Ma et al., 2016). Additional studies have shown that offering a variety of parental and community involvement opportunities during students' K-12 education reduced rates of violence, increased academic achievement, and improved attendance and behavior (Berg et al., 2017; Peterson & Skiba, 2001; Rodu & Dimock, 2017; Simon, 2001; Weiss et al., 2009). In another study, using data from the 2007-2008 School Survey on Crime and Safety, Cuellar (2018) found a negative association between parent involvement in schools and incidents like physical attacks or fights. Likewise, Raffaele Mendez et al. (2002) found that parental involvement in disciplinary matters was associated with lower rates of out-of-school suspension.

However, there are still additional unknown factors surrounding the effectiveness of parent and community engagement as a practice of school safety, particularly regarding immigrant students and families, English language learners, students and families from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and student populations long subjected to disproportionate school discipline procedures and outcomes (Mowen & Freng, 2019; Peguero & Bondy, 2020). It is pertinent to consider this research gap because approximately 25% of all students attending a K-12 school in the U.S. have at least one immigrant parent, with that proportion expected to rise to 33% by the year 2040 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Moreover, there are now approximately 4.9

million English language learners in U.S. schools, a number that has increased by more than a million since 2000 (Mitchell, 2020).

Inclusive Policies and Practices

To address the physical, emotional, and social safety of marginalized student populations, many schools implement policies and practices to promote inclusivity. Among them are safe spaces or safe zones (often signaled with stickers or posters), student clubs such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), and anti-bullying programs and policies, some of which are designed to protect students based on specific traits and characteristics (e.g., race, disability, ancestry, gender identity; Sadowski, 2017). These activities and policies have specifically increased experiences of safety in schools for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students (Sadowski, 2017). For example, there is evidence that GSAs contribute to experiences of school safety, peer acceptance, and connectedness for LGBTQ students (Kosciw et al., 2014). A recent meta-analysis of 15 primary studies with 62,923 participants found that the presence of a GSA significantly lowered self-reported homophobic victimization, fear for one's safety, and hearing homophobic remarks (Marx & Kettrey, 2016). Likewise, GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) found that an enumeration of specific populations in school policies contributes to lower rates of student victimization and increases the likelihood of teacher intervention on targeted students (Sadowski, 2017).

However, despite the gains made by safe spaces and zones, GSAs, and inclusive school policies, most students still report that they “frequently” or “often” experience homophobic comments in their schools (Kosciw et al., 2014; Sadowski, 2017). Sexist and racist remarks are also pervasive (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). Moreover, self-harming behavior and suicidality are high for all students, but they are especially high for sexual and gender minoritized students: 1 in 6 high school students considered suicide in the past year, but lesbian, gay, and bisexual students

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

are almost five times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts (The Trevor Project, 2021). A recent analysis of the research literature also found other consequences of homophobic incidents, including decreased academic outcomes and a sense of school belonging at school increased truancy (Moyano & Sánchez-Fuentes, 2020). It is thus unsurprising that students themselves are calling for more interventions. A school-based needs assessment of 180 racially and ethnically diverse LGBTQ students found that students articulated a need for broadly safe schools (and communities) that go beyond the “pockets of safety” created by GSAs and safe zones by nurturing supportive peers and adults who consistently “have their back,” and developing supportive, culturally sound resources for their families (Craig et al., 2018). In summary, the research on inclusive approaches recommend that school administrators adopt anti-discriminatory policies to ensure that their school environments are safe, affirming, and welcoming for/to LGBTQ youth and other vulnerable populations.

In addition to the policies and programs already mentioned, one promising training program that increases knowledge, awareness, and skills around homophobia and sexism is the “Safe Schools” training for school counselors (Byrd & Hays, 2013). Ensuring minority-inclusive and affirming curricula, providing ongoing teacher and staff training that moves from “cultural competence” to “structural competence” (i.e., moving into an analysis of the systemic causes of oppression), and honoring and affirming students and their perspectives are some important next steps for school leadership (Craig et al., 2018; Shelton et al., 2019). Furthermore, schools can collect and use quantitative data to understand how students’ opportunities and outcomes differ by demographic group and qualitative data to help interpret and avoid deficit-based understandings of the results (Ford, 2020). Although many of the programs and practices to support LGBTQ and other historically minoritized student populations are currently targeted

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interventions, truly affirmative policies, programs, and activities should be preventative and universal in scope, further developing a sense of inclusivity and affirmation of all students and celebrating their differences.

Anti-bullying

Bullying is a common occurrence on both school grounds and online interactions. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020), one in five high school students reported being bullied at school the previous year, and one in six reported being cyberbullied (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018). Some anti-bullying programs have been taken up as schoolwide campaigns and anonymous tip lines. By 2015, 98.5% of elementary, middle, and high schools had adopted anti-bullying policies for implementation on school property; 90.7% had adopted anti-bullying policies prohibiting off-campus bullying, specifically at off-campus school-sponsored events; 91.2% had adopted a policy prohibiting electronic aggression or cyberbullying on school property; and 84.8% had adopted a policy prohibiting electronic aggression or cyberbullying from taking place at off-campus, school-sponsored events (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2015; Kann et al., 2016).

Interestingly, at approximately the same time, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) found that between 2007 and 2010, school-related violence dropped 50% and theft dropped 45% among all genders and races and in urban, suburban, and rural schools (Finkelhor, 2013). Moreover, a recent evaluation of empirical studies found that anti-bullying programs reduce bullying perpetration by 19-20% and victimization by 15-16% (Gaffney et al., 2018). International research supports these findings. For instance, evidence from a quasi-experimental study in 22 public secondary schools in Spain points to the “Tutoría Entre Iguales” (TEI) program as promising for bullying reduction for middle and high school students. This peer

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

tutoring intervention led to significant reductions in bullying and cyberbullying and improvements in school climate (Ferrer-Cascales et al., 2019).

In an influential report, the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) identified anti-bullying programs as effective prevention strategies, particularly when they were multi-tiered in scope. This was confirmed by a recent review that found that the most effective programs are based on the premise that bullying is a “group phenomenon in which bystanders play an essential role, either encouraging bullies or standing up for the victims” (Luiz da Silva et al., 2017, p. 2333). Among anti-bullying programs, OBPP (Olweus Bullying Prevention Program) is one of the most popular options. OBPP is a school-wide, comprehensive bullying prevention and threat assessment program the begun in Norway in 1983 (Olweus & Limber, 1999; Cornell & Sheras, 2006). An intensive form of OBPP was soon evaluated and found to decrease instances of bullying by half; schools in the United States adopted OBPP nearly a decade later (Olweus, 1991; Olweus & Limber 2010). OBPP programs have four components: individual-level plans and activities, classroom-level meetings, school-level committees and training, and community-level support and best practices (Kalis, 2019). In the U.S., OBPP has been deemed a “promising program” for reducing bullying, delinquency, and violence (especially in middle schools and high schools) by the certifying entity Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development (2021).

It has been noted, however, that the research on OBPP reports inconsistent findings (Peguero & Bondy, 2020). For instance, a large-scale longitudinal study involving more than 30,000 students revealed success in reducing rates and forms of being bullied and bullying others (Olweus et al., 2019). However, critics of the OBPP program cite its inability to address all forms of student perceived bullying, since the definition of bullying and perceptions of the

bullying injuries and victimization is couched in primarily adult language, contextualized definitions, and inconsistent understandings of bullying (Hong, 2009; Peguero, 2012; Swearer et al., 2010). Interestingly, a recent 5-year evaluation on the impacts of OBBP in urban middle schools found reductions in teachers' ratings of student aggression but the students reported no intervention effects (Farrell et al., 2018). The adult interpretations of bullying may influence which preventative practices are adopted and implemented with specificity and fidelity and unintentionally create "systems of intimidation based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, social class, physical ability, and sexual orientation" (Peguero, 2012). Likewise, intimidation based on identity groups and intersectional identities may be excluded from school staffs' definition of bullying but may be of most importance to the students (Peguero & Bondy, 2020). Overall, whether school leaders incorporate an approach to the bullying prevention initiative that resonates with the students may determine the success. Another factor in bullying prevention related to secondary school environments is that bullying victimization has been found to decrease with age. However, as bullying decreases, the likelihood of sexual harassment increases, suggesting that the name and scope of the aggressive behavior may shift with age, but not the need to address it (Felix et al., 2009).

Self-governance Approaches

Self-governance design and approaches to school safety have slowly become more mainstream in relation to student voice, equity, and student and familial engagement. While similar to the community-based approaches in addressing school safety, self-governance approaches place greater emphasis on the inclusion of students in decision-making processes. Some examples of self-governance approaches to address school safety are democratic schools, peace education and conflict resolution programs, restorative justice, peer mediation, and school-based teen courts. When centering students in school reform efforts to address engagement and

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

safety challenges, studies have shown an increase in a myriad of skills (leadership, problem solving, communication, and organizational) while improving the overall school climate and academic achievement (Osberg et al., 2006; Weiss, 2018). However, another study of 22 urban high schools implementing school safety programs that include student voice and participation, highlights the effectiveness of these approaches to be highly dependent on the fidelity, reach, quality, and school context (Giraldo-Garcia et al., 2021).

Democratic Schools

Democratic schools build on progressive education traditions, experiential learning, student-centered pedagogies, and shared governance. They operate with the principles of participatory democracy, which entail the involvement of all stakeholders (especially students) in deliberation and decision-making on a variety of issues traditionally reserved for school administrators, including discipline, safety, and conflict. Some 20th century examples of this approach include Sumerhill (England), Sudbury Schools (U.S.), and Citizen Schools (Brazil). In democratic schools, self-governance often includes legislative, executive, and judicial bodies, regular meetings, general assemblies, and frequent voting. Through democratic processes, students (in collaboration with teachers and administrators) make policies and are responsible for enforcing them, with the only restriction being that they cannot make rules that contradict government laws or put the school community at risk. If there is a complaint that a rule was broken, a judicial committee of students from different grades investigate the incident and decide on an appropriate outcome for the student(s) in question. Through participation in the school's democratic process, students learn to make decisions together and to live with their consequences. Implementation of democratic education principles in schools can exist in various forms, spanning from classroom-based practices to the school ethos, including school safety plans and procedures.

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

Research has shown that democratic schools enhance psychological health, increase social skills, improve discipline, and have positive outcomes in student behavior and perceived school safety, especially when students have a key role in promoting and enforcing school discipline (Gutmann & Ben-Porath, 2014; LeBlanc & Skaruppa 1997; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Sadofsky, 2000). Moreover, several large-scale studies concluded that when democratic education promotes anti-racist, inclusive, and equitable mindsets, school climate improves and violence and hostility within schools decrease (Apple & Beane, 1999; Osler, 2002; Osler & Starkey, 2005; Richardson & Miles, 2003; Richardson & Wood, 1999). Furthermore, an examination of 32 empirical studies on the impact of student participation in school decision-making processes found positive effects on life skills, self-esteem, social status, democratic skills and citizenship, student–adult relationships and school ethos on the part of student participants (Mager & Nowak, 2012). This meta-analysis also found evidence of positive effects on academic achievement, facilities, rules or policies, and health. Another study on a cooperative discipline program that included 62 middle school teachers in Georgia found a positive impact on student behavior and school climate (Anderson, 2006).

Peace Education and Conflict Resolution

Peace education focuses on competencies such as cooperation, communication, tolerance, and positive emotional expression to address school safety concerns (Kreidler, 1984; Quinney, 1989). As early as 1912, movements to establish chapters of the School Peace League in schools were underway in nearly every state in the U.S. (Howlett, 2008). Rooted in progressive education and human rights, peace education strives to disrupt socially constructed barriers among diverse populations and foster interpersonal relations, conflict resolution, forgiveness, and violence prevention skills (Caulfield, 2000; Harris, 2008). Conflict resolution education is a related approach that stems from the 1960s movements of community mediation as an alternative

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

to the formal legal and justice systems (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). Both peace and conflict resolution education models include support to build equitable relationships through anti-bias education. Discipline and school safety plans are approached through the lenses of social justice, creative problem solving, and crisis management (Bickmore, 2011; Caulfield, 2000). Activities include meetings and mediating behavior solutions to foster positive relationships and inclusive communities among learners (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Slavin, 1990, 1995). The curricula are designed for students to develop competencies in six areas (Crawford & Bodine, 2001): building a peaceable climate, understanding conflict, understanding peace and peacemaking, mediation, negotiation, and group problem solving. Each area aims at nurturing a conflict management approach without coercion or alienation.

The research on peace education and conflict resolution programs reveals positive impacts on the development of conflict resolution skills. A meta-analysis on conflict resolution training conducted in eight different schools in two countries found students to effectively apply the procedures to both school and non-school settings and more frequently engage in problem solving to address issues (Johnson & Johnson, 2001). Moreover, other studies have found that approximately 85 to 95% of the mediated student conflicts resulted in lasting agreements, that referrals to administrative personnel for inappropriate student behavior decreased, and that antisocial behaviors such as bullying, physical aggression, and fights (especially among adolescents) declined. These programs also had a positive impact on turn-taking behavior and, interestingly, on the disposition and ability of students to apply mediation skills in different conflict situations at school and at home (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007; Lane-Garon et al., 2005; LaRusso & Selman, 2011; Smith et al., 2002; Turk, 2018).

Restorative Practices

Restorative practices are rooted in indigenous conceptions and traditions of justice that value human dignity and respect, emphasize healing and accountability and strive at repairing relationships and promoting safer communities. In restorative practices, offenders must make amends for their harmful actions and provide assistance to the victims. In seeking justice, restorative practices utilize dialogue and relational pedagogies to orient the wrongdoer with the person or people harmed to humanize the injury having been committed (Gregory & Evans, 2020; Pranis, 2007; Van Ness & Strong, 2014). After successful implementation in the criminal justice system, restorative practices were adopted by schools worldwide to improve relationships after conflict and prevent future harm. Misconduct is seen not so much as a violation of an institutional rule but as a disrespect to others in the school community (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001; McCluskey et al., 2008).

Research on restorative practices found that they successfully promote dialogue and accountability, create a stronger sense of community, improve relationships, reduce exclusionary discipline referrals, and increase equity in discipline (Cowan et al., 2013; Davis, 2014; Gregory & Evans, 2020; Gregory et al., 2016a; Osher & Berg, 2018). Likewise, after reviewing the research literature, DePaoli et al. (2021) concluded that restorative practices contribute to safe learning environments and the development of positive, supportive, and authentic relationships. Moreover, in a Chicago study, Rich et al. (2017) found significant the use of restorative practices led to a decrease in out-of-school suspensions (30% lower than comparison school) and in-school suspensions (14% lower than comparison school). Also, in a recent evaluation of ten studies, Katic et al. (2020) found that schools that implemented restorative practices reduced the use of office disciplinary referrals and suspensions, lowered rates of bullying behavior, and saw increases in social skills and self-esteem. When used as a method to shepherd school safety,

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restorative practices have also been shown to be an effective alternative to punitive responses to wrongdoing (Karp & Breslin, 2001). More specifically, the restorative practice of relational pedagogy, often observed through the instructional method of circling, builds a listening culture, and positively impact student practices of respect, empathy, trust, critical thinking, and problem solving, and shared leadership in addressing changes across school campuses (Gregory et al., 2016b; Hollweck et al., 2019; Hopkins, 2015).

School districts that implemented restorative justice practices as an alternative to traditional school discipline measures have cited overall drops in in- and out-of-school suspensions. For example, the Dallas Independent School District experienced a 70% decrease in in-school suspensions, a 77% decrease in out-of-school suspensions, and a 50% cut to the number of students sent to an alternative place of learning (Long, 2016). However, research shows that restorative practices, including peer mediation and student conferences, have not been implemented equitably across schools. In a study using a nationally representative sample, Payne and Welch (2015; 2018) found that schools with more low-income and minoritized students are more likely to use harsh disciplinary practices and less likely to use restorative approaches.

Peer Mediation

Peer mediation programs have some similarities with restorative practices (both uses facilitated dialogue in conflict situations) but peer mediation focuses on finding solutions rather than on recognizing the impact of the harm and repairing relationships. Peer mediation programs are implemented in schools as a support structure to overall school safety efforts. Drawing from a conflict resolution framework, peer mediation stems from former US President Jimmy Carter's Neighborhood Justice Centers, featuring "community mediation" as an alternative to policing and the court system. The process brings together disputing participants, alongside the assistance of a neutral person(s), to analyze the issues, develop options, consider alternatives, and reach a

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

settlement between participants (Cohen, 2005). In schools, peer mediation addresses disputes among students and members of the school community by bringing together those involved with the assistance of a neutral peer. This process allows for mediation participants to develop mutual understandings, alternative options, and a consensual agreement to move forward.

Studies on peer mediation have revealed declines in school violence and student suspensions (Bell et al., 2000; Bickmore, 2002; Churchill, 2013; Schellenberg et al., 2007). Peer mediation strategies have shown to not only foster safer school environments but also have increased skills among participants like problem solving, collaboration, and leadership and reduced student “obliging” and “avoiding” behaviors (Ay et al., 2019; Powell et al., 1995; Prevention Institute, 2001). Furthermore, peer mediators themselves show enhanced social-emotional skills, attendance, and sense of connection with their schools (Devoogd et al., 2016).

School-Based Teen Courts

School-Based Teen Courts (SBTC) are alternative programs to suspension, expulsion and/or juvenile justice referral whereby student participants determine consequences for offending youth through a courtroom-like process, using restorative justice principles (Cotter & Evans, 2018). According to Smokowski et al. (2020), SBTC is a viable alternative to school routine discipline by addressing the school-to-prison pipeline and improving school safety. In a study on the educational value of youth courts in Pennsylvania, Norton et al. (2013) found positive impacts like reduced recidivism (fewer students committed disciplinary infractions and received suspensions after their youth court hearings than referred students who did not attend youth court hearings) and positive peer pressure led students to “clean up their act” and increased a sense of belonging to their school communities. Interestingly, this study identified improvements not only on students who committed offenses but also on students who served on the courts. This included academic behaviors (e.g., attendance, participation, being organized),

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

social skills (e.g., interpersonal skills, cooperation, empathy, and responsibility) and sense of attachment. Moreover, in an evaluation of 15 studies of Teen Courts (most of them in non-school settings) that assessed statistical significance of recidivism, Gase et al. (2016) noted that four studies found statistically significant results favoring Teen Courts, one study found statistically significant results favoring the traditional justice system, and ten found null results. They also pointed out that these findings should be interpreted with caution considering weak study designs, lack of description and assessment of intervention components, unclear and inconsistent outcome measures, and little examination of pathways or differential intervention effects.

Along the same lines, a recent review of teen court studies found heterogeneity across program components and practices and few rigorous evaluations (Cotter & Evans, 2018). Since then, Smokowski et al. (2020) completed a randomized trial with 24 middle and high schools. The study found that students at SBTC schools reported higher school satisfaction, fewer antisocial friendships, and a perceived decrease in violent behavior. However, the wrongdoers reported increased feelings of peer rejection and lack of support. Smokowski et al. (2020) suggest this may be a result of the offending youth losing contact with peers, although this could also be the result of alienation the wrongdoer feels from his peers who serve as part of the courtroom. Further research is needed into SBTC effects on young “offenders,” including whether using legalistic language and procedures in the school setting is beneficial for young people and school safety.

Concluding Remarks

Presently, many school districts are at a critical juncture. Students and communities across the country have demanded schools without police. Also, there is a growing consensus among researchers and educational leaders



that hiring SROs is not the most cost-effective strategy to promote school safety. Moreover, there is mounting evidence that SROs' presence on campus results in disproportionate punishment and inequitable use of exclusionary school disciplinary practices, with long-lasting negative impacts, especially on historically marginalized students like students of color, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, and students of low socioeconomic status. In this context, many educators, students, parents, administrators, researchers, and community members are interested in exploring promising alternative programs for improving school safety that could replace or complement SROs. In our review, we found seventeen options available to school districts. We organized these programs in four approaches (punitive, social psychological, community-based, and self-governance) and identified which ones are more likely to be universal, targeted, or intensive interventions. We then examined studies conducted during the last two decades on the effectiveness of these programs.

Punitive approaches seem pragmatic in creating safer schools and deterring antisocial, illicit, and violent behaviors but the research literature reveals that, as in the case of SROs, they are not only ineffective, but also tend to escalate antisocial behaviors and disproportionately impact disadvantaged communities. The other three approaches (social psychological,

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

community-based, and self-governance), which emphasize preventive and proactive strategies and pedagogical principles, are more likely to improve school climate and reduce disciplinary incidents (Bear, 2011; Jean-Pierre & Parris 2018; McCluskey et al., 2008). Furthermore, the literature suggests that when schools commit to fair and consistent enforcement of rules, avoid the over-labeling students in regard to risk and referrals to the juvenile court to secure services, and strengthen relationships within the school community, they are more likely to reduce exposure to violence and victimization and help students feel safer (Fisher et al., 2018; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Gregory et al., 2010; Johnson, 2009; Mears et al., 2019).

Each program has strengths and weaknesses; therefore, schools can adopt and adapt a mix of these 17 programs, creating a nested or layered system of school safety measures. The decisions behind which school safety programs and how they can be implemented are still very much contextualized in a school's community and values and highly dependent on the perception of individual student factors like substance abuse, violence, victimization, or self-control. It is important to note that even without the presence of SROs on campus and the implementation of alternative programs, schools will continue to work with local police. For instance, Phoenix Union stated that in addition to the alternatives recommended by the school community through the participatory budgeting process, it will use off-duty officers, when and as needed, to assist with the requirements of law enforcement notifications, campus and community safety needs, and other mandatory reporting issues. However, police officers will be assigned to the district and not to individual schools like in the past (Phoenix Union, 2020).

Future research is needed on each of the promising models presented herein, paying particular attention to the quality of their implementation for creating and sustaining school safety (Afkinich & Klumpner, 2018) and their impact on historically marginalized students.

REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT RESOURCE OFFICERS

Likewise, more meta-research is needed to update the information on the most effective approaches currently available to schools. Strong research design (i.e., quasi-experiment or randomized control trials longitudinal in nature) can help establish a clearer causal relation between programs and their effectiveness. Furthermore, schools aiming to improve school safety should also consider factors within school campus dynamics such as relationships, curriculum, and extra-curricular opportunities (Allen et al., 2018; Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2020; Kutsyuruba et al., 2015; Mahoney, 2000). Likewise, it is pertinent to establish baseline characteristics before evidence-based program implementation to provide relevant data for decision-making and for the replication and adaptation of the most successful models (Astor et al., 2010).

One limitation to some of the promising school safety interventions highlighted in this paper is that they tend to be prescriptive and applied “top down.” However, schools have opportunities for democratic, grassroots processes that bring together all school stakeholders in adapting best practices to fit their school communities (Astor et al., 2005). Another limitation of these approaches is the reliance on the level of quality of teacher training and the fidelity of implementation. A community-driven participatory budgeting on school safety that includes students, parents, and staff like the one promoted by the Phoenix Union High School District constitutes an innovative and exciting initiative to address these limitations. We hope that the menu of options presented in this paper assists this district and other districts, school leaders, and community stakeholders in their deliberations on equitable and effective school safety alternatives to SROs.

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