

September 8, 2016

Dear Colleagues:

I know that many of you, like me, have become increasingly concerned about school-based law-enforcement officers' involvement in the administration of school discipline in many of our Nation's schools. While these officers—commonly known as school resource officers (SROs)—can help provide a positive and safe learning environment and build trust between students and law enforcement officials in some situations, I am concerned about the potential for violations of students' civil rights and unnecessary citations or arrests of students in schools, all of which can lead to the unnecessary and harmful introduction of children and young adults into a school-to-prison pipeline. As education leaders, you can empower schools, educators, and staff with the skills and capacity to avoid relying on SROs in the first place, and also eliminate SRO-related school discipline policies and practices that may harm young people and needlessly contribute to their involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

In accordance with the specific needs of each school and district, the role of law enforcement in school learning environments should be determined by local educational officials in consultation with local law enforcement agencies, school leaders, educators, families, students, and community and civil rights stakeholders. This requires education leaders to engage in a deliberate process resulting in thoughtful decisions about whether and when to use SROs. Where SROs are used, education leaders and local law enforcement agencies should work together to understand local needs and reexamine policies and practices to ensure the proper role of law enforcement within a community's schools.

School districts that choose to use SROs should incorporate them responsibly into school learning environments and ensure that they have no role in administering school discipline. State and local leaders should consider setting policy and passing legislation designed to help SROs minimize citations and arrests of students and use diversion programs and other alternatives to arrest, detainment, or the use of force. With appropriate training, support, and community engagement, SROs can bolster a school's capacity to ensure safety and promote learning among all students. Indeed, students and their families have the right to expect that all school-based personnel coming into contact with students are professionals trained to exercise appropriate judgment and to do so in a nondiscriminatory fashion.

To further these ends, I am pleased to announce the release of a new resource created by the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Justice (DOJ)—the [Safe, School-based Enforcement through Collaboration, Understanding, and Respect \(SECURE\) Rubrics](#)—to assist States and districts in improving SRO-related policy and practice. This new resource can help education and law enforcement agencies that use SROs to review and,

if necessary, revise SRO-related policies in alignment with common-sense action steps that can lead to improved school safety and better outcomes for students while safeguarding their civil rights. The SECURE Rubrics are premised on the notion that partnerships between school districts, law enforcement agencies, and juvenile justice entities should be formalized through locally developed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) among these parties. Additionally, the SECURE Rubrics can support school safety and other SRO-related policies and practices that are informed by educators, families, students, and community and civil rights stakeholders; are updated regularly; and explicitly articulate that SROs should ensure safety and security *but should not* administer discipline in schools.ⁱ

I encourage those school districts that choose to place SROs in schools to make good use of the SECURE Rubrics, and all other available resources,ⁱⁱ to create or strengthen partnerships between school districts, law enforcement, and juvenile justice entities. Strong partnerships can enable SROs to improve safety, while keeping students out of the criminal justice system. Our partners at DOJ are also releasing a letter for law enforcement leaders to highlight these resources. You can find the letter at <http://cops.usdoj.gov/supportingsafeschools> and may wish to share it with your local law enforcement partners.

In order to eliminate overreliance on SROs in schools, school staff and administrators should be well trained to address behavioral issues through a variety of corrective, non-punitive interventions, including restorative justice programs and mental health supports.ⁱⁱⁱ As many States and districts are already demonstrating and as ED and DOJ have recognized through the [Supportive School Discipline Initiative](#), any approach to improving school safety, security, and discipline should also focus on creating a positive school climate^{iv} that helps students thrive, including employing a multi-tiered behavioral support framework such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.^v These strategies can prevent and resolve students' behavioral issues without relying on SROs while reducing unnecessary detentions, suspensions, expulsions, citations, and arrests in schools. Further, any consequences for negative student behaviors should be nondiscriminatory, fair, and age-appropriate.

As educators, we are bound by a sacred trust to safeguard the well-being, safety, and extraordinary potential of the children and youth within the communities we serve. In order to fulfill this trust, it is incumbent upon us to abolish the use of unnecessary school discipline practices that could deny students the opportunity to mature into capable, healthy, and responsible adults. We should also work with intention to build credible and sustainable systems, structures, and partnerships that provide safe, supportive learning environments that lift up students and nurture them when they do well *and* when they make mistakes. While there should be effective responses to a student's willful misbehavior, the focus should be on prevention and positive interventions—not reflexively removing students from regular academic instruction or unnecessarily escalating situations by calling SROs into classrooms to enforce discipline. We should condone no other approach.

Thank you for your leadership and action to ensure appropriate supports for SROs and educators, and safe and positive learning environments for all students.

Sincerely,

/s/

John B. King, Jr.

ⁱ Resources on strengthening partnerships are available at ED's [Youth for Youth](#).

ⁱⁱ States, districts, and schools may access free resources to help improve school environments at ED's technical assistance centers, including the [National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#) and the [National Technical Assistance Center for Neglected or Delinquent Children and Youth](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ Many of these approaches have been promoted through the Administration's [Supportive School Discipline Initiative](#).

^{iv} For more information on positive school climate, consult "Quick guide on Making School Climate Improvements." U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students. Washington, DC (2016). This document is available free of charge at <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/SCIRP/Quick-Guide>. Additional information and resources on improving school discipline can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html>.

^v For more information and resources on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, please visit ED's Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports at <http://www.pbis.org/>.