



# Distinguishing School Work from Police Work

A Case Study of Aurora Public Schools'  
Relationship to the Aurora Police Department

Case study author: Dr. Antwan Jefferson

**ROSE**  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

## Executive Summary

Relationships between public schools and law enforcement are hotly contested. Many districts, at the demand of community members and other stakeholders, have sought to clarify and redesign these relationships. This case study presents an analysis of one such undertaking in Aurora Public Schools (APS), the fifth largest district in the state of Colorado. Headed by Superintendent Rico Munn, the District set out to reevaluate, and possibly restructure, its long-standing relationship with the Aurora Police Department (APD). Since the reassessment of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two parties in 2014, during which roles and responsibilities were clarified, APS has tracked improvements in student success and student feelings of safety.

### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present Aurora Public Schools' efforts to increase district-wide safety and security through substantial changes in practices and structures. This report:

- Presents an analysis of interviews, documents and data related to student outcomes and general perceptions of school safety and security to identify the characteristics of the District's efforts as well as results, when those could be determined.
- Presents the context of APS focusing on geography, chronology and its relationship with law enforcement services provided by the Aurora Police Department.

### Findings

While a correlation is not altogether clear, we have concluded that role clarifications, in addition to the District's CARES framework of accountability, have contributed to a positive paradigm shift in APS' focus on student well-being. Also, opportunities for APS to continue to build upon its current work are presented and discussed.

### Limitations

The results of this report are limited by factors of timing. The time between the successful campaign to approve a Mill Levy Override and hiring additional mental health staff is too short to correlate clear outcomes. Additionally, interviews were conducted with district administrators; students, SROs, teachers, school leaders, and other school and district staff were not involved in this study; thus, their perspectives are not represented here.

### Disclosure

This report was developed on behalf of and funded by Rose Community Foundation.

### Appreciation

Thank you to Superintendent Rico Munn and the staff of Aurora Public Schools for their participation in this report.

## Introduction

In recent years, several Denver-area school districts have revisited the roles of law enforcement officers in schools. The contexts of the area's districts vary, as do perspectives on the roles of law enforcement in schools. Also varied are district leadership definitions of school safety. Aurora Public Schools is an example of a school district attempting to rethink the roles of armed officers in public schools. APS is the 5th largest school district in Colorado, serving 37,907 students in grades P-12 (as of December 2020). Demographically, APS is among the state's most racially and ethnically diverse, enrolling 85 percent students of color.

Historically, one of APS' long-standing partnerships has been with its local police department, Aurora Police Department (APD). Since at least the 1980s, APD has assigned full-time officers to patrol each APS middle<sup>1</sup> and high school, at no cost to the school district, as School Resource Officer (SRO) costs have been, and continue to be, included in the APD budget. This financial arrangement is unusual for Denver-metro area school districts; it also appears to be unusual across much of Colorado. Because APD has incorporated Aurora Public Schools into its provision of services to the City of Aurora, the school district has had the benefit of on-site law enforcement services without direct impact to the District budget. This relationship between two large organizations serving the city of Aurora is at the center of this report.

Given Aurora's long-standing relationship with the local police department, the focus of this case study is to understand APS' shift on school safety, and its impact to student referrals to law enforcement over the past six years. The question guiding this study is: *Why and how has Aurora Public Schools changed its relationship to the Aurora Police Department and shifted its focus on health and safety?*

## Overview

In developing the case for this study, we determined that a focus on the District as a whole (a group of people in an organization, rather than individual schools or persons) was necessary to understand the context of change within the District. This focus signals that senior District administration and the Aurora Board of Education represent the level of leadership of the District, and that APD, while important, is not the organization of focus. At the center of this study are the circumstances informing the District's changes, the nature of change enacted by the District, and the results of these changes, including those that are in progress at the time of this report.

It is worth noting here that APS offers a range of school types, including Early Childhood Education sites (4); P-5 Elementary Schools (27); P-8 and K-8 Schools (7); Middle Schools (7); High Schools (8); and Charter Schools (12). For this case study, given the sites at which School

---

<sup>1</sup> According to a District administrator, APD budget limitations resulted in a reduction of officers in APS to only high schools in 2014.

Resource Officers are assigned by Aurora Police Department, only APS High Schools are included.

Four primary themes that guided the development of this case study:

1. The national social and political climate potentially generating pressure or offering a reason for change
2. The professional and personal interests of the superintendent, who identifies as a Black American father
3. Community interest in the District's relationship to law enforcement
4. Lack of data supporting positive impact of policing in schools in the District

## I. Informing the Case

Shifting national and local attitudes influence the role of law enforcement in public, particularly interactions with vulnerable populations. This is also true in the context of Aurora Public Schools, which has been affected by local and national events.

There are several key dates that deserve consideration:

- July 2010 - Aurora Theater Shooting
- May 2014 - APS/APD develop MOU
- November 2018 - Mill Levy Override (Expand mental health professionals and services)
- August 2019 - Elijah McClain death

Other events, such as protests for racial and social justice during Summer of 2020, occurred outside the timeframe of this study. While nearby, these are not included in the established context of this case. Nonetheless, the particular context of safety and security in Aurora Public Schools seems to be significantly influenced by internal and external events.

Additionally, there are several key documents that deserve consideration in understanding the APS case:

- APS' Safe Schools Plan
- June 2020 [opinion article in the local paper](#)
- Board Governance Policies (e.g., KLG - Relations with Law Enforcement Agencies)
- MOU: Agreement Regarding the Duties of Police Officers Assigned to APS
- 2020 TLCC Climate Survey [Report](#)

There are also several Aurora Public Schools data points that require consideration:

- Graduation rates
- School referral, suspension, expulsion rates
- Law enforcement referral rates
- Dropout rates
- Student achievement

Together, this combination of dates, events, documents and data provides a rich case to be examined in answer to the question: *Why and how has Aurora Public Schools changed its relationship to the Aurora Police Department and shifted its focus on health and safety?*

## II. Emergent District Tensions

Since 2010, Aurora Public Schools' (Adams-Arapahoe 28J) rating (reflected in points earned) by the Colorado Department of Education (District Accountability Ratings) has fluctuated from 45.8 percent (2010) to 49.1 percent (2019), including a low of 40.4 percent (2016). Over this time period, the District's accreditation rating has also fluctuated, moving from Accredited with Improvement Plan (2010) to Accredited with Priority Improvement Plan (2011), and returning to Accredited with Improvement Plan (2017). At its lowest (2016; 40.4 percent), APS was one of eight Colorado school districts rated Accredited with Priority Improvement Plan. Currently, based on all points earned in 2019, APS is 161 of 183 rated districts. For years, APS has faced pressure to improve, whether this pressure is generated by state ratings, local or national events, or local community expectations.

In response to pressure by state and district leadership to improve student outcomes throughout the District, teachers and school leaders began to respond and to recommend change strategies. According to one district leader, teacher responses to the pressure to improve performance resulted in increased reliance upon law enforcement to respond to undesirable classroom behaviors; limited evidence of this appears in Appendix A. In the short term, this may have removed the inconvenience of student disruption. However, the likely long-term consequence would have been the creation of a deepened policing culture in schools as police officers became more engaged in classroom management, a responsibility for which they were not trained. Additionally, increased policing in schools results in a carceral environment that harms children emotionally, occasionally physically, and also academically (Fine & Ruglis, 2009). Rather than improving students' sense of safety in school along with their academic performance, the consequences of teachers' reliance upon officers to manage classroom behavior would have sent a chilling ripple throughout the school, as has been documented around the U.S. (Howard, 2016).

A second component of school staff response to pressure to improve student outcomes emerged as principals began to recommend that the District begin to develop alternative schools – schools developed for students who were not experiencing academic or behavioral success in their current schools. While other districts throughout the Denver metro region employ alternative schools, the results are inconsistent at best and concerning at worst, as students who are difficult to teach or support in schools would become concentrated in a specialized school environment which would off-load the unique challenges they present while also decreasing their opportunities for post-secondary success.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>For reference, see: Lehr, C. A., Tan, C. S., & Ysseldyke, J. (2009). Alternative schools: A synthesis of state-level policy and research. *Remedial and Special Education, 30*(1), 19-32; Raywid, M. A. (1994). Synthesis of Research / Alternative schools: The state of the art. *The New Alternative Schools, 54*(1), pp. 26-31.

Given these tensions, we closely examined indicators of safety and security conditions at the District as well as the types of interventions pursued by Aurora Public Schools.

### III. Conditions

Responding to state ratings and employee suggestions is not enough to shift the District's efforts to restructure its relationship with the police department. In some ways, these two phenomena may be considered altogether separate – academic outcomes and school safety and security. However, in the case of APS, the academic outcomes could not be resolved without attention to the nature of school safety and security.

Despite the long-standing relationship of Aurora Public Schools to the Aurora Police Department, accumulating evidence indicated that change of some sort was necessary, according to Superintendent Munn. Student academic outcomes were not steadily improving and there was increasing community concern about the role of police officers in society at-large, in the city of Aurora, and in Aurora Public Schools. This created a unique environment ripe for change. It was clear that what the District was doing was not enough.

The District's state rating (noted above) also helped to make a convincing argument that change was necessary. And while it was not clear that School Resource Officers were impeding instruction or school safety in APS, the need for clarity about their roles in schools was undeniable to District administrators, given the aforementioned indicators including teacher over-dependence on calls to law enforcement.

After a review of data and anecdotal evidence, it was clear that the conditions at Aurora Public Schools signaled the need for immediate and long-term change in the District's relationship with the local police department. Organized into categories, these conditions include a) school district culture; b) local community context; c) student academic and disciplinary outcomes; and d) staffing limitations.

## District Culture

Educating nearly 40,000 students, employing nearly 5,000 professionals and overseeing schools of several types, APS as a single organization cannot be fully understood through any singular school or personal experience. Similarly, understanding the culture of the District, as a condition of its broad change strategy requires adding up parts that may seem disconnected. Here are three examples:

- Most calls to APD were from center-based classrooms
- Some APS teachers suggested developing alternative schools for difficult students
- Teachers throughout the District sought out SROs to address low-level classroom challenges

Another important component of the District's culture involved law-enforcement presence and practice.

***Presence and Practice.*** APD officers are professionally trained law enforcement officers, skilled in use of firearms, threat response and crime deterrence. To some APS district leaders, APD officers are a resource to the District, ensuring greater school security and general student safety. However, these same officers, upon arriving at lower-level classroom events involving students, often had an intimidating effect on students. Describing the need for mental health supports as an alternative to calls to APD, one district administrator described:

*...when somebody's acting a certain way, it's not because they're trying to be bad, or because they're lazy, or because there's some internal characteristic flaw that's problematic about that student. It is not what's wrong with them. It is what happened. And that is what we are trying to work for over the long haul, because that's not something that happens overnight.*

While similar observations about law enforcement practice persist in social and racial justice organizing, the unique contexts of public schools make interactions with law enforcement particularly significant. This is made even more complex by the added combination of student and resource segregation in the District. Special education students (SPED) remained segregated from the general student bodies at schools throughout APS, and the District's focus upon mental health was directed specifically to the SPED population. This meant it was difficult for other students to get needed access to mental and emotional health supports in schools. The federal requirement that schools adhere closely to Individualized Education Plans led to a disparity in resource allocation for other students throughout the District.

Daily, when high school students arrived at APS high schools, they encountered a police cruiser parked in front of their school buildings. While the intent of officers' presence was to deter crime, and possibly to communicate to students that they were safe, for many students, their families and members of the broader community, this visual cue was a reminder of the constant presence of law enforcement. For a district that enrolls 85 percent students of color, uniformed officers and police cruisers communicated to many that schools were places of policing and control.

## Community Context

The challenges related to the visible sign of police cruisers parked at schools was not without Aurora's unique community context. As noted above, the 2012 Aurora Theater shooting occurred just over one mile away from APS' Gateway High School. There were more than 150 students, employees and APS family members at the theater when this violent event took place. The grandmother of one APS student who was killed during the theater shooting spoke at an APS Board meeting to communicate that she was grateful for the support of Gateway High School staff and administration offered to victims affected by the tragedy. The District's response to this tragedy acknowledged the community's desire for safety, as APS prioritized enhancing security at the District's schools. The District's website maintains a page, Disaster Recovery, that continues to acknowledge the long-term consequences of the Theater shooting, providing guidance for employees, students, and others.

In the summer of 2020, national calls for restructuring police departments and broadening their roles in the community (often referred to as defunding the police) landed right at the heart of Aurora, as protesters, including many APS students and families, took to the city's streets to protest law enforcement officers and the police department as a whole, following renewed attention to the 2019 death of Elijah McClain at the hands of APD. Preceding and following both the 2014 MOU and the 2018 Mill Levy Override, these two examples of community response to law enforcement demonstrate shifting views in APS.

The city of Aurora is not without its own challenges, which spill into schools from time to time. According to one district official:

*There is a significant amount of criminal activity that is occurring within blocks of our schools and people don't want to admit it, and I guess I can admit it because I have lived here all my life. There is a reason that we go into a certain number of secure perimeter activity situations, because of the level of criminal activity that's occurring around our schools, particularly our high schools and middle schools.*

Over the past decade, Aurora's population has grown and changed, becoming increasingly diverse. Members of this diverse community include asylees, asylum seekers and refugees who enroll their children in APS. Many asylum-seeking families have experienced traumatic interactions with law enforcement. For years, Aurora police officers parked their cars on the grounds of each high school throughout the District, sending clear signals that schools were "hard targets" (sites with visible safety measures in place) rather than "soft targets" (sites with less visible security measures in place).

Two other important conditions to consider are academic and disciplinary outcomes and staffing limitations.

## Interventions

Given the multiple, and at times dualistic, conditions facing the District, APS' strategies for responding represent the challenging nature of public schooling in the face of a shifting community context. The decisions of APS to improve academic outcomes and to ensure safe and secure schools are most apparent in three categories: a) structural change; b) developing a guiding framework; and c) funding change.

***Improving Structures.*** It is not surprising that families and educators are interested in student safety and security. Physical safety from violence is a top priority for APS. In APS, though, issues of law enforcement officer presence indicated that achieving safety required more than having officers in buildings.

Significant steps towards improving the structure of school safety and security occurred through APS staff training, revising and clarifying administrative expectations, and adopting restorative



justice approaches. Additionally, APS and APD developed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2014 to distinguish between schoolwork and police work, ensuring that what was in the purview of APS staff was handled by APS staff, and that events requiring the involvement of the police department were clearly articulated.

What is clear from these efforts is that distinguishing responsibilities was, and remains, necessary. The District's efforts to ensure the safety and security of students is primarily the responsibility of school administrators, who must set norms and expectations, rather than SROs, whose training is differently oriented and whose responsibility it is to support the school staff and students.

APS' work to achieve District-wide structural improvement required collaborative training between the two organizations. Of note is the additional complexity of APS' Department of Safety and Security. In addition to two School Resource Officers (APD employees) at each APS high school, the District employs 14 Campus Safety Officers (CSO; uniformed, armed), several Campus Monitors (employed at the discretion of individual school principals; not uniformed, unarmed), and a central security office with approximately 2000 cameras throughout the District. Given these layers, which appear to be practiced throughout US public schools,<sup>3</sup> the structure and frequency of training are a key component of safety and security throughout the District. Additionally, SROs and CSOs are trained together annually, and quarterly meetings are held between APD and APS.

Because CSOs throughout APS are not stationed at any particular school and instead travel throughout the District responding to a wide range of events (e.g., APS bus breakdown on highway; site-based violence event), they are likely to be unknown by many APS students. Building CSO-student familiarity has been a challenge. In response to this, APS has changed its prerequisite experience requirements for CSOs. Previously, the District required that CSOs had prior military, security or law enforcement experience. Recently, though, this requirement has been relaxed somewhat in order to encourage Campus Monitors to consider these positions, moving a step closer to the District's past community-policing model.

Another component of the District's structural improvements is the 12-point Safe Schools Plan, which includes five "Discipline Action Levels" based on severity of infractions for which law enforcement must be involved.<sup>4</sup>

## Developing a Framework

In APS, the types of challenges signaling the need for change would likely not be addressed through occasional, disconnected changes. For instance, increasing the amount of SRO/CSO training would likely have been inadequate to the task of improving student outcomes.

---

<sup>3</sup> An NCES report indicates that 83 percent of US public schools have security cameras, just under half have SROs, and though the number of cameras in a district is not reported. For more information see: <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=334>; NCES reports that just under half of the nation's schools have SROs, see: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019061.pdf>;

<sup>4</sup> The APS Health and Safety Plan is web available: <https://aurorak12.org/about-aps/school-safety/>

Additionally, a lesson learned by APS was that increasing the visibility of security also resulted in lower student performance and high expulsion rates, as demonstrated in Appendix A. It seemed clear that what the District was doing was not working well enough.

In 2018, the District constructed a holistic and guiding framework, represented by the acronym CARES: Communication, Awareness, Relationships, Engagement and Security. The framework is meant to create a comprehensive approach to health and safety with the goal of protecting students and families in APS.<sup>5</sup> The use of a focused framework to inform and guide decision-making across the District and to encourage coherence in reorienting training, increasing staffing, and heightening the District's focus on the overall well-being of students and staff, has been promising. The framework was also an effective way to communicate a general message about health and safety to the entire Aurora community.

The CARES Framework allowed APS to communicate to the city's voters the importance of its 2018 Mill Levy Override<sup>6</sup> request, helping residents understand that there are many factors that APS has to work through in order to educate students and keep them safe. The Framework also helped APS clarify for teachers and building leaders when to handle discipline events internally and when it was necessary to contact law enforcement – a difference that Superintendent Munn referred to as the distinction between schoolwork and police work. And the framework addressed a tension throughout the community around the perception that the District's leader, a self-identified African American man and father, was not doing enough fast enough in a largely student-of-color district, in a city facing its own challenges with criminal activity as well as race, poverty, immigration and law enforcement practice.

In practice, the CARES Framework resulted in the District prioritizing a new focus on safety and security to APD by developing coordinated, regular training; prioritizing mental health access and resources for all students; and communicating to the broader community that the District and its leadership were willing to be held accountable to families and voters.

## Funding Change

As discussed above, SROs were assigned to APS by the police department at no cost to the District. While this ensured officers were present at each APS high school, police alone were not enough to produce the changes necessary in schools, whether academic or behavioral. District-wide data indicates steady improvement in APS graduation and completion rates through 2017 (the year immediately preceding the Mill Levy Override vote), and a notable nearly nine percent graduation rate increase in 2018.

District-wide discipline data also demonstrate the significant need for greater coherence throughout APS, including through changes to staff and practice. As noted in Appendix A,

---

<sup>5</sup> Read more about the CARES framework at <https://aurorak12.org/2018/08/06/aps-cares/>

<sup>6</sup> Due to Colorado's state tax structure and funding of school districts, districts may use a ballot measure to request voter approval to collect taxes above what is allowed by the state. See <https://buildingabettercolorado.org/understanding-the-property-tax/> for more information.

suspension and expulsion rates have generally declined though differences in the number of suspensions between 2017-18 and 2018-19 are notable – high school suspensions went up by more than 150 district-wide.<sup>7</sup>

As District leadership recognized the need for a two-pronged approach that distinguished between a) social, emotional, physical and mental health and b) physical safety and infrastructure, additional resources were necessary. In 2018, the District concluded a successful Mill Levy Override campaign, resulting in \$35 million for the following:

- Expanding staff and training dedicated to student mental health<sup>8</sup>
- Expanding after-school programs for students in grades K-5
- Adding lap seat belts to school buses
- Increasing teacher pay to recruit and retain high-quality educators

## Outcomes

Following the thread of these changes throughout APS is both simple and complex. For instance, the student-outcomes indicators of graduation and completion rates, alongside referral, suspension and expulsion rates, indicate that conditions are improving throughout the District. The complexity of change, however, is signaled by staffing changes. While the number of SROs (School Resource Officers, APD employees) remains unchanged at two per high school, and the number of CSOs (Campus Safety Officers, APS employees) continues to hover around 14 throughout the District, APS has welcomed more than 100 additional professionals to the District’s Mental Health and Counseling team. From the District’s perspective, at least based on language from its website, the result of hiring additional mental health professionals has been to improve student health and increase their resiliency. Resiliency is tough to define and measure, as are safety and security.

Statewide, measuring student and teacher safety and security is accomplished through a survey, which includes questions about feelings and perceptions. The state’s Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado (TLCC) report is a “statewide, anonymous survey intended to support school, district and state improvement planning, as well as research and policy,”<sup>9</sup> requiring 50 percent participation in order to show results on the state’s website.

The 2020 TLCC survey results demonstrate that APS has improved 4 percent over 2019 results. In the survey subsection “Managing Student Conduct,” which focuses on school safety and expectations for student conduct, APS’ survey results regarding managing student conduct have improved by 11 percent over 2019.

---

<sup>7</sup> Suspension and expulsion data include one district school that is both a middle- and high school; data are not disaggregated to reflect only high school discipline rates at this school. Available referral data are disaggregated; thus, reported referrals represent high schools only.

<sup>8</sup> Of these Mill Levy priorities, “Expanding staff and training dedicated to student mental health” is relevant to this study.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cde.state.co.us/site/tlccsurvey/>

However, the types of questions asked have less to do with changes in schools and more to do with the internalized messages about the schools themselves.

- Students know how they are expected to act in the school.
- Students have the behavioral supports needed to focus on learning.
- Rules for student behavior are enforced in a consistent manner.
- This school is a safe place for students to learn.
- Students at this school have at least one adult on staff they can trust to support them with social, emotional or personal concerns.

Survey respondents represent three categories: school leaders, education professional or service providers, and teachers. This survey is not administered to students, and the responses of adult education professionals does not represent student perceptions about their experiences in APS.

Importantly, APS conducts an annual Student Climate Survey, asking students about their experiences in the District's schools, focusing on student feelings of emotional and physical safety. Nearly 70.3 percent of students in grades 5-12 responded (these are the grade levels to which the survey was administered in 2019-20, the last available year of survey administration), with results below.

**Table 1. Selected APS Student Climate Survey Results**

<b>Indicator<sup>10</sup></b>	<b>Results<sup>11</sup></b>
Safe and Respectful School Climate	71%
High Expectations/Academic Rigor/Challenge	74%
Student Support	69%
Social Emotional Learning	49%

Overall Student Climate Survey results offer interesting insights into the effects of the District's strategic efforts to improve mental/physical safety and overall security, though some available results are not disaggregated by grade level. For instance, in response to three of the Safe and Respectful School Climate questions, nearly 50 percent of students responded feeling not safe or only somewhat safe outside of school, in hallways and bathrooms, or in classrooms. Because these results are not reported by grade level, it is not clear whether high school (which have 2 SROs on site each day at each school) students feel safer than their elementary, K-8, or middle school counterparts (which do not have SROs on site).

Social Emotional Learning questions on the Student Climate Survey, which ask students about general bullying, targeted bullying (because of students' race, religion, weight or sexual

<sup>10</sup> The Safe & Respectful Climate subscale measures how physically and emotionally safe students feel • The High Expectations/Academic Rigor/Challenge subscale measures how much students perceive that teachers and other adults in the school encourage them to think, work hard, do their best, and connect what they are learning in school to life outside of school • The Student Support subscale measures how much students feel listened to, cared about, and helped by teachers and other adults in the school. • The Social and Emotional Learning subscale measures students' perception of their peers' social and problem-solving skills.

<sup>11</sup> The reported results represent students' agreement with the subscale questions anchored by an agreement scale.

orientation), teasing, and concerns about violence at school, are disaggregated to represent high school responses. In the 2019-2020 school year, the Student Climate Survey results are improved across the board compared to responses from the previous year (before the District hired additional mental health professionals).

Subscale Question	2018-19	2019-20
Students at this school are often bullied because of certain characteristics (for example, their race, religion, weight or sexual orientation).	6.85%	5.43%
Students at this school are often teased or picked on.	6.31%	5.10%
Students at this school are often bullied.	4.96%	3.62%
I worry about crime and violence in school.	8.72%	8.52%

The results of the Student Climate Survey indicate that APS high school students generally feel safer in schools throughout the District, that the District has improved the safe and respectful nature of its schools, from the perspectives of students. What remains unclear is how much of this to attribute to coordinated training between APS and APD. It also is not clear what impacts increase mental health support will have on these improvements, though it is likely that there will be benefits for APS students and professionals.

## Closing

Aurora Public Schools has made significant strides to produce a more safe and secure school district, leveraging community needs and inputs, student outcomes, and its local police department. Included in the District's efforts is a dramatic increase in the number of mental health professionals employed throughout APS, and more targeted training for School Resource Officers and APS central office and school staff.

A few recommendations include:

- By coordinating response training for SROs and APS mental health staff, unintended negative consequences of student-SRO interaction may be mitigated; this also can support student social-emotional health and building safety as co-priorities.
  - While deepening the incorporation of an equity focus in training, this can inform hiring practices for mental health professionals and SROs.
  - Training should be supplemented by an evaluation of the effectiveness of these roles for racially and ethnically diverse students, students with Special Needs, and students from other historically marginalized backgrounds.
- Sustain the CARES Framework and continue to operationalize CARES as the framework for sharing progress towards student outcomes benchmarks. This can also help to achieve shared language and commitment, district-wide, to overall student health.
  - Periodic review and evaluation of CARES should ensure adequacy of the Framework, as well as alignment with other District strategic priorities.

- Maintain the organizational relationship with APD. Conduct annual evaluation, with student, teacher and community input, of the efficacy of partnership, and make regular updates to the MOU.
- Build up and upon student voice throughout APS. Involve current students in training and evaluating the impact and roles of SROs and Mental Health Professionals.
- Develop additional short-cycle mechanisms to supplement statewide and current District-wide assessments, that will assess student, teacher and SRO experiences with school environments, directing attention to indicators of resilience, agency, and mental and emotional health for teachers and students.<sup>12</sup>
  - Incorporate review of teacher and school reliance on calls to APD.

Just as other districts may learn from the APS model and experiences in considering the role of policing in their schools, APS must continue to evaluate the policies and practices of their partnership with APD in relationship to health, safety and student outcomes.

For more information, contact

Janet Lopez  
Director of Policy and Advocacy  
Rose Community Foundation  
303.398.7415  
JLopez@rcfdenver.org

---

<sup>12</sup> See <https://positivepsychology.com/3-resilience-scales/> for resilience scale resources.

## Appendix A

Table 1. District student outcomes by year

Year	Grad Rate	Comp Rate	Referrals	Suspension	Expulsion	Law Enf. Referrals
2019	76.2%	77.5%	1646	AI,AN <sup>13</sup> - 13 Asian - 38 Black - 438 Hispanic - 711 White - 219 Two/More - 63	AI,AN - 0 Asian - 4 Black - 6 Hispanic - 15 White - 0 Two/More - 0	AI,AN - 3 Asian - 4 Black - 37 Hispanic - 67 White - 21 Two/More - 7
2018	76.5%	78.1%	1688	AI,AN - 7 Asian - 23 Black - 467 Hispanic - 698 White - 217 Two/More - 78	AI,AN - 0 Asian - 1 Black - 11 Hispanic - 10 White - 3 Two/More - 2	AI,AN - 1 Asian - 5 Black - 63 Hispanic - 68 White - 24 Two/More - 10
2017	67.6%	68.7%	2109	AI,AN - 3 Asian - 27 Black - 736 Hispanic - 879 White - 194 Two/More - 86	AI,AN - 1 Asian - 0 Black - 17 Hispanic - 8 White - 2 Two/More - 0	AI,AN - 1 Asian - 1 Black - 66 Hispanic - 69 White - 16 Two/More - 3
2016	65.0%	66.0%	2279	AI,AN - 10 Asian - 15 Black - 825 Hispanic - 903 White - 246 Two/More - 87	AI,AN - 0 Asian - 0 Black - 16 Hispanic - 13 White - 1 Two/More - 1	AI,AN - 0 Asian - 2 Black - 64 Hispanic - 57 White - 33 Two/More - 6
2015	59.0%	59.9%	1941	AI,AN - 19 Asian - 37 Black - 773 Hispanic - 684 White - 207 Two/More - 99	AI,AN - 0 Asian - 1 Black - 11 Hispanic - 10 White - 11 Two/More - 1	AI,AN - 1 Asian - 2 Black - 34 Hispanic - 43 White - 8 Two/More - 0
2014	55.8%	58.3%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2013	52.6%	55.0%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

<sup>13</sup> AI,AN stands for American Indian or Alaska Native