

Written Public Comments Submitted for the Franklin Pierce Board of Directors Meeting on  
August 18, 2020 Related to School Resource Officers  
(Permission was granted to post these comments on the Franklin Pierce Schools website).

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Dear Franklin Pierce School Board Member,

I'd like to take this opportunity to express my concerns for the continued funding of Student Resource Officers in Franklin Pierce Schools. Data and research shows that the increase of police presence in schools began during the 1990s in education, where strong zero tolerance policies were implemented in schools. 30 years later, after many years of an attempt to "create school safety", we have not seen data to support that a police presence makes schools any safer. We have seen data to show that zero tolerance policies in schools have disproportionately impacted black and brown students. We have seen data that supports a direct correlation with police presence in schools and students early involvement in the criminal justice system (school to prison pipeline).

At Franklin Pierce school district, the funds to pay for police would be better used funneled into services like mental health counselors and social workers, as well as training for teachers in restorative justice. In my previous line of work, we used restorative justice as an accountability system. I have direct experience with restorative justice, and this type of accountability system supports students in taking responsibility for their behavior and amending it. Restorative justice humanizes our students, as it allows for children and teenagers to be treated as young humans who make mistakes versus criminals in need of punishment.

Franklin Pierce has set goals to dismantle systemic racism and implement restorative justice, as well as trauma informed practices. Each of these contradict the continued use of police in schools, as many students of color have trauma related to institutionalized racism. It is time to move away from antiquated discipline structures to support our students success.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Beth Weisenmiller

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Dear Franklin Pierce School Board,

Over the past months, members of FPS staff and community signed a petition to remove School Resource Officers from our campuses. The full petition and letter with rationale about why SRO presence is in direct conflict with FPS goals is available [here](#). 83 people signed their name to this petition and I wanted to share with you some of the comments. One person said, "I just get very anxious whenever I see a SRO in my building" and another stated that "I've have seen students hand cuffed on campus, taken into police cars, over property damage. Inflicting

lifelong trauma on children for something that was fixed within the week. Both instances were students who receive special education services."

Policing as a system is inherently racist and removing SROs from schools is one way in which we can work to dismantle systems that disproportionately affect people of color. As one petition supporter stated, "the lived experience of many of our students is that the presence of an armed police officer does not create an environment more conducive to learning and feelings of home on our campus."

As a social worker, I believe that the hundreds of thousands of dollars that are spent annually on the SRO contract with Pierce County Sheriffs Department could be better utilized on prevention and wraparound services. Students need caring relationships to thrive and SROs do not provide nor support nurturing relationships. Another person stated that, "I have not seen officers on campus with the purpose of restorative practice to build good rapport or relationships with staff or students [...] If their intention is to be a positive presence, weapons have NO place on campus."

Our schools should be safe, caring environments where students can learn and families can come to be supported in their students' growth. SROs do not facilitate safe, caring learning environments. As a petition supporter said, "criminalizing 11 year olds is sickening and we can no longer standby and normalize it [...] There is no place in my school for a police presence." I urge you to remove SROs from FPS schools.

Best,  
Jenny Nakata MSW, MPH

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I have the following public comment for the board meeting:

This comment is in regards to Pierce County Sherrif's involvement and handling of the police murder of Manny Ellis. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, our community member, Emanuel Ellis was killed by Tacoma Police Officers on 96<sup>th</sup> and Ainsworth. He died after a TPD Officer kneeled on his neck for multiple minutes. Released audio recordings can be heard where Manny is saying "I can't breath, sir" before he died. Manny was also Tased prior to his death. Pierce County Sheriffs were at the scene and two separate witnesses report they were involved in restraining Manny.

Despite their involvement in Manny's death, Pierce County Sheriff Department was selected to investigate his death according to State Law (I-940<sup>[1]</sup>). Throughout the investigation, the sheriff's department has demonstrated criminal negligence and blatantly broke I-940 in its handling of the case.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Initiative 940 was designed to provide police accountability when a community member is killed by police. I-940 was passed in 2018.

### **I-940 entitles the community and family to the following:**

- Weekly briefings on the state of the investigation – Pierce County Sheriff held 0 briefings, despite the insistence of Manny’s family
- Appoint community members to the investigative team. PCSD failed to do this.
- Appoint a liaison to communicate and advocate for the family of the victim. PCSD did not do this, even after the insistence of Manny’s sister and Family. According to Manny’s Sister, PCSD sheriff Paul Pastor and Communications Director (now Sheriff Elect) Ed Troyer refused to meet or communicate her or Manny’s family.
- Release relevant documents and footage to the community, such as the Medical Examiner’s report, body cam, and dash cam footage. PCSD never released the Medical Examiner’s report, despite the insistence of Manny’s family. Manny’s family was given the Medical Examiner’s report by a reporter, 3 months after Manny was killed. Only after the press started investigating and 2 witnesses came forward with cell phone footage did PCSD release dash cam footage and audio in late May.

**PCSDs Conduct in Manny Ellis Case** - Including clearly breaking I-940, PCSD failed to release and contradicted evidence from the Pierce County Medical Examiner and stalled the investigation for 3 months, failing to communicate with the family during this time.

- PCSD ruled initially that Manny had died of “excited delirium” and that no crime was committed. The TPD officers were allowed to return to work at this time, after being on paid administrative leave for just 3 weeks. This DIRECTLY contradicted the Pierce County medical examiner report that ruled his death was a homicide, resulting from hypoxia due to medical restraint.
- On June 4<sup>th</sup> PCSD Communications Officer Ed Troyer publicly stated that “No taser was used” and “There was no heads on knees, there was no cutting off circulation, none of that”. This public statement directly contradicts the Medical Examiner Report and video evidence from cell phone and a Door camera on an adjacent house. In the video, an officer can be seen kneeling on Manny’s neck and punching him repeatedly. It was confirmed that PCSD had this video from the beginning of the investigation
- Only after the leaked medical examiners report and cell phone footage did PCSD change their story.
- After stalling the investigation for 3 months and an active community campaign led by Manny’s sister and local activists, Governor Inslee directed the attorney general to conduct an independent investigation after learning a PCSD officer was involved in restraining Manny. In a public statement, Inslee said the following. *“Provisions of I-984 were not followed by the Sheriff’s department, for example, they did not appoint community members to assist in reviewing members of an independent Investigative Team and no family liaison was appointed. Both are requirements of a police agency investigating a case involved someone who dies in police custody.”*

Pierce County Sheriff not only ignored I-940, but actively covered up details of Manny Ellis case to protect TPD and PCSD officers to the point of directly contradicting video evidence and the medical examiner's report. PCSD information officer Ed Troyer, whose responsibility it was to communicate with the Ellis family, failed in all regards. Troyer is now Sherriff elect in the upcoming election. PCSDs actions in the Ellis case showed a willingness to subvert the law and a complete disregard for the humanity of Manny Ellis and his surviving family. How can we welcome officers into our schools when their institution has such a lack of regard for black lives and our community? How would the PCSD respond if one of their officers killed one of our students, parents, or educators?

Thank you!  
Matt Price

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Dear Franklin Pierce Board of Education Members,

I am writing in favor of the removal of student resource officers from Franklin Pierce schools.

Having SROs in Franklin Pierce Schools is harmful and perpetuates oppression towards our Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other Students of Color. Additionally, SROs contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. I implore you to familiarize yourself with Zaretta Hammond's work Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain that explains how stereotype threat negatively impacts the emotional safety and educational outcomes of students of color. Black FP alumni and educators have spoken to the board about the presence of SROs and police in general. Their comments support Hammond's work: the presence of police is distracting. Mental energy is redirected to the fear of what might happen if they are approached by an SRO. Chronic fear and stress can have short- and long-term impacts on the health of brains and bodies; this is supported by an extensive body of research such as that reflected in The Deepest Well by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, Childhood Disrupted by Donna Jackson Nakazawa, and The Body Keeps the Score by Dr. Bessel van der Kolk. The recent murders of Manuel Ellis and Bennie Branch in our community reinforces this as a rational fear. Our priorities for students should be establishing their perceived and real safety; the presence of SROs can function to traumatize students. The removal of SROs will create an immediate increase in perceived and real safety for our Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other Students of Color.

It is not only studies and data that support the above, but also the experiences of children in our neighboring district. Please listen to students at Tacoma Public Schools express their own concerns about police in schools. Watch the Student Panel via TPS Facebook on August 24th – 12:30 – 2pm. [https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_pTFvXmlvQRqfmA7hPXSalg](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_pTFvXmlvQRqfmA7hPXSalg)

Under Superintendent Goodpaster, the district has committed to social justice and equity. Keeping SROs in our district is in direct opposition to the commitment to being an antiracism, education system in Franklin Pierce. No matter how much we 'talk the talk' of antiracism, the words are meaningless if we are not walking the walk. Removing SROs will create the

opportunity to increase student access to trauma-informed preventative and therapeutic mental health services. This is an opportunity for the Board to take a step in a positive direction, away from a system that harms Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other Children of Color, and toward one that supports them in fulfilling their potential.

Thank you for your time.  
Melissa McPheeters

Dear Franklin Pierce Board of Education Members,

I am writing to express my support for the removal of SROs from Franklin Pierce Schools.

Removing SROs is a crucial step for our district in shifting from a punitive paradigm that perpetuates systems of oppression to a paradigm that actively disrupts and challenges systems of oppression. According to the [Justice Policy Institute](#), the increased presence of SROs in schools since the early 2000s correlates not to increased student safety or learning, but instead to an increase in school referrals to law enforcement or the juvenile justice system. Is this what we want for our most vulnerable students? If our district is truly dedicated to its stated goal to “Maintain safe and caring schools”, we must remove police officers from our schools and end our complicity in the school-to-prison pipeline.

According again to the Justice Policy Institute, “Research has shown that within a year of re-enrolling after spending time confined in a correctional facility, two-thirds to three-fourths of formerly incarcerated youth withdraw or drop out of school.” In my mere 2 years teaching in the district, I have seen multiple students arrested on campus, and this statistic rings harrowingly true.

It is my hope that we can direct our energy and resources away from punitive systems and toward restorative systems that foster personal and community healing, especially when harm has been done. I believe that school is or should be a place for regeneration, belonging, and interdependence, not a place where students should come to “learn” how to behave under the watchful eye of people with guns (police), people who are likely good people with good intentions caught up in a system that was literally designed to ensure the protection and privilege of middle-upper class white people (like me and many of us here), and the subjugation of black and brown people living in poverty (like many of our students). There is obvious injustice in this, and it is within our power to do something about it. Removing SROs is an obvious step in that direction. Thank you.

-Paul Cavanagh

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Dear Members of the FP School Board,

I have spent a significant amount of time not sleeping and thinking about my comments today. That restlessness is a result of feeling that members of the Board have not gained a full understanding of Systematic Racism. My grandmother has reminded me of community members back in Little Rock, Arkansas who sat in to get fair treatment.

Speaking of Little Rock, Arkansas, it reminds me the historical struggles of education. My alma mater, Little Rock Central High School, was the site of school desegregation in 1957. The opposition was so great that the National Guard had to usher 9 black students into school. The citizens disagreed, the state disagreed, and the law enforcement disagreed. Yet, the right thing to do was to give those students an equal education. When I think about Equality (a vision that the board is supposed to have) there are some parallels that I can draw from that situation.

These parallels are:

1. Students were afraid then to attend school in the presence of police officers, and students are still afraid today. Statistics are not the focus, because if one student is harmed that is enough. If one student is sexually abused, we are not going to stop and ask, "What about all the students that aren't?"
2. Back then the public wanted to maintain the status quo, and some still do today. We acknowledge that inequality is wrong, but when we go to address it, we allow an unpopular opinion to sway us from doing the right thing. What status are you trying to maintain by being popular? Your position? Your power?
3. Those students had to fight for their rights as citizens and it took courageous adults to stand with them. It is not any different today. Students are begging for a peaceful and equal education. Police officers are not the first to ensure that peace. My students will not run to an SRO first. They will find a teacher, a counselor, a social worker, a paraeducator, a dean, a principal, a parent, or any other trusted adult that they have a true relationship with. It is OUR job to create a safe environment first. That can be done without handcuffs but with proper proactive services.

I would like to highlight that just because schools have been seemingly desegregated, does not mean that inequalities do not exist for our students. This is because those who want to maintain racial inequalities have gone to the shadows. They are a part of our governments, public bureaucracies, and private institutions. No one has addressed the number of police officers nationwide who serve, but who secretly have racist intentions. If individuals make up systems, and these individuals have covert ways to maintain racism with their power; it is accurate to believe that our systems have racist intentions. We have been fighting the same fight for 200+ years, and frankly the time is now for drastic change.

Thank you,  
Terry Johnson

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Dear Franklin Pierce School Board,

Thank you for listening to our concerns during your retreat last week.

I am writing because I am still advocating for the removal of SRO officers in Franklin Pierce Public Schools.

There is extensive research showing that SROs do not make students feel safer at schools. Aside from that, there is no research that shows SRO officers actually prevent school shootings (<https://wfpl.org/do-school-resource-officers-prevent-school-shootings/>). However, there is mounting evidence showing SROs have negative outcomes for students of color, particularly Black students who report heightened anxiety, more absences, and lower standardized test scores in school that have a police presence.

I think we need to understand what we mean when we say we are a district dedicated to equity. Equity means advocating for our most vulnerable students. The data shows students of color in our district have disparate disciplinary and educational outcomes when compared with our white students. Removing SROs and reinvesting that money into services that prevent interaction with law enforcement would signal to our students and wider community that we are invested in dismantling the systemic and institutional racism in our education system.

If you are unimpressed by the extensive research and data collection that has been conducted on SROs in schools and their impact on Black and Brown students, consider listening to students at Tacoma Public Schools express their own concerns about police in schools. Watch the Student Panel via TPS Facebook on August 24th – 12:30 – 2pm. [https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_pTFvXmlvQRqfmA7hPXSalg](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_pTFvXmlvQRqfmA7hPXSalg)

I believe that school should be a safe space for all of our children. I don't believe SROs make schools safer, but that positive relationships with teachers and administrators will. Please renew your commitment to equity and racial justice at Franklin Pierce Schools by removing SROs and reinvesting it in social workers, mental health professionals, and restorative justice.

Thank you for your time and consideration.  
Violet Hill

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Dear Franklin Pierce School Board,

We are writing in favor of the removal of school resource officers (SROs) from Franklin Pierce Schools.

We are very concerned about the role SROs play in the school to prison pipeline for students of color, specifically our Black students. There is little research that shows SROs improve safety outcomes in schools. According to the Harvard Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Law Review, a

recent synthesis of 12 studies found “no conclusive evidence that the presence of school-based law enforcement has a positive effect on students’ perceptions of safety in schools.”

(<https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/JPRC-Police-Schools-Brief.pdf>).

Furthermore, there are multiple studies that show SROs are in fact harmful; data show that schools with police are more likely to refer children to law enforcement for non-serious violent behaviors. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2577333](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2577333). Black students are more likely than white students to be arrested at school.

We also implore you to familiarize yourself with Zaretta Hammond’s work Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain that explains how stereotype threat negatively impacts the emotional safety and educational outcomes of students of color. Black FP alumni and educators have spoken to the board about the presence of SROs and police in general. Their comments support Hammond’s work: the presence of police is distracting. Mental energy is redirected to the fear of what might happen if they are approached by an SRO. The recent homicide of Manuel Ellis in our community reinforces this as a rational fear.

If you are unmoved by the extensive research and data collection that has been conducted on SROs in schools and their impact on Black and Brown students, consider listening to students across Washington state express their own opinions about modern day racism in education.

Watch the student panel on August 24th – 12:30 – 2pm and register

here: [https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_pTFvXmlvQRqfmA7hPXSalg](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_pTFvXmlvQRqfmA7hPXSalg)

We implore you to fulfill your commitment to an equitable and anti-racist education system in Franklin Pierce Schools by removing SROs and increasing student access to trauma-informed preventative and therapeutic mental health services, especially as our students, families, and community face much uncertainty and anxiety. Amidst a pandemic, we have a unique opportunity to revisit and reevaluate past practices and build a positive and empowering education system for all students by removing SROs from all FPS campuses.

Thank you for your time,  
PGK Equity Team