



## OUSD Board Unanimously Approves Policy to Limit the Role of Police in Oakland Schools

***“We’re students, not suspects.” --Reginae Hightower, McClymonds high school freshman***

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Parents, students and community members made their voices heard last night, at the Oakland school board meeting to ensure the passage of a model policy to limit and clearly define the role of school police in Oakland schools and help stop the school-to-prison pipeline. The board voted unanimously to approve the policy drafted in partnership with the Black Organizing Project, Public Counsel and ACLU.

The policy comes after nearly two years of organizing by members of the Black Organizing Project’s Bettering Our School System (BOSS) campaign, and partnerships with legal advocates Public Counsel and ACLU. **Approval of this policy makes Oakland school district one of the few leading districts across the country to make a shift toward policy changes that focus on limiting the role of police in schools and making a commitment to replacing contact with law enforcement with support from school counselors and other adults.**

Parents, students, teachers and community members spoke out on community-proposed amendments to the policy that they felt passionately about seeing added before the policy was approved.

"My daughter is an 11 year old. The school has to ask for permission for my daughter to go on a field trip, to miss school or for a photograph. But the district has not found it necessary to ask my permission to have her questioned by the police? This is unacceptable.," said Karissa Lewis, BOP parent member.

The Board accepted the amendments put forth by BOP that focused on provisions that require OUSD staff to “take immediate steps to get oral consent” from a students’ parent or legal guardian before releasing a student to police for interrogation. Because of this policy, if a parent or guardian says they do not want their child questioned, OUSD staff is prohibited from releasing the child to an officer for questioning until his or her parent or guardian is present. After hearing from BOP parents, teachers, students and others, the Board unanimously passed the policy.

Passage of the policies is particularly important because of the severe disproportionality in law enforcement contact with students in Oakland and the

impact on education. Over the last few years, Black youth have made up more than 70% of all juvenile arrests by the Oakland Police Department. Additionally, 72% of the 43 arrests and citations issued by school police last school year were issued to Black students even though they make up only 30% of the student population. Police contact with young people is one of the best predictors of whether a student will fail to finish school, will have to repeat a year, or will end up in the juvenile justice system or criminal justice system. In fact, just one arrest doubles a child's chance of dropping out of school.

“This win is a huge victory for the Black community in Oakland because we have taken the first step in reversing the tide of the school to prison pipeline and further investing in a more restorative approach by engaging families,” said Jasmine Jones, lead organizer for BOP. “This is exceptionally powerful for Black students because far too often our youth are the victims of over-criminalization and are punitively punished for mistakes that all young folks make.”

Oakland Unified School District is only one of three Districts in the State, along with San Francisco and Pasadena, who have worked with community and committed to ensuring that parents are notified before a child is interrogated by police on a school campus, during school hours. These model policies, which were drafted and negotiated for more than a year with BOP, Public Counsel and ACLU also provide that:

- OUSD must develop district-wide intervention to help schools showing the greatest disparities in contacts and arrest rates for African-American students and share information about the interventions with the Board two times per year;
- No school police officer or school security officer shall act as a school disciplinarian and law enforcement shall only be used as a last resort.
- Alternatives to police involvement, such as the use of restorative justice practices, must be tracked and documented and a plan of support created for students who have multiple law enforcement contacts.
- A private location out of sight and hearing of other students should be arranged whenever the arrest of a student is necessary, to avoid invasion of the student's privacy and disruption on the school campus.
- Data on referrals to law enforcement, citations and arrests must be tracked and shared with the Board of Education and OUSD must develop an action plan to address any disproportionate minority contact.
- School police officers shall tell any student that he or she may have a parent/guardian present before and during an interrogation and that he or she may decide to wait for the parent before questioning begins.
- School police shall make every effort to handle law enforcement related issues that are not school-related outside of school.

Passage of these policies was one of the recommendations that BOP, Public Counsel and ACLU made to the Oakland Unified School District when it released the report

[From Report Card to Criminal Record, the Impact of Policing Oakland Youth in August of 2013.](#)

*The Black Organizing Project is a black, member-led community organization working for social, racial and economic justice through grassroots organizing and community-building.*

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