

Interrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Understanding and Amplifying Youth Calls for #PoliceFreeSchools and #CounselorsNotCops

As the country continues to reel from a series of police killings, many communities—from large cities to small towns—are reevaluating the relationship between policing, community safety and racial justice. As part of this movement, many school districts are rethinking costly police contracts and debating whether they really need to maintain school-based police (often called School Resource Officers). This work is getting renewed attention in this movement moment; however, youth organizers around the country and their allies have been leading efforts to shift school culture away from school-based policing and towards restorative/transformational justice for quite some time.

If we are to successfully interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, we must resist efforts to criminalize children of color, and we must begin to move from biased systems that offer a false promise of school safety through policing to real, comprehensive, community-rooted solutions that offer *genuine* safety for all children.

A Few Simple Next Steps for Adult Allies

- 1. Listen to youth voices.** Listen to young people in your own community and throughout the country. Looking for a place to begin?
 - a. Watch Girls for Gender Equity's video, ["Black Girls Breaking Silence on School Push-out"](#)
 - b. Read this recent article from *Teen Vogue*, ["Over-Policing in Schools is an Issue Black Students Have Been Fighting For Years"](#)
 - c. Hear student concerns via CNN, ["5 students tell you why they want police-free schools"](#)
- 2. Understand and uplift local youth demands.** Participate in community listening sessions to

If we don't want police in schools, what do we want?

"Cultivating safe spaces for girls of color in the learning environment includes more than simply removing law enforcement and other instruments of surveillance from schools. My conversations with girls of color throughout the country reveal that they feel safer in schools that have cultivated spaces for them to learn without the stress of racism, sexism, racialized sexism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and other biases that marginalize students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Schools that *theorize* and *practice* safety as a function of trust and love—rather than a function of surveillance or the threat of arrest or removal from school—can produce higher-achieving students and achieve robust inclusion of students who might otherwise be cast out to the margins. As students' brains process this safety, their defense mechanisms relax and they are more able to counter the narratives of dehumanization that have come to define them. Their lives become narratives that defy the justification for police in schools in the first place. Their blues become songs of praise." – Dr. Monique Morris, *Sing a Rhythm, Dance a Blues: Education for the Liberation of Black and Brown Girls*, page 106



United
Methodist
Women

FAITH • HOPE • LOVE IN ACTION

hear from students, parents and community members. Be especially attentive to the voices of youth of color in your community. As United Methodist Women, we are committed to listening carefully to young people as they share their experiences and perspectives.

3. **Advocate for change at the local level.** Many of the most important decisions about education and racial equity are happening at the local level—through the decisions of school boards, superintendents, local school councils and principals. Join with existing community efforts to organize for #PoliceFreeSchools and #CounselorsNotCops locally. Wondering who is working on these issues in your state? Explore [Dignity In Schools](#)' partner organization list as a place to begin.

4. **Redirect dollars for the good.** The goal is not *just* to remove school-based police from schools. We need to divest from systems that exacerbate school pushout and increase racial disparities in school discipline and school-based arrest. We *also* need to invest in solutions and strategies that work to ensure educational access and success. That means we cannot think of ending school police contracts as just 'money saved in tough times,' and watch those dollars disappear. Instead, we need to redirect the funds currently spent on school-based policing towards children's educational success and comprehensive student support services, including restorative/transformational justice. What this looks like, specifically, should be a community-led decision based on the particular circumstances of a local school and school district. Some schools need more nurses, mentors or teachers. Others need mental health counselors, social workers or afterschool supports. Some may find success in Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) implementations and others may find a need for full-scale school culture change. There is no one-size-fits-all. We should, however, always ensure that the community of students and parents is an active part of the decision-making.

Want to learn more?

- Listen to this 4-minute podcast from NPR: ["Why There's a Push to Get Police Out of Schools"](#)
- Read and study *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* by Dr. Monique Morris

Note: This will be our Mission u issue study text for 2021. It is available for direct purchase from local and online booksellers.

- Explore web resources from credible sources:
 - [We Came to Learn](#) report prepared by Advancement Project
 - [Counselors Not Cops Campaign](#) led by Dignity In Schools
- Dive into Scripture with United Methodist Women's [school-to-prison pipeline Bible Study](#)
- Ready to read even more? Get inspired by the organizing success stories in *Lift Us Up, Don't Push Us Out!: Voices from the Front Lines of the Educational Justice Movement* edited by Mark Warren and the vision of educational possibilities in action in *Sing a Rhythm, Dance a Blues: Education for the Liberation of Black and Brown Girls* by Monique Morris



United
Methodist
Women

FAITH • HOPE • LOVE IN ACTION