

SCHOOL SAFETY & CLIMATE: ISSUE BRIEF

Practices that aim to “harden schools” through the use of increased police presence, permitting teachers to bear arms, the installation of metal detectors, or other school security and infrastructure changes may be harmful to students with disabilities and should not be used to address school safety or climate concerns. NCLD opposes policy proposals that would harden schools for the reasons outlined below:

- 1. Research has shown measures to harden schools do not improve school safety.**
 - A report by the National Association of School Psychologists found “no clear evidence that the use of metal detectors, security cameras, or guards in schools is effective in preventing school violence.”ⁱ In addition, it found that the presence of security guards and equipment can actually have a negative impact on some students’ sense of safety.ⁱⁱ
- 2. Measures to harden schools may actually have a negative impact on students and disproportionately hurt students with disabilities and students of color.**
 - Students with disabilities and students of color are restrained and secluded, suspended, expelled, and referred to the justice system at a higher rate than their peers. Black students are 3 times as likely to be arrested in school and students with disabilities (only 12% of the student population) account for 25% of arrests at school.ⁱⁱⁱ Additionally, students with disabilities make up 67 percent of the students subject to physical restraint or involuntary confinement in school.
 - Increasing police presence in schools will continue to have a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities and students of color, increase the criminalization of non-violent student behavior, and will exacerbate discipline issues and the school-to-prison pipeline.
- 3. Decreasing the use of punitive measures in schools can actually improve school climate.**
 - When Chicago schools decreased the use of suspensions and expulsions, they saw students’ attendance and academic performance improve.^{iv}

Given the lack of evidence connecting “hardening” measures to improved student or school outcomes, we should not invest our limited resources and capacity on them. Instead, NCLD urges Congress to invest in measures that promote positive school climates. This includes investing in practices that have a demonstrated evidence base: school-wide approaches such as:

- 1. Use of a multi-tier system of supports (MTSS)**
 - MTSS is a school-wide framework that provides targeted intervention and supports to students who are struggling in academics, with behavior, or with their social emotional needs. MTSS includes screening every student early on to determine their areas of need. Increasing levels of support and evidence-based instruction are provided for students in the areas where they are struggling and plans are developed to address their academic, behavioral, and social and emotional needs. Teachers, counselors, psychologists and other specialists will work in teams to monitor students’ progress, collect data, and determine which strategies and interventions are needed over time.
- 2. Integration of positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) into MTSS systems**

- PBIS is often described as the behavioral component of MTSS. It is a school-wide framework that improves school safety and promotes a positive school climate. A school that uses a PBIS approach will set expectations for appropriate behavior in different school settings and teacher students skills they will need. When students struggle to display appropriate behavior or meet the school-wide expectations, teachers can intervene and provide instruction to help the student succeed. PBIS focuses on prevention, early intervention, and managing behavior to ensure a positive school climate.

3. Integration of social and emotional interventions into MTSS systems

- Social emotional learning (SEL) refers to strategies that aim to help students understand the strengths and needs, manage emotions, persevere through challenges, engage and build relationships with others, resolve conflicts, work collaboratively, and make positive choices. SEL programs and curricula require students to use the very skills that students with disabilities often struggle with, such as executive function, managing emotions, or self-awareness. Therefore, for SEL programs to be effective, schools must provide targeted supports and tailor these programs to help these students with disabilities fully participate.

4. Provision of comprehensive mental health and counseling services for students

- Comprehensive school counseling programs are critical in identifying and addressing students' academic and social/emotional needs, helping students overcome barriers to learning, and developing the necessary mindsets, attitudes, behaviors, and interpersonal skills for long-term success. School counselors are essential in every school that serves students with disabilities and are leaders on issues relating to social/emotional learning and school crisis response.

The Every Student Succeeds Act includes Title II funds for professional development which can be used to support and provide training to educators. In addition, ESSA's Title IV includes flexible funding that can be used to increase the capacity of school counseling and mental health programs or to help teachers learn how to create safe learning environments, which might include training on the strategies discussed here.

ⁱ National Association of School Psychologists (2013). "Research on School Security: The Impact of Security Measures on Students. Available at: <http://www.audioenhancement.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/school-security-by-NASP.pdf>. See also CRS Report (2013) finding that "The body of research on the effectiveness of [school resource officer] programs is limited, both in terms of the number of studies published and the methodological rigor of the studies conducted," available at: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43126.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ *Id.*

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013-14, available at <http://ocrdata.ed.gov>.

^{iv} <https://in.chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2018/03/13/when-chicago-cut-down-on-suspensions-students-saw-test-scores-and-attendance-rise-study-finds/>