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School Resource Officers and Academia

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Author

Trujillo, Maissa

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School Resource Officers and Academia

A Policy Brief by Maissa Trujillo

Background:

School safety and community has been a priority for parents, administrators, and students alike. Since 1998, the federal government has invested over [\\$1 billion to explicitly increase police presence in schools](#), and over \$14 billion to advance community policing, which include School Resource Officers, or SROs. Through the increased police presence, there has been numerous studies that have seen a correlation with the increase of police presence on school campuses and an increase in students of color and other vulnerable populations funneled into the criminal justice system, which is coined the “school-to-prison-pipeline.”

Safety Concerns in Academic Environments:

Concerns about on campus safety have risen with the increased worry of a mass shooting or other violent threats on campus. Because of this, many school districts have turned to employ local police and sheriffs on campuses to ensure school safety. Many schools who do tend to have SROs, have a predominately Black or Latino student body, [regardless of income](#). Many Superintendents, administrators, and community members echo that police presence tends to deter violence and crime on school grounds because of the notion of authority. However, this impacts the perception of school safety, as an environment with a heavy police presence creates a tense atmosphere despite good intentions. In 1975 only 1% of US schools had sworn in police officers on campuses compared to 2018, [where the number has increased to 58%](#).

Contracts, Training, and Funding:

As recently unveiled, many school districts have no control over police department contracts between officers and the school district. All contracts are made through the local police department where the police department acts as a third-party contractor between the individual SRO and school district. In addition, many contracts are nonnegotiable on the school district’s part in which contracts bind the school district to police department dispositions. Many school districts have attempted to create culturally competent training and other academic environment workshops in order to better equip police officers assigned to school campuses. This training is [not consistent throughout different states](#) as each individual state and police department has the discretion to set requirements for SRO training. The lack of consensus leaves gaps in how an

SRO is supposed to act and does not prepare them to mitigate. On occasion, the overall goal of creating community relationships between youth and the local police department fall short because of the quick escalation that has been seen in recent years.

One specific school district located in the Inland Empire, had an amendment to their contract which terminated SROs while virtual learning was in place. The previous budget negotiated for the contract was \$155,000, however, due to the vacancy of campuses, the contract was terminated for the time being.

Data on Graduation, Standardized Testing, and Disciplinary Action:

Focusing the study’s themes regarding SROs on that same school district, specifically one high school, in which there were SROs in previous years and then they were removed.¹ The data is sourced from the [California Department of Education](#) and looks at data from a year with SROs and a year with no SROs.

2

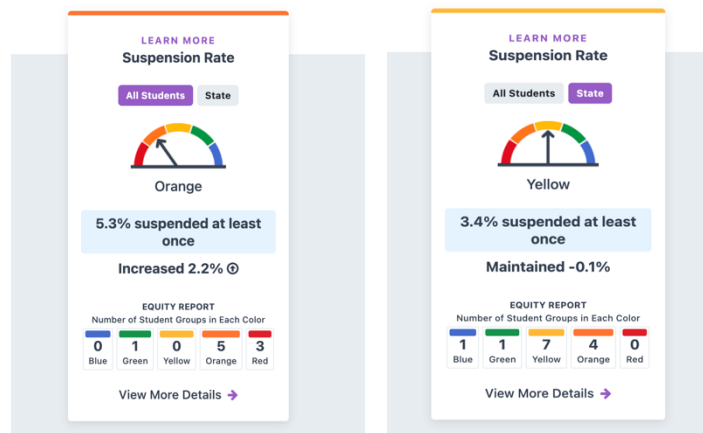
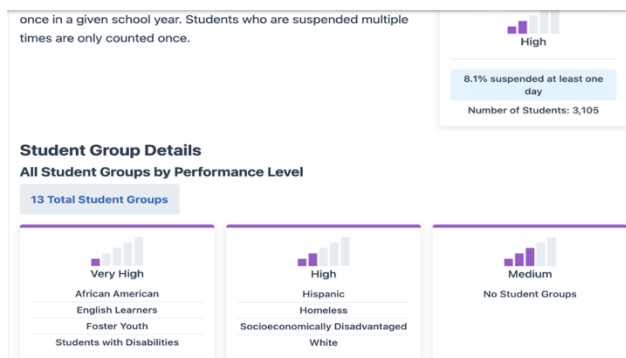
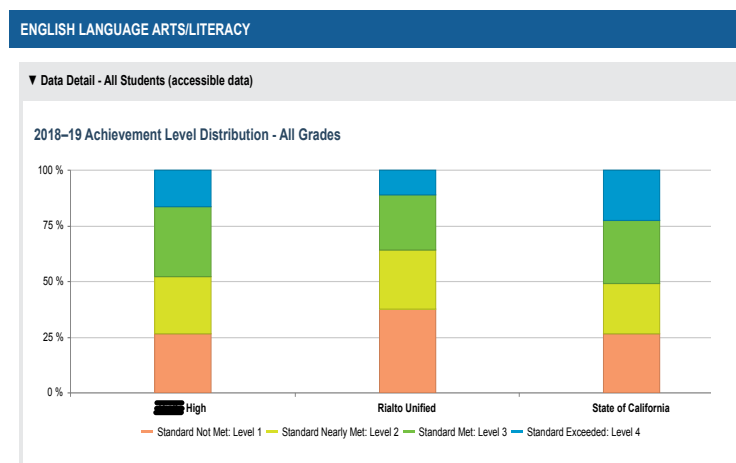
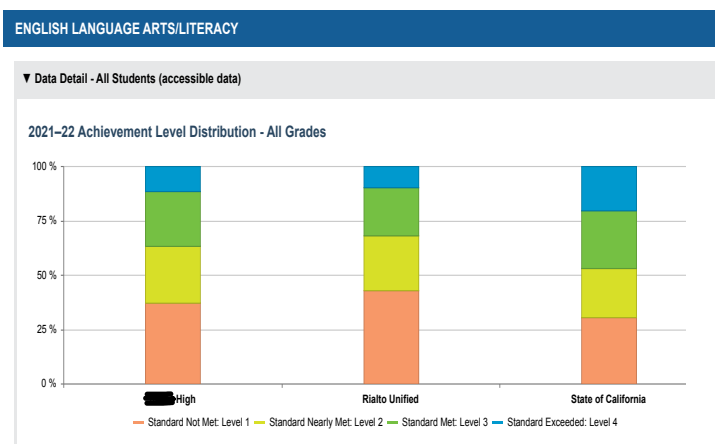


Figure 3: CAASPP (state) Testing

Year: 2021-2022

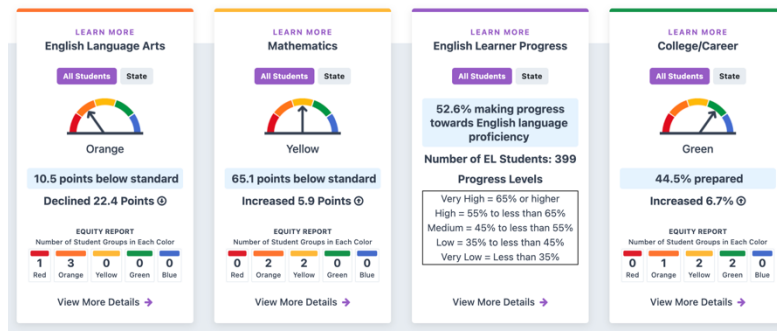
Year: 2018-2019



¹ The school district is working on a new contract to reinstate SROs onto their campuses for the next fiscal school year.

² Suspension rates based on identifying factors in comparison between focus school and state (2021-22).

³ Figure 3: State testing statistics on an individual school, district, and state level.



Policy Recommendations:

The state should work in conjunction with the California Department of Education to create a concise and statewide agreement on the standards for hiring SROs and adequate training.

Because of the nature of the contracts, there is no required training or special hiring process. Most contracts are litigated by the police department and not the individual, meaning that most SROs are regular sworn in officers. The state should seek to pass legislation that forces police departments to create a separate unit within that specializes in SRO training and hiring. Due to the nature of the environments that these individuals work in, the general training they receive, catered towards adults, does not effectively transfer over to interacting with vulnerable populations such as youth in controlled environments such as educational institutions.

The state is already looking to address the Prison Industrial Complex with legislation such as Nancy Skinner's bill: [SB 274 \(Keep Kids in School\)](#). This bill is a small step in decriminalizing adolescent behavior within K-12 schools and pushing to create a well rounded safe, mobilizing, and accelerating environment to foster education excellence for students, which SROs do play a valuable role in.

⁴ Overall statistics and performance evaluated by the state.