REIMAGINING
SAFETY IN DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The Denver Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety is a community-led initiative that emerged in response to the 2020 protests following the murders of George Floyd and Elijah McClain. Over the course of several months, the Task Force brought together more than 40 community organizations, along with elected officials, faith leaders, and youth, to foster relationships, engage in effective dialogue, and develop solutions regarding policing and public safety in our city. One of our primary goals was to address and eliminate the issue of militarized over-policing in black, brown, and other targeted communities.

Our purpose here is to develop recommendations for Denver Public Schools that embody a community-centered approach to school safety.

Executive Summary

The Task Force comprises an inclusive coalition representing African American, Latino, Asian, indigenous American, Jewish, Caucasian, LGBTQ+, individuals with disabilities, and those with lived experiences within the criminal legal system. Its members come from diverse organizational backgrounds, including civil rights organizations, community activists, direct service providers, faith-based organizations, policy advocacy organizations, and youth-serving organizations. To date, this initiative stands as the largest and most diverse community-led public safety endeavor in the nation.

As part of our work, we developed a practical, community-centered definition of public safety. Our Definition: Public safety ensures that all members of the community decide how to organize a social environment that provides the freedom to live and thrive with the protection and support of social, physical, mental, and economic well-being. Safety is not a function of armed paramilitary forces with a proven track record of racism and violence. Public safety prevents, reduces, and heals harm.

The Task Force greatly benefited from the participation of Denver's youth. Due to the fact that many of us have had negative experiences with public safety, especially youth, this was urgent work. We created an innovative process that not only gave the community a voice in policies that affects us directly but also enabled a foot in the door for our community when it comes to engaging with the city council.

The participation of Denver's youth has greatly benefited the Task Force. Given the negative experiences many of our youth have had with public safety, this work was urgent. We devised an innovative process that not only empowered the community to voice their thoughts on policies that directly affect us but also facilitated greater engagement with the City Council and the Department of Safety.

Executive Summary

Following the recent school shootings in DPS, the Task Force established a special subcommittee consisting of youth, educators, and experts. This subcommittee's purpose is to develop recommendations for DPS that embody a community-centered approach to school safety, outlining how it should be prioritized. The recommendations presented in this report offer crucial perspectives on creating safe environments for black, brown, and other targeted youth in our schools without relying on armed officers.

The nationwide epidemic of school shootings, which originated in the greater metro Denver area, underscores the ineffectiveness of armed officers in preventing such tragedies and their limited capacity to respond adequately once an incident occurs. Moreover, research consistently demonstrates that School Resource Officers (SROs), like other law enforcement entities, disproportionately target Black and brown students while disregarding the most significant demographics of actual mass school shooters, thereby perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline.

In this report, we present a comprehensive and transformative vision for the future. We offer recommendations based on the insights and expertise of various community organizations, incorporating research and best practices while uplifting the ideas and initiatives that are already making a positive impact in the lives of our youth.

Our foremost demand is for fundamental change that prioritizes the well-being of our youth and eliminates the need for increased policing. The objective of this report is to establish safe, equitable, and truly just learning environments for all young individuals. It is our firm belief that black and brown, immigrant, LGBTQIA+, and other targeted youth deserve schools that cultivate hope, facilitate healing, and break the cycle of racism, neglect, and abuse. To achieve this, we must shift away from overreliance on traditional approaches centered around "cops and cages", and instead embrace community-driven solutions that foster healing and growth.

Thank you,
Dr. Robert Davis   Samantha Carwyn, Chief Editor
Denver Task Force   Carwyn Collaboration LLC

Our Strategies

Safety is fostered in equitable systems by taking time to develop balanced relationships, continuously creating a sense of belonging, and implementing meaningful changes that support the most marginalized.

Ensuring the safety of our youth requires active engagement from the Denver community, clear guidance from Denver Public Schools, cohesive leadership across school buildings, partnerships with staff, and a commitment to empowering students and their families to take the lead.

We have identified five strategies central to reimagining schools where students can thrive. However, we acknowledge that school resource officers are currently present in schools; though not a strategy we endorse, it must be directly addressed.

01. Moving with Intention

02. Creating Belonging

03. Restorative Culture

04. Power to the People

05. Supporting the Most Targeted

Moving with Intention

Prioritizing youth safety requires urgency and adequate time to avoid further harm and ensure the full inclusion of impacted individuals, families, and communities. However, the superintendent's unilateral decision to immediately introduce SROs into schools disregarded the desires of DPS students who fought for safer schools, particularly for those facing unjust surveillance and over-policing. Hastiness prevented comprehensive training for all the SROs entering this unique role, and school leadership's input should have been included. Active engagement is essential for the community, DPS leadership, building administration, staff, students, and families.

Given the chaotic end-of-year period, the lack of sufficient notice forced students, families, and the school community to prioritize their limited time and energy. To ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach, involving diverse participants in decision-making is essential to avoid creating problems in a silo with tunnel vision. A safe school encompasses more than just gun and gang violence, acknowledging the wide range of safety concerns students face. We need a holistic approach that addresses emotional, mental, and physical safety. Prioritizing the entire well-being of students includes addressing bullying, sexual harassment, bodily autonomy, self-esteem, and other relevant aspects. Developing such a comprehensive plan requires ample time to gather an informed and diverse group, building upon existing knowledge to create a widely supported path forward.

"What if we are looking at it like a growth plan or a success plan?
A safety plan illuminates something that has to happen.
It's operating from the conflict."
~Debra

Next Steps

01. Commitment & Action

Maintain relationships with community organizations that can bring forward youth voices.

02. Commitment & Action

Establish contracts with community organizations led by BIPOC individuals, who have a proven track record of providing services for Denver youths and amplifying their voices.

> *The Task Force has carefully selected a culturally competent list of organizations to serve as a valuable resource for the DPS.

03. Commitment & Action

Identify community leaders, the number of youth, which family structures, particular DPS leadership, and key staff to identify key questions to ascertain if students feel safe.

04. Commitment & Action

Develop a robust group like above who can gather quickly so a collective plan forward can be determined when a criss occurs.

05. Commitment & Action

Steps to Moving Intentionally with BIPOC and other targeted students

- Listen more than you speak
- Take note of your social location
- Ensure most impacted is centered
- Resist default reactionary thinking and prioritize prevention
- Hold space for excluded, missing, quiet, or ignored voices
- Check your privilege and leverage it for those denied access
- Be mindful to avoid oppressive thoughts & behaviors [ageism, racism, sexism, classism, ableism, heterosexism]
- Clarify what constitutes a "good" outcome
- Develop plans based on people's lived experiences
- Deliberate with thoughtfulness and intention about the range of options
- Identify specifics about how will make a non-hierarchical decision in an atmosphere of urgency

*Adapted from White Supremacy Culture: Still Here, Tema Okan, May 2021
Revised and Enhanced by Carwyn Collaboration LLC

Creating Belonging

Belonging, with its intricate components, can seem elusive. It entails invitation, being welcomed, respect, and celebration. Creating belonging is a collective responsibility shared by every individual within a school building and those responsible for establishing policies and procedures. The district's proactive encouragement of student involvement in decision-making processes at each stage makes it clear that this is their school to invest in. The district's responsibility is to provide explicit guidelines regarding unacceptable behavior, given that bullying, harassment, and discrimination are present within every school setting. Prior classroom teaching experience should be a requirement for a dean, ensuring that teachers receive the necessary support from their administrative staff. Furthermore, acknowledging the significance of community engagement in establishing a solid foundation for belonging, it is reasonable to expect that certain roles or positions within schools be filled by community members. Additionally, the district should set goals centered around data collection about retaining teachers from historically excluded groups and comprehensive plans to support those who remain within the school buildings.

Celebrating significant days pertinent to various races, religions, cultures, and identity groups allows students to feel acknowledged and valued, increasing their sense of belonging. Utilizing the current dedicated time for social-emotional learning to foster community building can support ongoing relationships. Allotting time for affinity groups within the school structure embeds a sense of belonging. It is imperative to create opportunities for students to express their feelings of insecurity, identify the underlying causes, and collaboratively develop action plans for subsequent steps.

*Our focus is belonging and nurturing environments.
Safe is the bare minimum; we want kids
to feel belonging and connected to their schools.
That's the actual goal.
~ Sam*

Next Steps

01. **Commitment & Action**

Staff and students need a dedicated space to reflect and to regain composure.

02. **Commitment & Action**

Establish student groups where they can address triumphs, challenges, and unique experiences to foster an environment of reflection and growth.

03. **Commitment & Action**

Conduct regular assessments of schools, classrooms, and curriculum to ensure inclusivity and diversity, utilizing different evaluation tools.

04. **Commitment & Action**

Equip staff with training and guidance on effectively intervening when a colleague undermines belonging.

05. **Commitment & Action**

Integrate mental health support staff into everyday school life to become an intrinsic resource for overall well-being beyond crisis response.

06. **Commitment & Action**

Divide the entire student body into smaller pods with a dedicated staff member, ensuring every student has a point of contact for support.

07. **Commitment & Action**

Offer elective summer school classes focused on social-emotional learning.

08. **Commitment & Action**

Develop an ROI for community organizations to become an alternative suspension space for students.

09. **Commitment & Action**

Integrate the principles of BLM at School, observe the Week of Action, and engage in reflective dialogues with the Year of Purpose reflection questions.

Restorative Culture

Restorative justice should be a fundamental element within the entire school culture, transcending disciplinary measures and reactionary approaches. Building a restorative culture asks us to examine the nature of our relationships with one another, emphasizing the need to think, mend, and foster connections. Restorative justice encompasses the essential principles of relationships, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration. It acknowledges that while individuals make choices, their behaviors do not define who they are. Some students may perpetrate harm, and others experience harm. Yet it is important to recognize that students can be both simultaneously. It is crucial to state that no student should be labeled as a bully.

A restorative culture necessitates the active engagement and involvement of all. It can begin with the district taking responsibility for the harm students, families, and staff endured. Continuous relationship-building efforts should be present in schools and extend across the district. All schools should have consistent, relevant learning opportunities about restorative justice practices. Addressing the guidance and coaching needs of certain teachers, based on data analysis, is essential. Teachers' disciplinary actions should prioritize a restorative approach, emphasizing respect, authenticity, and addressing harm. Teachers should create a space where students feel comfortable to address concerns and call them in. Opportunities for repairing teacher-student relationships should be prioritized. Social-emotional learning should extend beyond the core curriculum, with students engaging in social circles and meaningful conversations centered around resolving conflicts. Must shift away from isolating students from their peers and removing them from the school environment. Emphasis should be placed on fostering respect in all directions rather than solely wielding power for compliance.

"We're building a culture of relationship and respect."
Beth

Next Steps

01. Commitment & Action

Begin the school year with a restorative dialogue and regularly host town hall meetings to encourage community engagement and feedback.

02. Commitment & Action

Establish a public message board for students and families to facilitate inquiries and see prompt responses.

03. Commitment & Action

Outline prevention-oriented educational programs for all students, focusing on proactive approaches to promote positive behaviors in peers.

04. Commitment & Action

Ensure all staff members learn about adultification and have opportunities to explore and address personal biases.

05. Commitment & Action

Offer mediation services for students and staff upon either's request.

06. Commitment & Action

Develop robust support systems for staff members facing challenges in their interpersonal relationships with students.

07. Commitment & Action

Empower students to identify teachers who can facilitate healthy peer relationships and acknowledge those teachers' contributions financially.

08. Commitment & Action

Implement differentiated strategies for addressing students' behaviors, considering their individual needs and circumstances.

09. Commitment & Action

Outline a clear disciplinary framework, including specific classes, and resources as part of the disciplinary ladder.

Power to the People

Students often serve as the initial support system for their peers when they encounter challenges in their lives. They possess valuable insights into conflicts, self-harm behaviors, the struggles faced by their peers, and the connections between students and teachers across the school community. It is imperative to enhance students' capacity to support their peers effectively. They should receive training to develop leadership skills, be supported in addressing vicarious trauma, and be connected with mentors within the school. Students should have a voice, representation, and decision-making power wherever decisions are made that impact them. Regardless of where an issue arises, students across the district are affected, making it essential to include students from different schools for all perspectives to be heard. We must genuinely value and consider the experiences of students. By strengthening peer support models and capacity, we can ensure that students without meaningful adult relationships are not left unsupported. Additionally, we should build upon existing adult relationships to further bolster support networks for students.

Extended family members and community members are invested in our students and want to provide additional support. It is important to recognize that parental or guardian involvement alone does not capture the full range of care and support provided by the broader community. Also overlooked are the supports students in foster care may have, such as CASA workers, guardians ad litem, previous placement caregivers, and other adults who advocate for their stability and well-being.

The effectiveness of a system relies on the contributions of those within it. To ensure equity is advanced within schools, specific training, and experience should be required for School-Based Restorative Practices Coordinators. These coordinators play a vital role in identifying alternatives to suspension for students who require disciplinary action under the supervision of the Dean. However, providing them with the necessary resources and tools to support innovative approaches is essential. They should be trained to assist teachers in implementing restorative justice practices in their classrooms and also act as community partners and resource liaisons. Furthermore, it is important to outline prevention efforts as part of their overall responsibilities to establish a comprehensive approach.

Power to the People

Professional associations in the field provide recommendations for student ratios, emphasizing the ideal number of students per professional. These ratios serve as guidelines to ensure adequate support and care. When compiling data across the district, none of the ratios were met for the 2022-2023 school year. Recommendations are a nurse for every 750 students [1:919], a psychologist for every 500 students [1:531], and a counselor for every 250 students. [1:597] and a social worker for every 250 students. [1: 449]

The need for mental health support at East High School, which has been the catalyst for the current safety measure, is astounding. The workload for professionals at the school exceeds recommended ratios. With social workers serving over 850 students, psychologists serving over 600 students, counselors assigned to nearly 300 students each, and nurses expected to care for more than 2,000 students, it becomes evident that the workload is overwhelming. Then when you review the school nurses' list of responsibilities, it undermines their ability to provide the level of support students deserve, and the current plan states they would receive. The workload distribution appears to be concentrated among a few individuals.

Community organizations are eager to partner with DPS to support all students. However, there are challenges beginning with accessing the necessary forms to initiate the partnership process. It is important to establish clear criteria for determining which organizations are a good fit for partnership. Those that apply and are approved must have the capacity to be reimbursed months after services have been provided. By prioritizing partnerships with Black and Brown-led organizations and conducting an inventory of current partners, the district can take steps towards building diverse and inclusive partnerships to meet the support needs of students.

"We as the people have more power than the system just haven't exercised it."
~ Mauryell

Next Steps

01. Commitment & Action

Support students in creating, sharing, and utilizing wellness recovery action plans (WRAP) for their mental health and overall well-being.

02. Commitment & Action

Identify and list commonly trusted adults within the school building who have established strong connections with students. These adults should be given additional support and recognition for their role in supporting students. Provide Askable Adults Training to new staff members and ensure that current staff members receive training within five years.

04. Commitment & Action

Establish a student advocates council across the district to provide training, serve as peer support, amplify student voices, and advocate for their needs.

05. Commitment & Action

Utilize SEL time to regularly address and discuss vicarious trauma, which can help students develop coping strategies and build resilience.

06. Commitment & Action

Develop alternatives to suspension in collaboration with students and youth-serving organizations. That includes restorative justice practices, conflict resolution classes, and other approaches that prioritizing learning, growth, and accountability.

07. Commitment & Action

Provide School-Based Restorative Practices Coordinators with comprehensive training that includes Youth Mental Health First Aid, WRAP, and intercultural conflict style inventory to equip them with the necessary skills to support students' mental health.

08. Commitment & Action

Establish a clear partnership application process and provide guidance on qualifications for community organizations and individuals interested in collaborating with the district. Ensure that student profiles or records include information about their extended family members or other advocates who play a significant role in their lives.

Supporting the Most Targeted

Every student deserves an inclusive and supportive school environment that prioritizes their well-being, education, empowerment, and dignity. It is essential to critically examine the underlying biases that shape the selection of strategies outlined in the safety plan. Why is the focus solely on addressing youth violence related to gangs and guns, while other forms of violence and discrimination persist? It is crucial to acknowledge that certain components of the school system have never been safe for marginalized students, including those who identify as Black, Latino, Native American, LGBTQIA, disabled, Muslim, and those with intersecting marginalized identities. These students disproportionately bear the impact of disciplinary practices, often becoming targets or entangled in a pervasive surveillance web. Merely applying policies and procedures equally does not ensure equitable outcomes or mitigate the disparities experienced by marginalized students.

You can use surveys with response options to reach individuals who are often excluded or may need help expressing their thoughts and concerns. Surveys provide a structured format that gathers a wide range of perspectives. To ensure inclusivity and address the various needs of students, the following strategies can be implemented for surveys.

1. Offer opportunities for individuals to talk through their answers with a supportive person who can help them process their thoughts and provide clarification if needed.
2. Provide assistance to individuals with language barriers by arranging for a scribe or interpreter to help them complete digital surveys or other forms of communication.
3. Accommodate individuals who may find writing burdensome by offering alternative methods of communication. For example, allowing them to submit voice notes or audio recordings with their answers.
4. Recognize that not all individuals have access to the internet or reliable devices, and provide options for completing paper surveys.

Supporting the Most Targeted

Include non-involved adults to document a student's "side of the story" in cases of habitable disruption or disciplinary actions. This additional perspective can help ensure a fair and unbiased assessment of the situation. Establish a clear appeals process for discipline decisions to provide a way for reviewing and addressing any concerns or discrepancies. Enhance the specificity of action and intervention plans to minimize discretion and potential bias. Clearly outlining the steps, measures, and expectations helps ensure consistency and fairness in addressing discrimination, harassment, or other issues.

Shift from a deficit-based approach to a holistic approach when addressing the needs of students with disabilities. Focus on areas of support and identify individual needs to provide appropriate accommodations and interventions. Students require tailored support and need an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Incorporate a needs assessment or community care questionnaire to identify and address external factors that may impact students' safety and well-being. Recognize that safety extends beyond the school environment and that students require resources and support to remain safe in their homes and communities.

By implementing these strategies, schools can promote inclusivity, address biases, and ensure that the needs and perspectives of all students are valued and considered in decision-making processes.

Who needs to be safe, and how does "protecting their safety" negatively impact other people or groups?
~ Alex

Next Steps

01. Commitment & Action
Utilize hot spot mapping to identify areas or situations where students may be more vulnerable or at a higher risk. Then target resources and interventions to address specific challenges and improve student well-being.

02. Commitment & Action
Conduct a review of all students' test scores to identify any significant discrepancies that may indicate undiagnosed learning disabilities.

03. Commitment & Action
Ensure that teachers regularly review students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans at the beginning of the year and periodically throughout the year. Teachers should note quarterly the accommodations implemented that are specified in these plans.

04. Commitment & Action
Collaborate with community supports, such as local organizations or agencies, to guide and assist students in navigating discipline processes and systems. To ensure students and their families access the resources and support they need more effectively.

05. Commitment & Action
Partner with diverse mental health providers and organizations to develop projects and initiatives focused on reducing the stigma associated with mental health. By promoting awareness, education, and open dialogue, the school community can create a supportive environment that encourages help-seeking behavior and fosters positive mental health.

06. Commitment & Action
Establish partnerships, allocate funding, and provide support to organizations that specialize in meeting the needs of specific groups of students. This can include organizations that serve marginalized communities, students with disabilities, or those with unique challenges. Schools can utilize the expertise of these organizations to provide tailored support and resources.

~~School Resource~~ Officers

It doesn't matter what they wear. Clothes can not delineate the impact or prevent an immediate negative physical response in one's body. Officers, wherever they are, represent control of bodies, movements, and communities. It is important to recognize that SROs, by their training and nature as law enforcement officers, are required to have a posture of authority, a mindset of suspicion, and the ability to react quickly with force.

SROs are not mentors, universally trusted adults, or neutral supporters. While they may engage in positive behaviors, their presence can be a threat due to their enforcement powers, which can result in tickets, arrests, and the criminalization of age-appropriate behavior. The lack of accountability for police violence further erodes trust in their role as protectors. School hardening, such as advanced technology and bulletproof glass, merely creates an illusion of safety. These measures often disproportionately negatively affect the marginalized. Policing, 911, and surveillance measures have been enacted to protect and care for only some at the expense of others.

Exploring alternatives to policing in schools is crucial, but experimentation and comprehensive evaluation are necessary to identify effective approaches. It is important to shift the focus from solely collecting data on disciplinary incidents to addressing the underlying unmet needs, provocation, and trauma experienced by students. Consequences for behavior should emphasize guidance, support, and opportunities for healing. By reimagining school safety,   actively seeking alternative models, and implementing preventative and supportive measures, schools can work towards creating schools that foster trust, growth, and holistic development for every student.

"Work towards coming alongside young people to envision what they want their schools to be like. Not just want to go to school and not die, not experience fear that something bad is going to happen to me at the hands of the police, or because of a conflict, or for any reason. How do I want to feel in the building? What do I want to have access to? How do I want to learn and have input into the process? In the curriculum, in the experience of soaking up information and sharing information with my peers. I'm going through this amazing phase of my life; what would it look like so that I can enjoy it?"
~ Dana

Next Steps

01. Commitment & Action
Collaborate with Longmont Police Department to review and refine an after-incident response form for School Resource Officers (SROs).

02. Commitment & Action
Within the discipline matrix, it clearly states when a referral to law enforcement will occur. If a specific offense is not listed in the matrix, it should indicate that no ticket or involvement with law enforcement will be pursued.

03. Commitment & Action
Collaboratively identify the circumstances when SRO involvement is appropriate and clearly define the authorized decision-makers within the school. Provide training for school staff on the role of SROs and how to effectively engage with them.

04. Commitment & Action
Contract with an independent and neutral organization to conduct quarterly reviews of a sample of discipline referrals and outcomes to ensure consistency in disciplinary decisions.

05. Commitment & Action
Require SROs to provide a diversity statement before their assignment. The hiring team, including a student, family representative, school staff, administration, and a community organization, can score this statement.

06. Commitment & Action
Establish an easily accessible system for students and family members to provide feedback on specific incidents involving SROs and the program. Implement procedures for reviewing and addressing complaints on a regular basis. The system and procedures must be well-publicized.

07. Commitment & Action
Conduct evaluations of the SRO program at the end of each quarter, involving school administrators, students, their families, community members, and other stakeholders. These assessments should include written and verbal feedback to gather diverse perspectives and inform improvements.

In Solidarity with Movimiento Poder

Enough is Enough

Prohibit SROs and the consistent presence of armed security or law enforcement personnel in DPS schools.

My middle school had an SRO. As a Latina student, I felt intimidated, eerie, targeted, and most importantly not safe.

Eliminate any other practices by DPD or DPS personnel that criminalize students.

The level of discrimination and criminalization DPS is willing to enforce on their students from the BIPOC community shows how much they really.

Redirect any district resources currently allocated toward the criminalization of students to instead provide wraparound supports for students.

Students want to continue being criminalized and instead want access to resources that truly make a difference like mental health support and counselors.

Movimiento Poder is a racial justice organization led by working-class Latine immigrants, youth, and families, that builds power through community organizing, leadership development, and civic engagement.

Learn more at www.movimientopoder.org

Power dynamics, usually rooted in cultural norms, may make it difficult for young people and adults to feel comfortable working together. Formal instruction in school often teaches youth to expect answers from adults, and youth may expect adults to ignore, deride, or veto their ideas. Adults frequently underestimate the knowledge and creativity of young people and may be accustomed to making decisions without input from youth, even when youth are directly affected by the decisions. Therefore, joint efforts toward solving problems can be difficult, requiring deliberate effort on the part of both adults and youth."
-Advocates For Youth

What helps students feel safe?

Healthy food

Descalation

Chill rooms

We keep we safe

Self & community care

Respecting & trusting students

Quality sex education

Cultures of consent

Healthy relationships

Schools Full of Love

LGBTQIA Inclusive Curriculum

Restorative Justice

Transformative Justice

Healing justice practices

Trusted adults

Counselors & mental health support

Engaging parents, families, elders, & community orgs

Responses from Police Free Schools 2021

What helps us Thrive?

Joy
Music
Art
Good leps

Hallways full of art

Codesiging space

Flexible classrooms

Life/Adulting Skills
Gym and body wellness
Budgeting & Banking
Time to rest & destress

Culturally responsive & relevant curriculum

Epic libraries That lend technology

Paths to Trades

Community partnership

Outside learning opportunities integrated

gardens

Clean air

safe water

Free lunch

Washers & dryers

Feeding ourselves & communities

Student responses from Police Free Schools

Black Lives Matter at School
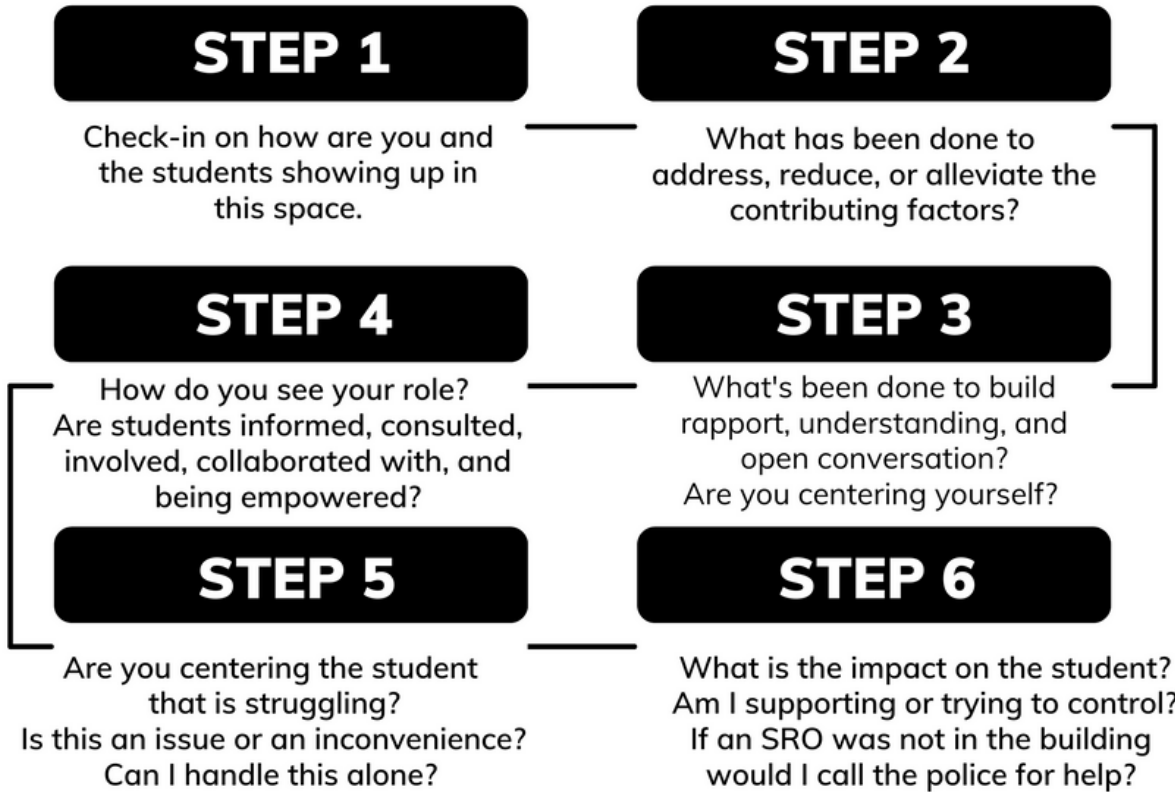Year of Purpose Reflection Questions

- What is our school's relationship to Black community organizing?
- Do we have relationships with local movement organizers?
- Do they see our school as a place that believes in their mission?
- Do they see our school as a place to connect with local families?
- How are school-wide policies and practices – especially disciplinary practices – applied across categories of race?
- Do problematic patterns emerge when we look at how policies are applied to Black students and when we also consider the intersections of gender, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability with Blackness?
- How are the voices, accomplishments, and successes of Black folk uplifted in my lessons, units, and curriculum?
- Rather than focus on singular events or individuals, does my approach highlight the everyday actions and community organizing that will lead to change?
- In what ways do our practices erase the histories of our students and prevent them from bringing their whole selves into the learning environment?
- How do I understand the role that local/state laws and policies have on the educational experiences of my students?
- What is my role in working to change policies, regulations, and practices that harm Black students and families?

BLACK LIVES MATTER GUIDING PRINCIPLES

"KID-FRIENDLY" VERSIONS OF THE 13 PRINCIPLES – by Laleña Garcia

PRINCIPLE	DESCRIPTION
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE	We know that if you hurt somebody, you have to help them feel better; you can't just say, "Sorry," and walk away. We also know that it's important for kids to be able to make a better choice another time, and it's grownups' job to help them make better choices and to give them chances to do that.
EMPATHY	It's so important to think about how other people feel, because different people have different feelings. Sometimes it helps to think about how you would feel if the same thing that happened to your friend happened to you.
LOVING ENGAGEMENT	It's so important to make sure that we are always trying to be fair and peaceful, and to engage with other people (treat other people) with love. We have to keep practicing this so that we can get better and better at it.
DIVERSITY	Different people do different things and have different feelings. It's so important that we have lots of different kinds of people in our community and that everyone feels safe.
GLOBALISM	Globalism means that we are thinking about all the different people all over the world, and thinking about the ways to keep things fair everywhere.
TRANSGENDER AFFIRMING	Everybody has the right to choose their own gender by listening to their own heart and mind. Everyone gets to choose if they are a girl or a boy or both or neither or something else, and no one else gets to choose for them.
QUEER AFFIRMING	Everybody has the right to choose who they love and the kind of family they want by listening to their own heart and mind.
COLLECTIVE VALUE	Everybody is important, and has the right to be safe and happy.
INTERGENERATIONAL	It's important that we have spaces where people of different ages can come together and learn from each other. Another way to say that is intergenerational.
BLACK FAMILIES	There are lots of different kinds of families; what makes a family is that it's people who take care of each other. It's important to make sure that all families feel welcome.
BLACK VILLAGES	There are lots of different kinds of families; what makes a family is that it's people who take care of each other; those people might be related, or maybe they choose to be family together and to take care of each other. Sometimes, when it's lots of families together, it can be called a village.
BLACK WOMEN	There are some people who think that women are less important than men. We know that all people are important and have the right to be safe and talk about their feelings.
UNAPOLOGETICALLY BLACK	The affirmation that Black Lives Matter and that our love, and desire for justice and freedom are prerequisites for wanting that for others. These principles are the blueprint for healing and do not include nor do they support ignoring or sanitizing the ugliness and discomfort that comes with dealing with race and anti-race issues. For kids: "There are lots of different kinds of people and one way that we're different is the color of our skin. It's important to make sure that all people are treated fairly, and that's why we, and lots of other people all over the country and the world are part of the Black Lives Matter movement."

A STUDENT IS HAVING AN ISSUE IN THE CLASSROOM

STEP 1
Check-in on how are you and the students showing up in this space.

STEP 2
What has been done to address, reduce, or alleviate the contributing factors?

STEP 4
How do you see your role? Are students informed, consulted, involved, collaborated with, and being empowered?

STEP 3
What's been done to build rapport, understanding, and open conversation? Are you centering yourself?

STEP 5
Are you centering the student that is struggling? Is this an issue or an inconvenience? Can I handle this alone?

STEP 6
What is the impact on the student? Am I supporting or trying to control? If an SRO was not in the building would I call the police for help?

Student	Both	Teacher
Do they need attention or to be more challenged?	Currently hungry or tired?	Are your expectations developmentally realistic?
Are they worried about judgment from others?	Feel alone?	Is a personal weakness being highlighted?
Do they want power or revenge?	Think you are being disrespected?	Today are you feeling overwhelmed?
Is the student dysregulated?	A feeling or emotion from the past is activated?	What is their goal? What is my goal?

Emotional Awareness and Regulation: Student recognizes, name, and regulates their emotions effectively.

Task Persistence and Logical Thinking: Students can approach tasks in a logical order and demonstrate perseverance when faced with challenging or tedious tasks.

Effective Communication: Student can express their concerns, needs, or thoughts appropriately, especially when upset.

Seeking Clarity: Student does proactively seek clarity when they don't understand what is being said and navigate ambiguity by asking for clarification.

Setting Boundaries: The student has had experience setting boundaries with others, and these boundaries are then respected and honored.

Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking: Student considers the potential outcomes and a range of solutions before taking action to address a problem.

Building Healthy Relationships: Student knows how to make equal relationships with their peers based on mutual respect and understanding.

Trust in Adults: Students perceive adults as people who care for and support them.

Empathy and Understanding of Impact: Student understands how their behavior can impact others and demonstrate compassion towards their peers.

Flexibility and Adaptability: Both students and staff can be flexible and able to shift their mindset when changes occur, adapting to new situations and circumstances.

It usually takes two for an issue to occur: a kid who's lacking skills and an environment or individual that demands those skills. Consequences don't teach kids the thinking skills they lack or solve the problems that set the stage for their challenging behavior. ~ Ross Green PhD

Adapted from Lost at School: Why Our Kids with Behavioral Challenges
are Falling Through the Cracks and How We Can Help Them
Revised and Enhanced by Carwyn Collaboration LLC

STEP THREE

Staff members should focus on prevention by emphasizing skill development, fostering self-understanding, and being honest about their own growth. They should also be able to meet students where they are, using different teaching methods, incorporating various learning styles, and trying new strategies to ensure effective learning experiences for all students.

Are their positive behaviors recognized, noted, and praised?

Avoid labeling they are vs they do.

Am I preparing for the worst cause scenario instead of addressing what is occurring?

Listen & Ask Questions

IS THE YOUNG PERSON SEEN FOR WHO THEY ARE?

Frame your point of view.

Question assumptions Student should...

Look for patterns regarding when issues arise.

IS THIS MY OPINION OR FACT?

STEP 3

DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

How is respect earned, shown, and when is it given?

Are they from a culture that communicates more directly or indirectly.

ARE THERE CULTURAL NORMS AT PLAY?

Do they communicate more emotionally expressively vs restrained?

Collaborate

Brainstorm and select positive peer role models.

Identify many solutions.

ARE THERE OTHER PEOPLE IN THE BUILDING THEY CONNECT WITH?

Experiment

IS THERE SOMEONE IN THEIR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT THEM?

Get feedback!

Learn about extended family.

Do they have trusted adults through extra-curricular activities?

What organizations are they connected to?

STEP FOUR

Students should be viewed as partners in their education and as valuable contributors to the learning process. They are not empty vessels to be filled with information but individuals who benefit from connections and meaningful relationships. Students should be respected and honored as whole people, recognizing that trauma may impact their experiences and behaviors.

In this perspective, students are not merely followers to be guided through their participation. While adult guidance and support are important, there should be a collaborative and non-hierarchical dynamic where students' input is welcomed, valued, and considered critical. Students should have opportunities to contribute their ideas, be consulted on decision-making processes, and have a say in relevant aspects of their education.

Empowering students as partners means providing them with the necessary information and resources to make informed decisions. Adults should support students' independence and provide them with opportunities to implement their ideas and engage in meaningful activities that align with their interests and goals. This approach fosters student agency, autonomy, and ownership of their learning.

STEP FIVE

Handling a situation alone may be more challenging, but is it still feasible? Is calling someone else demonstrating empathy, care, support, power, or control? It is crucial to consider the goals and priorities. If the primary focus is on ending the situation quickly, involving someone else may be necessary. On the other hand, if the emphasis is on providing an opportunity for growth, exploring alternative approaches that encourage reflection, dialogue, and learning may be beneficial.

Reviewing the situation with a peer can provide valuable support and insights. Mediation is a useful approach to facilitate open communication and for individuals to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns while working toward a resolution. Would connecting the student with someone with mental health training or informal support ensure that the student receives guidance to address their specific needs be most appropriate?
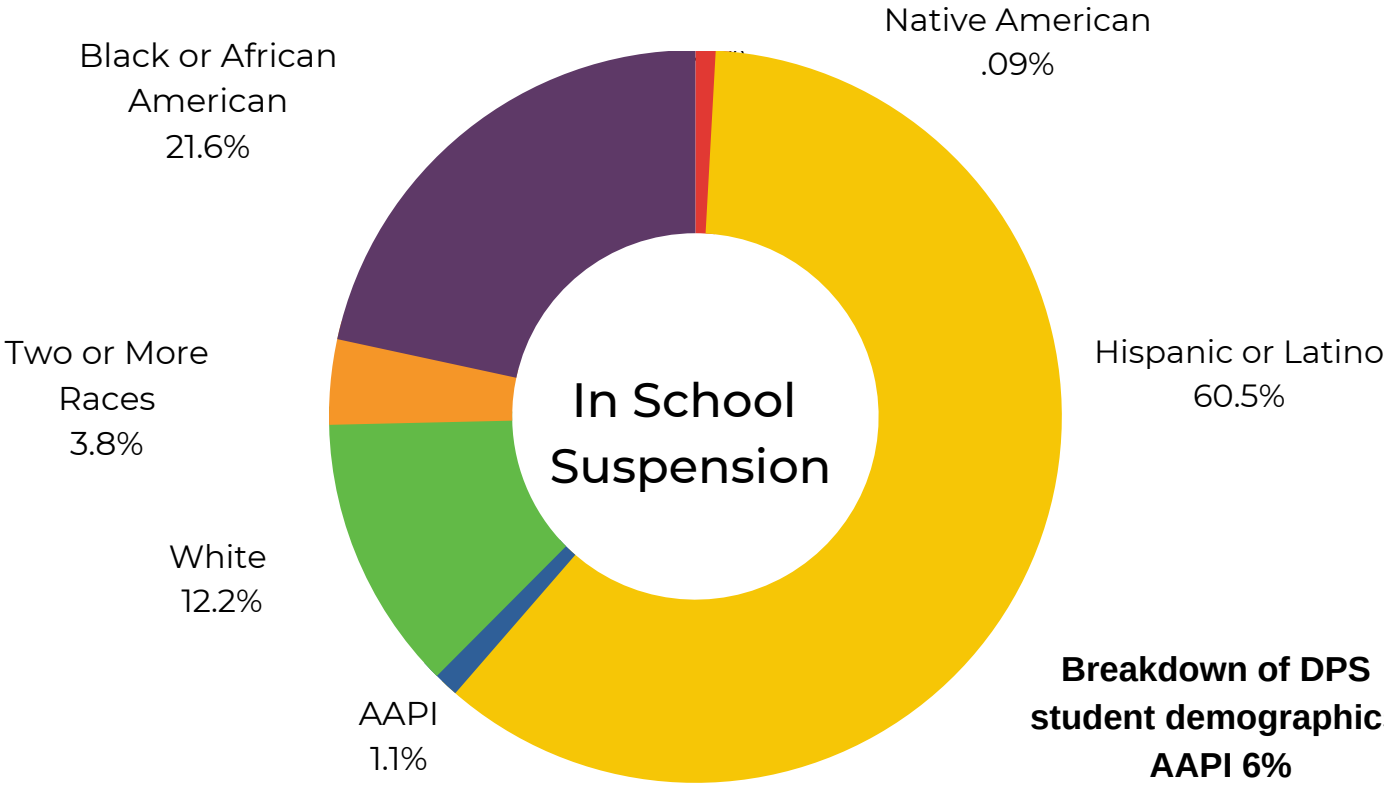
Ultimately, the decision to involve others should be guided by the intention to provide support and create opportunities for growth in the best interest of all individuals involved. External supportive adults can lead to more effective and supportive outcomes for all parties involved.

STEP SIX

The "school-to-prison pipeline" remains an issue with regard to policy and the overall well-being of the student population. The pathway is not unique and can be interrupted. The impacts of the school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately affect certain demographic groups with higher frequency than others.
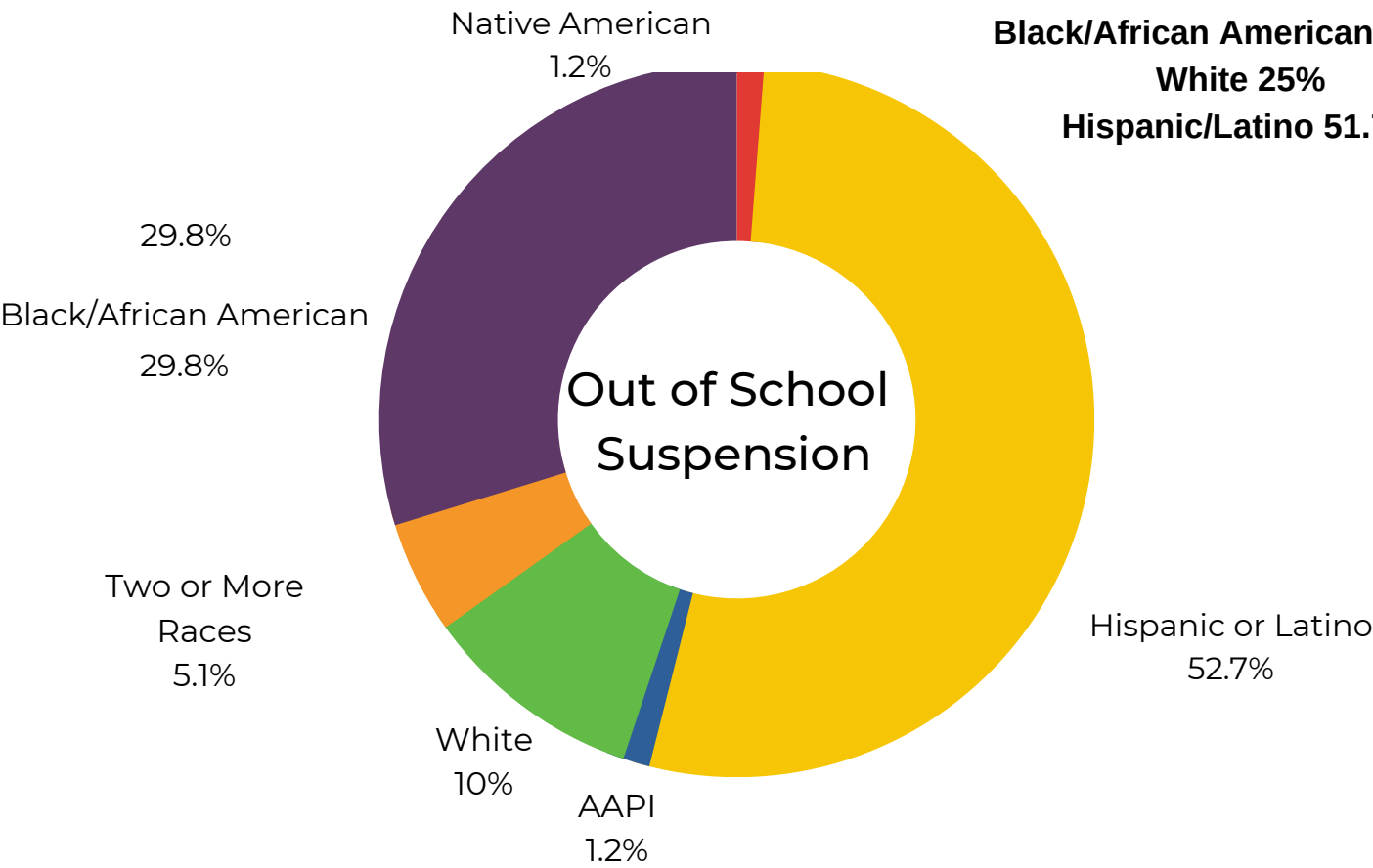

A SIMPLIFIED OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

The below data is for all of DPS during the 2021-2022 school year.

In School Suspension

- Native American .09%
- Hispanic or Latino 60.5%
- Black or African American 21.6%
- Two or More Races 3.8%
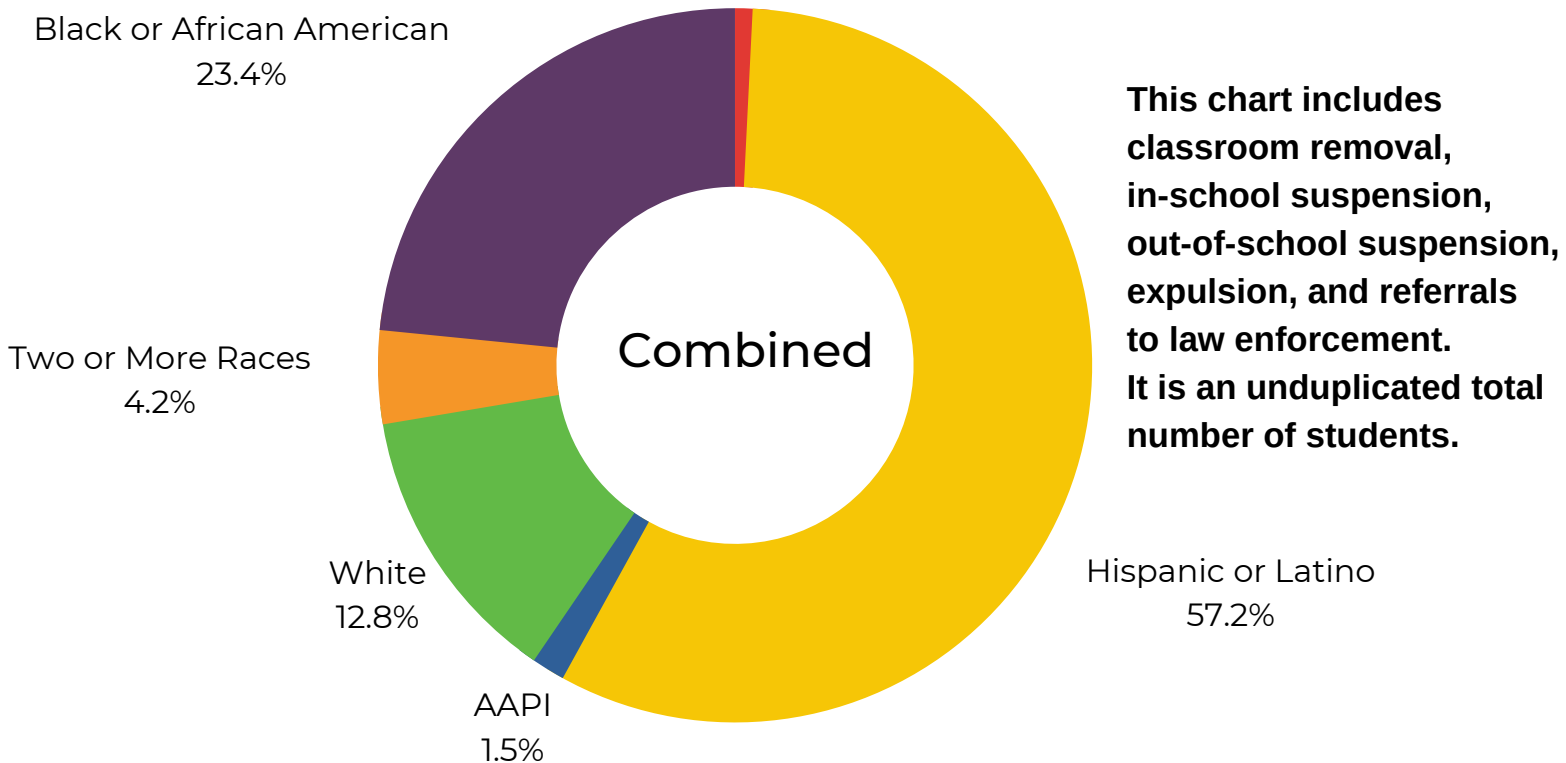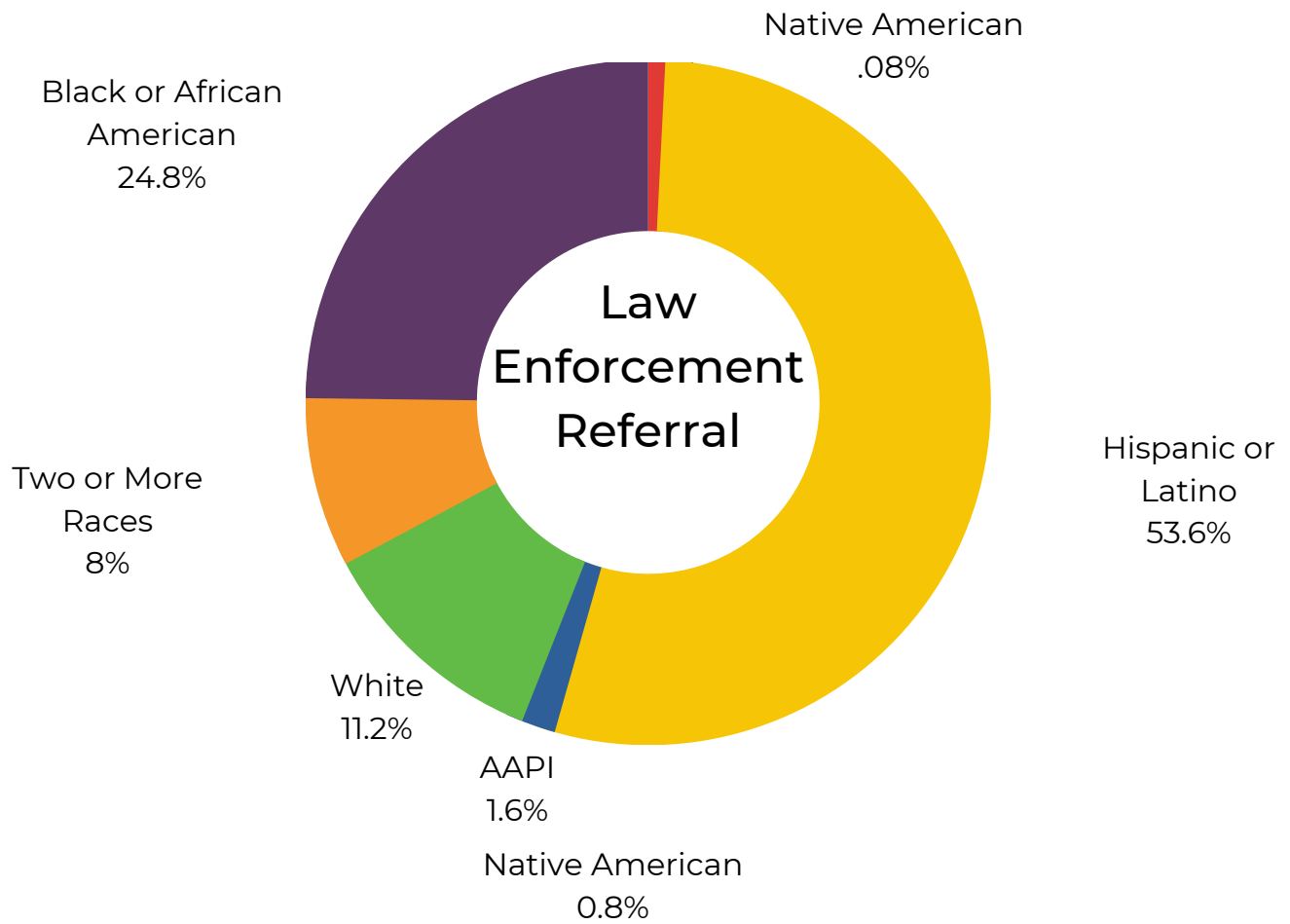- White 12.2%
- AAPI 1.1%

Breakdown of DPS student demographics.
AAPI 6%
Asian 3%
Two or More Races 5.1%
Black/African American 13.7%
White 25%
Hispanic/Latino 51.7%

Out of School Suspension

- Native American 1.2%
- Hispanic or Latino 52.7%
- Black/African American 29.8%
- 29.8%
- Two or More Races 5.1%
- White 10%
- AAPI 1.2%

Law Enforcement Referral

Native American
.08%

Black or African
American
24.8%

Hispanic or
Latino
53.6%

Two or More
Races
8%

White
11.2%

AAPI
1.6%

Combined

Native American
0.8%

Black or African American
23.4%

Hispanic or Latino
57.2%

Two or More Races
4.2%

White
12.8%

AAPI
1.5%

This chart includes
classroom removal,
in-school suspension,
out-of-school suspension,
expulsion, and referrals
to law enforcement.
It is an unduplicated total
number of students.

Evaluating Policy & Procedure

Systems: Would students and/or families who are caught up in the criminal court system, juvenile court system, or family regulation system be impacted differently?	The policy and/or procedure supports students and families that are system-impacted thus creating greater belonging.	The policy and/or procedure neither supports or increases harm for students and families that are system impacted.	The policy and/or procedure has more of a negative impact on students and families in systems. They may feel targeted by the policy and/or procedure.
Race: Would BIPOC students and/or families be impacted differently? Black, Indigenous, people of color	The policy and/or procedure supports BIPOC students and families thus creating greater belonging.	The policy and/or procedure neither supports or increases harm for BIPOC students and families.	The policy and/or procedure has more of a negative impact on BIPOC students and families. They may feel targeted by the policy and/or procedure.
Language Accessible: Would students and/or families whose primary language is not English and/or have language barriers be impacted differently. *Barriers to access language may include being nonverbal, deaf, hard of hearing, lower reading levels etc.	The policy and/or procedure supports students and families that have barriers to access language thus creating greater belonging.	The policy and/or procedure neither supports or increases harm for students and families that have barriers to accessing language.	The policy and/or procedure has more of a negative impact on students and families with barriers to accessing language. They may feel targeted by the policy and/or procedure.
Income/Employment: Would students and/or families who have little disposable income, work non-traditional hours, or get state benefits be impacted differently? *State benefits include social security, disability, TANF, and/or state sponsored health care.	The policy and/or procedure supports students and families with limited income, non-traditional employment, or receiving state benefits thus creating greater belonging.	The policy and/or procedure neither supports or increases harm for students and families with limited income, non-traditional employment, or receiving state benefits.	The policy and/or procedure has more of a negative impact on students and families with limited income, non-traditional employment, or receiving state benefits. They may feel targeted by the policy and/or procedure.
Transportation: Would students and/or families who don't have a personal vehicle, primarily use public transportation, or don't have access to public transportation be impacted differently.	The policy and/or procedure supports students and families regardless of transportation needs thus creating greater belonging.	The policy and/or procedure neither supports or increases harm for students and families with varying transportation needs.	The policy and/or procedure has more of a negative impact on students and families with particular transportation needs. They may feel targeted by the policy and/or procedure.
Family Structure: Would students who are in a single parent home, split their time between homes, staying with extended family, or in or out home care be impacted differently?	The policy and/or procedure supports students and families with various family structures thus creating greater belonging.	The policy and/or procedure neither supports or increases harm for students with particular family structures.	The policy and/or procedure has more of a negative impact on students with particular family structures. They may feel targeted by the policy and/or procedure.
DisAbility: Would students or families who have a physical, developmental, intellectual, behavioral, emotional or sensory impairment be impacted differently.	The policy and/or procedure supports students and families with disabilities thus creating greater belonging.	The policy and/or procedure neither supports or increases harm for students and families with disabilities.	The policy and/or procedure has more of a negative impact on students and families with disabilities. They may feel targeted by the policy and/or procedure.

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