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FACT SHEET 2015

HB 2279

Equip Officers Working in School Settings with the Necessary Training To Properly Interact with Adolescents

OFFICERS WORKING IN SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS SHOULD RECEIVE SPECIALIZED TRAINING

School district peace officers and school resource officers face far different challenges than officers who protect our streets. And while all law enforcement officers receive training on subjects such as interacting with suspects, use of force, and firearms, officers do not receive specialized training on how to work effectively with kids in an educational environment. A lack of specialized training for these officers is likely contributing to the over-criminalization of children's misbehavior in school. Officers equipped only with training regarding adult offenders are likely to overreact in response to typical student misbehavior, and these negative interactions between students and school officers can push students away from school, which in turn is driving a dropout crisis in Texas.

As school engagement is a strong predictor of delinquent behavior,¹ it is imperative that policy-makers ensure that measures are in place to address every factor that influences a youth's involvement in school. This includes requiring school officers – not educated in interacting with youth – to undergo trainings in relevant subject matters that provide a framework for implementing best practices (e.g., adolescent development, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and cultural competency).

Furthermore, because the primary purpose for police presence on school campuses is to protect students and staff from external threats, it is likewise imperative to ensure that their presence is not counterproductive to students achieving success.

KEY FINDINGS

- **The increasing use of officers to respond to misbehavior in schools – and the lack of specialized training for these officers – corresponded with a dramatic rise in misdemeanor citations issued to kids in Texas schools.** In 1978, only one percent of Texas schools reported having a police presence on campus. Today, most Texas schools report police presence from a local law enforcement agency or from the school district's own police department. With the increase in police presence, the use of Class C misdemeanor tickets in Texas schools increased dramatically.² While SB 393 (West, passed during the 83rd Session) has resulted in a reduction in the number of tickets issued in Texas schools, the over-criminalization of student misbehavior continues and has been noted as a likely contributor to the dropout crisis in Texas.³
- **Over the past decade, police in schools have been using tools and tactics more commonly reserved for encounters with hostile citizens on the street.**
 - » From 2012 to present, Pasadena, Texas, school police have **used force 129 times, drawing and pointing their firearms 24 times, using pepper spray twice, and using nightsticks 4 times.**⁴

- » From 2006 to 2009, Austin ISD, which keeps fairly complete police records relative to the rest of the state, reported that its campus police **drew guns on students eight times**, used **pepper spray 26 times**, used **Tasers four times**, and used **police dogs once**. They used **batons or other physical force 258 times**.⁵
- » From 2006-2009, El Paso ISD reported that its campus police **used a baton once**, **pepper spray once**, and **physical force 34 times** to control students.⁶
- Despite the concerning frequency of school officers using force against students, **“neither the Texas Education Agency nor the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education require Texas’ 160 school district police departments to keep statistics on when they use force against students.”**⁷
- **Using police tactics against unarmed students has resulted in serious injury and, in some cases, death, as well as a decline in parent confidence in Texas schools to educate and monitor students in a safe and appropriate manner.** Several of these incidents were recorded by students and school security cameras and have gained national attention. Below are some incidents of excessive police violence in Texas caught on tape and shared widely in the news and on social media:
 - » Noe Nino de Rivera was **Tased** by Officer Randy McMillan at Cedar Creek High School in Bastrop, which **caused him to fall and hit his head**, resulting in a **52-day medically induced coma**. He spent **almost three months in intensive care**.⁸
 - » Cesar Suquet was **beaten with a metal nightstick** by campus officer Michael Y'Barbo at South Houston High School. He was **struck 18 times, including nine blows while he was on the ground**.⁹
 - » An anonymous young girl was **held down and punched in the face** by an officer at Jefferson High School in San Antonio.¹⁰
 - » Ixel Perez was **tackled and held down by three officers for cellphone use** at Sam Houston High School in Houston.¹¹
 - » Officer Steve Rivers **held down and broke the arm** of an unknown student at West Brook High School.¹²
 - » Jacob Herrera was **slammed face-first onto the ground** at Sam Houston Middle School in Houston for refusing to remove his rosary beads, which he claimed held sentimental value.¹³
 - » Officer George Bermudez of Georgetown ISD was recorded **tripping, grabbing, and shoving students after a soccer game**.¹⁴
 - » Derek Lopez was **shot and killed** by Officer Daniel Alvarado of the Northside Independent School District Police Department in San Antonio. Lopez **was unarmed**.¹⁵
 - » **Six Dallas High School students** were **hospitalized after being exposed to pepper spray** that officers used to break up a fight. The spray **leaked through the school’s ventilation system** and led to a full evacuation of the campus.¹⁶
 - » **12 Manor High School students** were **treated for pepper spray exposure** after cops used the spray to break up a fight.¹⁷

COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS: SUPPORT HB 2279 BY REPRESENTATIVE WALLE

- **HB 2279 will improve school safety through more effective campus policing.** Under this bill, the training curriculum for school district peace officers will include such areas as youth development, special needs, conflict resolution, de-escalation techniques, and restorative justice. Undergoing this supplementary training will enable school district peace officers to more appropriately respond to student behavior by taking into account the developmental and physical differences between youth and adults. This will allow school officers to match their tactics to the unique environment and vulnerable population with whom they interact, as well as mete out appropriate penalties for on-campus offenses. This specialized training is critical in defining officers' appropriate role in the educational environment.
- **HB 2279 can save school districts valuable security funds.** At a time when school districts are facing significant budget constraints, they are also spending an increasing share of their budgets on school-based law enforcement. Better-trained peace officers will enhance the quality of school-based policing, allowing savings to be redirected to other education priorities, such as teacher retention.
- **HB 2279 does not place an extra financial burden on school districts.** This bill's specialized training requirement would not present extra costs to school districts, as peace officers are already required to complete training hours to maintain their licensure. The requirements of HB 2279 fit within existing training as required for licensed officers.

Citations

¹ Li Yibing et al., "The Role of School Engagement in Preventing Adolescent Delinquency and Substance Abuse: A Survival Analysis," *Journal of Adolescence* 6, 34 (2011): 1181-1192.

² Texas Appleseed "Texas' School-to-Prison Pipeline: Ticketing, Arrest & Use of Force in Schools" (2010).

³ Council of State Governments "Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement" (2011).

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⁵ Texas Tribune "Texas Schools Rarely Track Force against Students" (2009), <http://www.texastribune.org/2009/11/25/tx-schools-rarely-track-force-against-students/>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Austin American-Statesman, "Tased student 'totally dependent on me,' Bastrop mother says," (Feb. 2014), <http://www.statesman.com/news/news/local/tased-student-totally-dependent-on-me-bastrop-moth/ndBZF/>.

⁹ Houston Chronicle, "Pasadena family."

¹⁰ My SA, "SAISD Investigating Officer After Struggle with Teenage Girl," (Feb. 2014), <http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local/article/SAISD-investigating-officer-after-struggle-with-5275016.php>.

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¹⁴ Austin American Statesman, "Georgetown Officer Suspended 40 Days after Tripping Incident," (June 2014), <http://www.statesman.com/news/news/local/georgetown-officer-suspended-40-days-after-trippin/ngD3F/>.

¹⁵ My SA, "Officer Who Shot Student Had History of Not Following Orders: 12 Warnings, 4 Suspensions. Why was the NISD Cop Who Killed an Unarmed 14-year-old On the Job," (May 2011), <http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/article/Still-on-patrol-1388322.php>.

¹⁶ Texas Tribune "Texas Schools Rarely Track Force against Students" (November 2009).

¹⁷ Ibid.