



Whole School Safety Steering Committee Report & Recommendations March, 2021

Prepared for Chicago Public Schools Chief Safety Officer for presentation to the Chicago Board of Education by ARK of St. Sabina, BUILD, COFI POWER PAC, Mikva Challenge, and VOYCE, facilitated by Embark Strategies.

This report is the culmination of the work of the Whole School Safety steering committee, each of their respective community engagement efforts, and a collaborative effort to synthesize findings into a single report which will guide school decisions for SRO alternatives. It is broken into three discrete parts:

1. Guiding Principles

These represent the underlying beliefs and philosophies that informed the development of these recommendations, and principles that we believe should be carried through into the upcoming work of selecting recommendations for SRO alternatives, making those recommendations actionable and school-specific, and implementing them.

2. Suggested Engagement & Implementation Processes

To continue the spirit of the way in which these recommendations were developed, the Steering Committee has suggested some processes for how these recommendations should be adopted and implemented at schools.

3. School Safety Recommendations -- SRO Alternatives

These are the recommended school safety SRO alternatives that have been informed by community stakeholders across the city, including students, parents/caregivers, community members, and school staff.

Guiding Principles

- **Inclusive:** Students, families, school staff, and community voice are reflected in each of these recommendations. Those stakeholders should continue to be included in the assessment of their school's safety needs, and their input should inform how recommendations are selected and implemented at the school.
- **Holistic:** The selection and implementation of school safety recommendations should reflect the whole needs of students and the community where the school is located.
- **Culturally Responsive:** The implementation of recommendations should include practices that are responsive and appropriate for the specific school environment, student body, and surrounding community.



- **Proactive and Reactive:** The philosophy behind each recommendation is that proactive and preventative interventions are as important to school safety as reactive interventions. The implementation of these recommendations should be applied both preventatively and in response to incidents, to truly make schools safer.
- **Reflective:** Recommendations should reflect the specific needs and environment of the school and surrounding community, and decision-makers should incorporate these needs and context into a regular cycle of reflection that assesses the effectiveness, responsiveness, and inclusiveness of the recommendations to foster a spirit of continuous improvement.
- **Embedded and Continuous:** Recommendations should become part of the fabric of the school culture, and not exist or be treated as a disconnected, discrete, isolated initiative, or short-term change.
- **Engaging:** Student, family, and community voice should not be selectively sought; rather, these stakeholders should have a clear role and avenue for input throughout the process, including during the design and implementation of the proposed solutions.
- **Accessible:** In addition to being culturally responsive to the specific school environment and surrounding community, stakeholders should feel safe and comfortable engaging with the safety solutions that a school selects. The stakeholder engagement components of those solutions should be designed with stakeholders at the center and reflect their needs (e.g., time, venue, language, content, etc.)
- **Relational:** Relationships are at the heart of many recommendations designed to improve the perception and implementation of safety measures at school, including relationships among students, between students and school staff, between school staff and families, and between the school and the community. The selection and implementation of these recommendations should center relationship building and bolstering.
- **Aligned:** Recommendations should take into account the existing supports and processes within schools, leverage the infrastructure that is currently working to make schools feel safe, and address specific opportunities or challenges within that particular school.

Process

Before a school selects a recommendation, this Committee recommends that schools should:

- Participate in an assessment of existing safety supports and examine the depth of knowledge about those supports by their intended audiences
- Assess how (if at all) Restorative Justice principles are incorporated into current practice in the school
- Create a vision for where they would like to see their school in the next year, and over the next 3-5 years, with respect to school safety. This goal/vision of school safety should have the buy-in of the entire school community and should remain consistent year over year. There should be



regular school-wide reflection on this vision and the progress being made to achieve it, which should be regularly communicated to the entire school community.

We also believe that the successful implementation of a holistic safety approach or recommendation requires that students, families, and community stakeholders be regularly engaged, and that there must be accountability measures in place to ensure that stakeholder input is included in school decisions. This could take the shape of student or parent leadership and governance councils, regular community forums with dedicated note takers and liaison roles, or the establishment of a cross-stakeholder Committee to make school safety decisions for a school community. In addition, we believe that each school should receive hands-on implementation support, including trainings for school safety teams and LSCs such that they have context for the work of this committee, and sufficient support to select a recommendation and to design and implement solutions for their school. Consultants and community groups with subject-matter expertise may be useful resources for schools in this process.

Recommendations

1. Schools should implement Holistic Restorative Justice that is led by students, parents, and community members that would also include all school administrators and staff. The implementation must have continuous training that is in line with world-class Restorative Justice training standards, and may include peace rooms, peace circles, peer juries, de-escalation training, and a new Restorative Justice trained designated staff or community practitioner to coordinate and support restorative practices across the school.
2. Schools should increase focus on Social Emotional Learning and mental health practices by increasing access to mental health professionals who:
 - a. use culturally affirming practices
 - b. collaborate with teachers to embed Social Emotional Learning programming into the school curriculum (including programs led by community partners who serve that school)
 - c. guide school-wide support for students experiencing trauma
 - d. infuse compassion and flexibility in academic and school policies for these students
 - e. provide access to meditation and calming techniques to the school community
 - f. coordinate access to in-school and community mental health resources for students and families
3. Schools should address the safety of the physical environment in collaboration with students, parents, and community members. Schools should prioritize physical repairs inside and outside of the building that will help create an appealing and structurally safe learning environment, make physical repairs or improvements to prepare the school for potential external safety



concerns that could infiltrate the internal school environment, and generally ensure that students have their basic physical and environmental safety needs met. Schools should also consider developing a welcoming and inclusive environment by adding greeting process protocols or other means of increasing feelings of safety and inclusion upon entering the school building.

4. Schools should invest in student leadership development and action-oriented activities to support holistic student growth. This could include providing continuous youth access to training in areas including, but not limited to, adultism, students' role in school governance, and positive relationship building. The schools should also provide free access to action-oriented extracurricular programs (e.g. sports, arts, gardening) with a structure that allows students to take ownership of designing program activities. Schools can form partnerships with community organizations or hire designated staff to support these efforts.

5. Schools should develop a strategy for meaningful engagement of parents and community members as partners and decision-makers. This could include leadership development training for parents, clear communication and training about school policies and practices, training on governance councils, and anti-racism and adultism training for all parents and community members who want to participate. Schools can form partnerships with community organizations or hire designated staff to support these efforts.

6. Schools should invest in increased and continuous training for designated behavioral intervention employees (e.g. safe passage workers, counselors, social workers, behavioral health teams, administrators, security officers). These training can include, but are not limited to, de-escalation strategies, emergency procedures, crisis response, trauma-informed practice, and specialized engagement and behavioral response for incidents involving diverse learners. This is in an effort to better equip adults in and out of the school building to respond to, and assist in, incidents without causing greater harm or trauma to those involved. Staff should practice daily communication about incidents to facilitate providing continuous support to students who were involved. These staff, their training, and their roles in incidents should be clearly defined in an on-going manner for all members of the school community to support transparency and strengthen school relationships with the community.

7. Schools should create or increase investment in a Behavioral Health Team (BHT). Schools with an existing BHT that wish to bolster the resources and support for that team should first assess the current role and impact, as well as the perceptions and understanding of the BHT by staff and students. The school should then develop an inclusive, aligned, and agreed-to vision and goal for the role of the BHT, and an implementation plan that focuses on the sustainability of the BHT while also maximizing its impact.