

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



Public Oversight Hearing on
“School Security in the District of Columbia Public Schools”

Testimony of
Patrick Davis
Chief Operating Officer

Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman
and
Committee on Education
The Honorable David Grosso, Chairperson

October 21, 2020
Live via Zoom Video Conference Broadcast

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, Chairperson Grosso, members of the Committees, and staff. I am Patrick Davis, Chief Operating Officer for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). I am honored to speak before you today and continue the conversation about DCPS' commitment to fostering a positive, healthy, and safe school experience for all students.

DCPS operates to ensure that all schools are prepared to respond to emergencies, disruptions, or other incidents in proactive, constructive ways to minimize risks to our students and the learning community. The Social Emotional and School Culture, Mental Health, and School Security teams represent vital components of maintaining a safe and positive environment where teachers can teach, students can learn, and all professionals can thrive.

We also want to recognize the events of the last several months have highlighted the reality of incidents of police brutality in our communities of color and are central to the conversation today. At this pivotal moment in the fight to end racism and police brutality, I am proud to share more about DCPS' preliminary plans for increasing social-emotional supports, enhancing our approach to security, our partnership with MPD, and our values of equity, teamwork, and joy. We are fully committed to increasing social-emotional supports for security staff, but also know that we must take a holistic approach in our schools, which includes SEL staff, such as social workers and counselors, developmentally appropriate interventions, and Peace of Mind and Second Step.

Security at DCPS


To provide some initial background, the School Security Team is responsible for providing a safe environment for students to learn and staff to work in. The School Security Team manages these services in collaboration with the MPD, which includes daily conference calls, Safety Meetings, and joint responses to security and law enforcement events occurring in and around DCPS schools.

I do want to provide background on the type of security personnel who work with schools to maintain a safe environment:

- **DCPS Special Police Officers (SPOs)** provide general law enforcement duties and maintain a close partnership with school administrators, staff, students, and parents to provide a safe school environment. DCPS employs approximately twenty SPOs.
- **School Resource Officers (SROs)** are MPD police officers who specialize in supporting schools. SROs lead in delivering security services and safety resources to DCPS and charter schools on a full-time basis. MPD employs approximately 100 SROs. SROs are deployed according to a "cluster model" and are responsible for supporting multiple schools at a time.
- **Contract Security Officers (SOs)** are school-based and support the school principal and staff to ensure the safety of all students. They monitor the school building, provide security coverage at athletic events, and perform entrance screenings. There are approximately 330 Contract Security Officers.

In addition to the personnel detailed above, our School Security Team actively participates in numerous working groups focused on safety across the district, including the DC Safe Passage Working Group, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council for the District of Columbia, and attends Public Safety Action Meetings held at numerous schools. These meetings also address safety and security related issues and allow for an exchange of ideas from students, staff, members of the community, Charter Schools, and local law enforcement.

In recent years, all Contracted Security Officers received 40-hours of basic training conducted by the security vendor and supplemental training, aligned with DCPS' focus on school culture. Topics included



communication, social services, diversity, and restorative justice, which was provided by DCPS' Social-Emotional Learning Team.

In many schools, we know that the Contracted Security Officers serve as valued members of the school community who have positive relationships with students, partner with staff, and promote DCPS' mission and values. At the same time, we know there is a need to expand the social-emotional training for our security staff and ensure that all are equipped to both maintain safety and promote quality learning for our young people. This also must occur as part of our larger approach to school climate.

As of three weeks ago at the start of the current fiscal year, DCPS began managing the contract for Security Officers with Security Assurance Management. DCPS will maintain our existing Special Police Officers, while MPD will continue to provide support to clusters of schools through their School Resource Officers. As a part of this transfer and in the spirit of planning for continuous improvement, both MPD and DCPS will still remain in close partnership to ensure coordination of our efforts in a way that meets schools' needs.

Looking Forward

At DCPS, our vision is to ensure that every student feels loved, challenged, and prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life. While a security contract is not part of our core instructional work, the way we think about safety is essential to providing a nurturing environment for our students. At the same time, we recognize the value in maintaining a close partnership with MPD and learning from their expertise and others when it comes to safeguarding our schools.

We have taken steps to ensure the security in our schools reflects our values. This includes a first-of-its-kind required visit and coursework for MPD officers and civilian members to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, as well as the cadet program that hires high school graduates to go to the University of the District of Columbia to become a police officer.

I appreciate the opportunity to hear from experts and advocates today as we build future plans around what will come next. DCPS is committed to embedding social-emotional learning and restorative practices in our students' educational experiences and creating learning environments centered around providing access, inclusion, and affirmation through equity. Centrally, DCPS has a dedicated team to focus on this work. In the coming months, this team will engage around plans for pairing social-emotional learning with our security work. The most successful practice for building school culture is a whole school approach involving all education staff and partners.

We are excited to begin conversations soon with our school leaders, staff, parents, and most importantly with our students to hear directly from them about their experiences and work with them to think through effective strategies and structures to ensure all our students feel safe, welcomed, and supported.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you about this important topic. DCPS shares your commitment to making every school a safe and welcoming space for every student. We look forward to working with community partners, fellow agencies, and DC Council to ensure every student has the opportunity to learn in a nurturing environment. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.