

Fresno Unified School District
Board Communication

BC Number EA-1


From the Office of the Superintendent
To the Members of the Board of Education

Date: February 18, 2022

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Cabinet Approval:


Lindsay Sanders (Feb 17, 2022 13:07 PST)

Regarding: The Collaboration with Fresno Police Department and Fresno Unified

A three-year contract with the Fresno Police Department (FPD) was approved in June 2021. Some key revisions to the contract included improving the collaborative relationship to include ongoing cycles of review to increase better outcomes for students. The relationship will include developing clear roles and expectations as well as developing a data collection system to guide understanding and future practices for both School Resource Officers (SROs) and site and district safety teams. Data collection will include capturing responsive practices to deepen relationships with families, students, and staff as well as metrics related to disciplinary actions. Our initial meetings and collaboration this fall included analyzing and evaluation quantitative and qualitative data that was gathered from our educational partners during the 2020/21 school year and the Fall of 2021/22 school year regarding police on campus. Below is a brief summary of those findings, and a new report from January 2022 is summarized and included with this board communications.

Report Findings

- **Student Voice on Policing Report** by Fresno Unified School District's Equity and Access Department, February 2021
 - Students shared mostly positive experiences and perceptions of having police on campus.
 - Trained police officers on campus and caring staff make students feel safe on campus, with student-adult positive interactions as the most influential factor.
 - Students did, however, share that there is a lack of consistency of police officers' interactions with students across Fresno Unified.
 - Students would like to see more positive interactions with students and a district-wide focus on trust building between police and students.
 - Students also shared that if police were not on their school campuses, schools would be more vulnerable to dangerous situations and students would not feel safe.
 - Lastly, the focus groups revealed that students believed schools should hire more diverse staff that represents the racial and ethnic make-up of their student body.
- **A Report on Fresno Unified School District's Stakeholder Experiences with Student Resource Officers (SROs)** by Fresno State's Departments of Counselor Education and Rehabilitation, Educational Leadership, Liberal Studies, and Sociology, April 2021
 - Most educational partners have positive experiences with SROs and indicated that SROs presence on school campuses was important.
 - The majority of families and staff opposed removing SROs from schools while two-thirds of families, who reported direct experiences with SROs, had positive experiences.
 - Staff have a more nuanced understanding of the impacts of SROs, acknowledging that there are problems that need to be addressed in the interactions between SROs and students.

- The family Focus Group Interviews had the largest array of viewpoints on SROs, with some groups seeing the positive attributes of having SROs on Fresno Unified campuses, while others were highly critical of the role and advocated for a change in how schools handle issues of safety and student discipline.
- Families, staff, and SROs viewed SROs as an asset in producing a safe school environment, providing positive perceptions through their conduct, and giving opportunities for positive relationship building with students.
- All educational partners see a need for greater communication between educational partner groups revolving around safety practices and responsibilities, and a need for additional training involving cultural sensitivity, unconscious/implicit bias, de-escalation, and conflict resolution.
- **Fresno Unified Student Interactions with Police** by Fresno Unified School District's Departments of Equity and Access and Prevention and Intervention, January 2022
 - At a Board Member's request, to dig more deeply into student perception, a cross-departmental team planned student interviews with students who had direct interactions with police on campus (i.e. student neighborhood resource officers (SNROs) and SROs) to address how students experience interactions with SROs, and what students believe is working well and what may need improvement to foster better student-officer relationships. Fourteen one-on-one interviews were conducted with students in grades 9 to 12 during November and December 2021. A summary of key findings is below, and the complete report is included with this communication.
 - Students rated their interactions with SNROs and SROs mostly positively, with students reporting more positive interactions with officers at their previous middle school than current high school.
 - Student interactions with police in their community were mostly negative.
 - Most student-SNRO/SRO interactions occur in response to disciplinary incidents and students expressed the need for more opportunities to interact with SROs outside of discipline.
 - Students shared the biggest barrier to good student-SNRO/SRO relationships being community and negative public perception of SROs and how it impacts student perception.
 - Consistency in SNRO/SROs on campus is key for strengthening relationships between SROs and students.
 - Students expressed the importance and need of having SROs on middle school campuses to foster positive perceptions and improve student-SRO relations.

Next Steps

The new district Safety Team, Communications, and Equity and Access started work in November 2021 with the newly appointed leadership within FPD. Below are actions that will occur this spring:

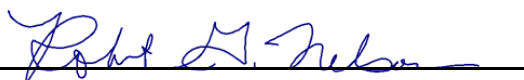
- Finalize SRO/student engagement data tool with FPD and identify 2-3 high schools to pilot tool.
- Deliver professional learning for SROs and Site Safety Teams to review roles, responsibilities and expectations, and launch pilot.
- Establish a student led safety task force at both the high school and middle school levels to capture ongoing student voice around school safety.
- Conduct listening sessions with SRO and pilot site administrators to garner feedback and make any revisions to the SRO/student engagement data tool.

- Hold drop-in sessions for all site administrators and SROs to review new data tool, review roles, responsibilities, expectations, and lessons learned from pilot.
- Implement and launch of SRO/student engagement tool at all high schools.
- Develop SRO/student engagement Power BI and reports to analyze the data collected.
- Facilitate a cycle of review utilizing the new data with FPD and District/Site Safety Teams
- Work with FPD to jointly identify areas of professional learning for officers in support of deepening relationships with students.
- Provide the Board of Education with initial data, roles, responsibilities, and next steps for the 2022/23 school year.

Included with this communication is the 2021/22 Student Interactions with Police Report.

If you have further questions or require additional information, please contact Amy Idsvoog at (559) 457-3498 or Lindsay Sanders at (559) 457-3471

Approved by Superintendent
Robert G. Nelson Ed.D.



Date: 02/18/2022



FRESNO UNIFIED

Student Interactions

with Police

JANUARY 28, 2022

PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION
EQUITY AND ACCESS

Introduction

In recognition of our need to better understand the impact of police officers on our school campuses, Fresno Unified developed a cross-departmental team to lead an ongoing process to engage our students, families, and school site staff in deeper discussions to gather their perceptions and opinions of police on our school campuses. Equity and Access, Communications, Operational Services, and the Office of African American Academic Acceleration collaborated during the 2020-21 school year to plan and conduct student focus groups with middle and high school students to better understand student perception of police officers in their community and on their school campus, to explore factors that impact student safety on campus, and to highlight areas of success and opportunities for improvements. Seventeen virtual student focus groups were conducted with a diverse representation of 114 students in grades 7 to 12 from January through February 2021.

The focus groups revealed that students shared mostly positive experiences and perceptions of having police on campus. Trained police officers on campus and caring staff make students feel safe on campus, with positive interactions between students and adults serving as the most influential factor. Students did, however, share that there is a lack of consistency of police officers' interactions with students across Fresno Unified. Students would like to see more positive interactions with students and a district-wide focus on trust building between police and students. Students also shared that if police were not on their school campuses, schools would be more vulnerable to dangerous situations and students would not feel safe. Lastly, the focus groups revealed that students believed schools should hire more diverse staff that represents the racial and ethnic make-up of their student body.

At the Board's request, to dig more deeply into student perception, a cross-departmental team planned student interviews with students who had direct interactions with police on campus (i.e., student resource officers (SROs)) to address the following questions:

- How do students experience interactions with SROs?
- What do students believe is working well and what may need improvement to foster better student-officer relationships?

Methodology

Fourteen one-on-one interviews were conducted with students in grades 9 to 12 during November and December 2021. School social workers were trained to conduct the interviews and notification letters were mailed out in early November to the parents/guardians of selected students to inform them about this opportunity. Prevention and Intervention also partnered with identified school sites to conduct outreach to chosen participants. One comprehensive high school and two alternative education sites were selected.

In total, 14 students were interviewed by trained school social workers. Interviews were held with students from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds. Thirteen (93%) students responded that they had at least one interaction with the SRO/SNRO on their school campus during middle or high school, while 1 student did not have a direct interaction. Nine (64%) students had at least one interaction with police in their community, while 5 students did not have a direct interaction. A content/thematic analysis was conducted of the qualitative data gathered from these student focus groups to identify key and sub-themes.

Key Findings

- **Students rated their interactions with SNROs and SROs (police on campus) mostly positively, with students reporting more positive interactions with officers at their previous middle school than current high school.**
- **Student interactions with police in their community were mostly negative.**
- **Most student-SNRO/SRO interactions occur in response to disciplinary incidents and students expressed the need for more opportunities to interact with SROs outside of discipline.**
- **Students identified the biggest barrier to good student-SNRO/SRO relationships as being negative perception of SROs within the public and community and how it impacts student perception.**

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- **Feedback from students stressed that consistency of SNRO/SROs on campus is key for strengthening relationships between SROs and students.**
 - **Students expressed the importance and need of having SROs on middle school campuses to foster positive perceptions and improve student-SRO relations.**

Students rated their interactions with SNRO/SROs (police on campus) mostly positively, with students reporting more positive interactions with SROs at their previous middle school than current high school. On average, students who were interviewed rated their interactions with SROs as positive (Score of “4”, please see Appendix B). Students shared how SROs treat them with respect and communicate with the students. Students also described SROs behaving calmly with them. A couple students also described how they have built a good relationship with their SRO. However, some students expressed a difference between their experiences with their middle school SNRO and the experiences with their high school SRO. Students shared they had more positive interactions with their middle school SROs than with their current SROs in high school.

“I feel like even the worst kid gets along with the officer on campus.”
- High School Student

Student interactions with police in their community were mostly negative. The average ranking of all interviewed students who had experiences interacting with police in their community was negative (Score of “2”, please see Appendix B). Students shared that they either experienced an interaction directly or observed an interaction between someone they knew and a community police officer. They rated these interactions negatively for reasons they described such as observing police in their community treating people poorly and being disrespectful. A few students shared experiences of seeing police officers demonstrate behavior such as holding a gun to a neighbor’s head or speaking disrespectfully to their parents.

“All of my interactions with cops in my community are a 1, none of my interactions with them are good.”
– High School Student

Most student-SRO interactions occur because of discipline and students expressed the need for more opportunities to interact with SROs outside of discipline. Students who were interviewed shared that almost all of their interactions with SROs were a result of getting in trouble. They stated that it would be helpful to encourage positive relationships with police officers if students had other opportunities to interact with them, outside of discipline. Some students suggested that SROs should walk around during lunch and have more of an active presence, interacting with students during the school day. Another student suggested that SROs should make more of an effort to get to know all students, one-on-one.

“Maybe start by trying to understand students.”
- High School Student

Students identified the biggest barrier to good student-SNRO/SRO relationships as being negative perception of SROs within the public and community and how it impacts student perception. The majority of students who participated in these interviews discussed how most of the barriers to positive relationships between students and SROs are based off of how others view police on our school campuses. Students shared how their interactions with SROs are different than how people in the community talk about police on campus. Students stated that student perception of police are skewed by the community/public perception. One participant suggested that if students had more opportunities to positively interact with police and build relationships with them on campus while they are in middle school, then this would help students build a foundation early on.

Similarly, students discussed that schools need to develop ways to get police officers in front of students more and not just when students misbehave or break the rules. A couple of students suggested that schools could address this barrier by creating more opportunities for students to interact and get to know SROs to form their own opinions and perceptions.

In addition to negative perceptions in the public and community a barrier, one student identified another barrier as the way their SRO speaks to students. This student described that it comes off as aggressive because their SRO has their hand on their weapon when they talk to students. Another student believed an additional barrier was SROs not having relationships with teachers on their campus.

“It’s all the bad stuff people say about the cops. You know kids, they hear one bad thing and they keep it in their mind forever.”

- High School Student

Feedback from students stressed that consistency of SROs on campus and opportunities for non-disciplinary interactions are key for strengthening relationships between SROs and students. When asked how schools might strengthen relationships between SROs and students, students shared the need for consistency and opportunities to interact with SROs outside of disciplinary incidents. Some students discussed the importance of having the same SRO on campus year after year to build relationships with students. One student expressed the difficulty when a new SRO is brought in and how students feel as if they are "starting over" as there's someone new to get to know. Some students also felt that police officers need to be intentional in building relationships with students and interact more with students during the day, by participating in assemblies, presentations, and various activities.

One student said that they would like to see SROs help students with academics and suggested the development of a program to pair struggling students with SROs for support. This same student shared that their middle school had a successful SRO-student program in place that was effective in fostering positive relationships between students and SROs. Another student shared the need for consistency in how SROs interact with students and how they treat situations. This student expressed that clear expectations and training across all SROs might help with consistency.

“Showing how they’re [SROs] actually helping our community and helping our schools be better.”

- High School Student

Students expressed the importance and need of having SROs on middle school campuses to foster positive perceptions and improve student-SRO relations.

In addition to consistency and more opportunities to interact with SROs, students also described the need for SROs on middle school campuses as one way to improve student-SRO relations. Some students stated that introducing students to SROs at a younger age would help to build better student-SRO relationships as they got older. One student described how middle school prepares students for high school and if middle school students had more opportunities to interact positively with SROs, they would go into high school having a better mindset about SROs. A couple of students discussed their own experiences with SROs at their middle school and how those positive interactions helped them build relationships with their SROs in high school.

“I think middle school is where it starts cause high school you can’t really change kids’ minds unless you get at them with the positive stuff in middle school.”
- High School Student

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the student interviews, there are three recommendations that emerged from synthesizing the cross-departmental team feedback for Fresno Unified to consider:

- SROs need to build **intentional relationships** with students by creating additional **opportunities to interact** with students outside of discipline.
- SRO expectations and responses to discipline situations need to be **consistently implemented** across school campuses.
- SROs placement should remain **consistent** and student-SRO relationship building should begin on **middle school** campuses.

Appendix A: Student Interview Questions

Introduction Question

1. In your opinion, what is the role of a student resource officer (SRO) on a school campus?

Exploratory Questions

1. Thinking back on your time in [middle school/high school], have you had at least one interaction with the SRO on your school site?
2. How would you describe your interaction(s) with the SRO on campus? On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 = very negative to 5 = very positive, how would you rate your interaction(s) with your school's SRO?
3. What are some ways that your school could help to improve your experiences with your school's SRO? What would you want to see more of?
4. In your opinion, what are some of the barriers to good student-SRO relations? How do you think we can we eliminate those barriers?
5. What do you think are some strategies or things your school could implement to strengthen the relationship between students and SROs?
6. Outside of school, have you had an interaction with police in your community?
7. How would you describe your interaction(s) with police in your community? On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 = very negative to 5 = very positive, how would you rate your interaction(s) with police in your community?

Exit Question

6. Is there anything else you would like to share with us today?

Appendix B: Likert Scale Data Table

Question	Average Ranking
How would you describe your interaction(s) with the SRO on campus? On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 = very negative to 5 = very positive, how would you rate your interaction(s) with your school's SRO?	4 "Positive"
How would you describe your interaction(s) with police in your community? On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 = very negative to 5 = very positive, how would you rate your interaction(s) with police in your community?	2 "Negative"

Likert Scale

- 1 = Very Negative
- 2 = Negative
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Positive
- 5 = Very Positive