

A Position Statement by the South Carolina Caucus of Black School Board Members

School Resource Officers: The School-to-Prison Pipeline

The South Carolina Caucus of Black School Board Members urges School Boards of Trustees to develop policy which will ensure school administrators use school resources officers appropriately. Moreover, the Black Caucus appeals to district school boards of trustees to develop policy which will hold school superintendents accountable for the proper training of school personnel-- teachers, administrators, and support staff-- to handle student disciplinary infractions without escalation.

School Resource Officer's Roles and Responsibilities-

The Johns Hopkins Center for Technology in Education states that School Resource Officers have three main roles and responsibilities:

- **One-** Primarily as law-related counselors and law-related educators who develop relationships with students. According to the Center, a SRO's primary role is to investigate allegations of criminal incidents and make referrals of students to juvenile authorities, only when necessary.
- **Two-** SROs are expected to work to reduce juvenile delinquency rates by establishing close contact with students and by building positive relationships with them. Also, SROs are to conduct security inspections, monitor crime statistics and work with local police and students to design crime prevention strategies. The ability to work closely with school administrators, as well as the ability to train school personnel in handling crisis situations, is an essential skill for a SRO. SROs must attend and participate in many school functions.
- **Three-** SROs should act as a resource at all times. School Resource Officers should act only as law enforcement officers when a law has been broken or a crime has been committed. Never should they act as school administrators or disciplinarians.

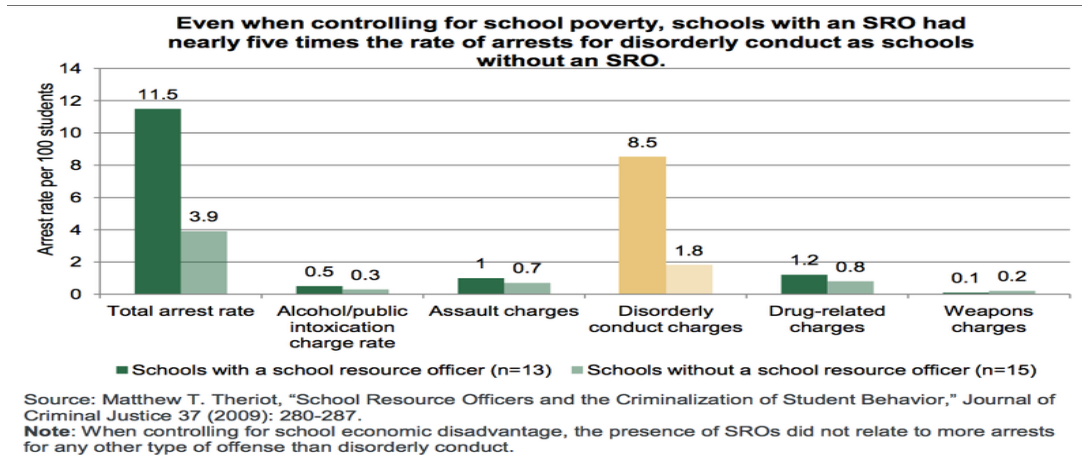
The position of the South Carolina Caucus of Black School Board Members is most significant in light of the recent out-of-control behavior of a school resource officer which resulted in two students being criminally charged for non-criminal behavior. This type of criminalization occurs too often and ultimately aborts the future dreams and aspirations of many students in South Carolina.

School personnel, parents, and guardians must tell students in the strongest terms- "You must obey the commands of law enforcement officers (school resource officers)." If a student feels that he or she has been wronged, that student should be advised of their options under the code of discipline.

School Resource Officers, because they are law enforcement officers, should only be engaged in student conduct that is unmistakably criminal. When resource officers are used as school administrators and disciplinarians, students ultimately end up with criminal records they would not otherwise have. This criminalization of students helps to create the "school-to-prison pipeline." This criminal charging of students hurts/damages the lives and future of African-American students disproportionately, creating and promoting negative attitudes, behaviors, and actions which oftentimes lead to a life of derogation.

The research is clear:

- The inappropriate use of School Resources Officers has helped to create the phenomenon civil-rights advocates call the "school-to-prison pipeline." In many cases, schools themselves are the ones pushing students into the juvenile justice system by having students arrested at school by School Resource Officers.
- Schools have outsourced discipline to juvenile courts and School Resource Officers. From 1997 to 2007 the number of SROs **increased by nearly a third**. First, foremost, and most importantly, SROs were placed in schools **to protect students, not to police them**; particularly, after the 1998 mass school shooting at Columbine High School.



- The chief judge of the juvenile court in Clayton County (Georgia) has become an outspoken opponent of police in schools. The placing of police in schools has resulted in eleven times as many students being sent to juvenile court. Furthermore, the chief judge informed Congress at a 2012 hearing that "the prosecutor's attention has been taken from the more difficult cases- burglary, robberies, car thefts, aggravated assaults with weapons, to prosecuting kids who are not 'scary,' **but to kids who made an adult mad.**"
- *According to federal data, Black students made up 16 percent of all enrolled children in 2011-12; however, they accounted for 31 percent of all in-school arrests. (Source: The Vox Explainers, Libby Nelson, Dara Lind, October 27, 2015)*

Submitted by Moving Forward Committee Members:

Dr. Gary Burgess- Chair, Rev. Cynthia Brown, Mr. Kenneth Davis, Esq., Ms. Rosemary English, Mr. Levi Green, Dr. Arthur Lance, Ms. Annie McDaniel, Ms. Amelia Mckie, Ms. Glenda Morrison-Fair, Dr. White.

For additional information please contact: Moving Forward Committee Chair: Dr. Gary Burgess (drb.burgessgroup@bellsouth.net or 864-760-3656); SC Caucus of Black School Board Members President: Elder Alexis D. Pipkins, Sr. (alexispipkins@aol.com or 843-615-0229)

E-mail: sccaucusblackschoolboardmembers@yahoo.com