

DPS PEERS

“Police - Establishing - Equitable - Relationships with Students”

Initial Program Recommendations

DRAFT Shared with DPS Leadership 3/8/22

PEERS is an acronym: Police - Establishing - Equitable - Relationships with Students

Two Typical Definitions of the term “peer”:

1. To be on the same level or footing as others and have the opportunity to influence each others’ perspectives
2. To look keenly and thoughtfully at something together

Across the country, there is an important and ongoing conversation occurring about safety in schools. The role of the police officer in the schools is a priority interest. With this interest in mind, school districts have taken a variety of actions from reducing the presence of police officers on school grounds to creating alternative roles to serve the schools. All of these actions seem to be grounded in the ideas that we need to be engaging in conversation on the same level and we need to look keenly and thoughtfully at these issues, together.

The DPS Board of Education passed a resolution removing the presence of School Resource Officers from school sites in 2020. This has eliminated the contextual and emotional threat some students, notably black students, have experienced with the constant presence of uniformed Denver Police Department officers in the schools. With this, the specific need for police officers to provide necessary support and urgent response services at school sites has persisted. As noted by school leaders and safety partners alike, this change has created a divide between line police officers and DPS school staff. Police officers do not feel welcome and are often reluctant to engage with school communities in a positive way.

PEERS is a programmatic approach to developing positive, equitable, and intentional relationships between students, school staff, and police officers who are required to interact with students and staff as a part of the community experience of schooling.

Understanding the need to shift the context with police officers in schools, DPS leadership is intending to reframe and reform the role and relationship that officers in the Denver Police Department have with our DPS school communities.

Most community members understand the need for law enforcement to work as a partner with school and district staff to keep our school buildings and campuses safe. Many of our schools exist in the urban context where external threats are persistent and all of our schools live in the context of the State of Colorado, where we have seen some of the most violent and horrific events possible occur on school campuses. External threats to the safety of our students occur on a daily basis in our city and a fluid and predictable relationship with safety partners must be a priority in order to ensure the safety of our students and staff. We need to develop the bridge that our safety partners can represent, connecting community concerns with school leadership. Officers have the capacity to align with schools and communities to advocate for non-punitive approaches to behavioral response and conflict resolution.

PEERS is a concept that is about reframing and reforming policing in our schools. The first priority with an implementation of PEERS is to create targeted and intentional relationships and partnerships between police officers who will have a presence in the school community and students and staff who must work together to create and sustain a safe environment for learning.

Certainly, it takes more than healthy and supportive relationships between school staff and police officers to ensure the safety of our children while at school. Significant investments in school-based student services professionals including counselors, school psychologists, and social workers, along with deep staff training and consistent practice in mental health, intentional cultures, effective disciplinary structures, and restorative contexts are prerequisite interests to secure a safe school context.

That being understood, creating a well-defined and well-executed partnership with police officers is imperative as we strive to ensure the physical and emotional safety of those in our schools.

The goals of a PEERS implementation include:

- Ensuring that every student experiences a safe and equitable learning environment in an emotionally and physically safe school context
- Engaging police officers as community members and safety professionals who care for our students and serve our school well

- Creating a fluent and fluid partnership between officers, school, and district personnel so that all members of the partnership are able to engage in a predictable and effective manner that ensures the safety of every student and staff member

Actions that may occur to engage a successful PEERS implementation (based on available research and recent promising practices from other city school districts):

- Identification of primary police officer contacts as partners for each school in each DPD division
- Co-training in equity-driven educational and engagement practices for police officers and school contacts
- Co-training related to mandatory reporting processes
- Police partner engagement in small group mentoring and enrichment activities with students
- Further development and facilitation of a future cadets programming
- Participation of partner officers on school-based campus safety teams
- Prioritization of partner officers for after-school/weekend event supervision
- Partner-driven personal safety training for students and staff
- Officer participation as a community member on a school's CSC or other teams to enrich a partner officers understanding of the full school context
- Partner officer participation in community service groups/projects with students
- Co-facilitation or guest teaching in school law or other related school courses
- Presence at after-school circle conversations with parents/guardians to keep them connected to and informed about community experiences

PEERS is customizable based on the school's context, needs, realities, and experiences and, as noted, would be grounded in the development of equitable relationships with students, families, and staff. Police cannot fear students and students cannot fear the police. If we allow such fear to be pervasive because of personal or political interests and concerns, we may create conditions that are problematic and to the contrary of the interests of a PEERS implementation.

The Denver Public Schools and The Denver Police Department may be able to co-develop and co-facilitate the training that prepares officers and schools to be great partners. This can be a city-wide effort grounded in secondary schools and connecting to the earlier grades so that relationships, trust, and partnership opportunities are created over time.

PEERS may be aligned with or inclusive of other local nonprofit and governmental agencies to provide related resources which may include:

- Neighborhood proactive violence reduction and mediation programs (ie: Conflict Center, Project Pave)
- Gang mitigation programming (ie: Denver Youth Program/Gang Rescue & Support Project (GRASP), Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver (GRID))
- Mentoring relationships within the school community (ie: Denver Kids, DYP/Metro Denver Partners, Big Brothers Big Sisters,)
- Access to community experiences and activities like athletics and volunteer opportunities (ie: Denver Parks & Recreation, Girls Inc., Boys and Girls Club)
- Access to internship and employment opportunities for students (ie: Denver Youth Employment Program, Denver Opportunity Youth Initiative)

Recommendations for PEERS Implementation in the Denver Public Schools:

Based on our local experience in the Denver Public Schools and the research engaged relating to actions and experiences in urban contexts across our country, the following notations represent a set of recommendations for PEERS implementation in DPS:

1. **Develop a current Inter-Agency Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding between the Denver Public School and the Denver Police Department** defining the intended relationship between the agencies and identifying commitments and roles and responsibilities in regard to purpose and actions. *At this time, there has not been a revision of the 2013 MOU in response to the removal of SROs.*
2. **Create and commit to a set of district-wide goals for the partnership** that include metrics with which the agencies will monitor progress of the relationship at a quarterly partnership meeting. *Metrics may include*
 - a. Number of student contacts with DPD
 - b. Number of student arrests
 - c. Number of tickets written in response to school-related concerns
 - d. Number of restorative conversations with DPD and students
 - e. Number of restorative responses to safety concerns supported by DPD
 - f. Types of student contacts with DPD
 - g. Mandatory reports completed by DPD
 - h. Number of DPD contacts at the school site related to adult conflict
 - i. Number of DPD contacts in response to external threats

3. **Identify partnership opportunities and school-sites that will develop and support a positive and predictable relationship between the school and the identified DPD Partner Officer(s).**
4. **Identify specific programmatic investments that will be made at the district level in response to the reduction of SROs to provide violence prevention and school safety services for students at school sites.** Examples of Police and School District Partnership Programming in Urban School Districts Across the Country (typically designed and implemented in response to a reduction of School Resource Officer presence in the schools):
 - a. **Violence Interrupters- Minneapolis, MN:** Individuals hired to help keep the peace in the blocks around the school in the hours after dismissal. Their work is a part of a program to ensure students at city high schools are safe as students leave school grounds and progress toward home. It is a partnership program with the Minneapolis Public Schools and the city's Office of Violence Prevention. Violence Interrupters are employees of the city.
 - b. **Mental Health and Human Services Partnerships:** Explicit partnerships defined by MOUs representing investments committed at school sites in support of preventative mental health services for students. Models present in Aurora Public Schools and Broward county Public School models.
 - c. **District-employed Police Services with Officers that Report to the Superintendent:** In Atlanta Public Schools, for example, officers are employed by the school district and trained both by the local police department and the school district to provide meaningful services to students living in the community.
 - d. **Student Safety Coaches- Plymouth, MN:** The Student Safety coach model replaced SROs with SSC's at school sites and was part of the district's move to provide racially conscious, trauma-sensitive and healing-centered school communities.
 - e. **District and School Level Student Safety Committees- Madison WI:** In response to concerns related to violent behavior demonstrated by students, Madison schools have designed a district-level student safety committee that may also be adapted for development at the school site.

- f. **Violence Prevention and Intervention Coordinator:** responsible for securing intervention and support and tracking and monitoring students involved in crises at the school site. Coordinates resources to ensure on-site and on-time intervention in potential violent conflict and monitoring of students progress in response to events. Models are present in various community agencies locally and nationally.

 - g. **Student Engagement Advocate- DPS Safety/Denver East Pilot 2018-19:** A prototype of the Student Engagement Advocate position was designed and implemented in partnership (hiring, funding, and training), between the DPS Safety and Denver East. An SEA is an early-career advocate focused on monitoring current climate and providing timely support and intervention for students with school and DPS Safety Partners. The position was deemed successful with full funding provided by the school site for an additional school year.
5. **Require all schools to facilitate a monthly School Safety Team meeting.**
The School Safety Team is a multidisciplinary team intended to monitor safety conditions and plan forward to ensure a safe learning environment. Goals and monitoring data should be reviewed at this monthly meeting and participants on the team should include: Principal, Asst. Principal responsible for school culture and safety, Deans of Culture, Counselor, School Psychologist, Social Worker, DPS CSO and Sargeant, DPS Partner, and other identified partners
6. **Provide comprehensive site-based equity, culture development, trauma-informed, restorative practices, and alternative behavioral response systems training for school teams.** Our schools are typically told by central offices to not suspend or expel. At the same time, sufficient levels of training and support for equity-driven and more effective options are not available to school staff members responsible for this effort.
7. **Structure and manage district level behavioral management supervision and support systems separately from DPS safety programming.**
Equity-driven behavior systems should be aligned with the instructional program, not the safety/security system.

8. **Identify and define relationships between schools and student-safety oriented nonprofit partners.** Nonprofit partners are an untapped resource in many of our school communities and are ready to partner and serve. Nonprofit partner relationships should be based on identified needs at the school site and managed through the development of an MOU with targets for performance set and progress of the relationship monitored over time.

These recommendations are intended to support and improve the effort that the Denver Public Schools engages to provide a physically and emotionally safe school environment for every student and staff member. This is our commitment to our community and our responsibility for our children.

Resources:

- Denver- Youth Violence Prevention
<https://www.denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Mayors-Office/Programs-and-Initiatives/Youth-Violence-Prevention>
- Minneapolis- Citywide Violence Prevention Initiatives
<https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/government/departments/health/office-violence-prevention/violence-prevention-initiatives/>
- Minneapolis- Violence Interrupters (Star Tribune)
<https://www.startribune.com/violence-interrupters-at-3-minneapolis-high-schools-work-to-provide-safety-build-relationships/600147550/>
- District 2870 Student Safety Coach Model
<https://www.district287.org/287-student-safety-coach-model/>
- ASU- Reimagining School Safety
https://sirc.asu.edu/sites/default/files/school_safety_alternatives_.pdf
- District Administration- Alternatives
<https://districtadministration.com/student-safety-coaches-an-alternative-to-school-resource-officers/>
- Dignity in Schools- Community Not Cops
<https://dignityinschools.org/take-action/community-not-cops/>
- Leadership for Educational Equity- Emerging Models
https://educationalequity.org/sites/default/files/documents/emerging_models_for_school_resource_officers_final.pdf
- End Zero Tolerance
<https://www.endzerotolerance.org/police-in-schools-policy-reforms>

- Brookings Institute- Considering Alternatives
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-considering-police-in-schools/>
- School Police Partnership IACP
<https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/School-Police%20Policy%20-%20FULL%2007092020.pdf>
- DPS School Resource Officer Transition Document
<https://www.dpsk12.org/sro-transition/>
- DPS SRO Transition Funding Reallocation
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UJtAYz-oD59L0bEmD-mwdTaS6MJz-oBnLJVQyB_5qbE/edit
- DPS SRO Transition Project
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1loehHCAx_eIMwrlCwndsrT3mjD8_jdYeVpHrdt2NKfQ/edit
- VERA Institute of Justice:
<https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/alternatives-to-policing-school-safety-fact-sheet.pdf>
- Hanover Report:
https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ui=2&ik=76447ea66c&attid=0.1&permmsgid=msg-a:r1795919350124071798&th=17ec684cdba5a3e2&view=att&disp=inline&reattattid=f_kz8vylwa0
- Sentencing Project:
<https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Back-to-School-Action-Guide-Re-Engaging-Students-and-Closing-the-School-to-Prison-Pipeline.pdf>
- Madison Student Safety Committees
[https://go.boarddocs.com/wi/mmsd/Board.nsf/files/CC3MAF559F5A/\\$file/Safety%20%26%20Student%20Wellness%20Adhoc%20Draft.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/wi/mmsd/Board.nsf/files/CC3MAF559F5A/$file/Safety%20%26%20Student%20Wellness%20Adhoc%20Draft.pdf)