

December 16, 2022

Mary Skipper
Boston Public Schools
2300 Washington St
Boston MA
02114

Dear Superintendent Skipper,

We write as youth justice advocates and organizers regarding Boston's alarming proposal unveiled at the December 12th Community Equity Round Table (CERT) to hire additional staff to surveil and monitor students, a proposal that will disproportionately harm students of color, particularly Black and Latinx students, immigrant students, and students with disabilities.

Black Advocates for Educational Excellence organized advocates across the city to respond to the new proposal during the December 12th CERT because this proposal would clearly harm Black and Latinx students. Every member of the BPS community deserves to learn in a safe, just, and affirming school. Boston's current proposal will not further that critical mission; instead, it will lead to further criminalization of our young people of color. As youth justice advocates, we are amplifying advocacy efforts and pushing back on the inequitable positions that are introducing youth to the school to prison pipeline. We urge you to reconsider and engage in a community-focused process to build meaningful school safety.

Boston has proposed hiring 18 "Community Connections Coordinator(s)" and a "Community Violence Response Advisor." The Community Connection Coordinators are described as people who will, among other activities, follow students as they leave school and coordinate with "Transit Police and BPD" at local T stations, as students head for home. Meanwhile, the "Community Violence Response Advisor" is set to "monitor ongoing issues between students who have self-identified as street affiliated via social media." We understand this to mean that BPS will be surveilling students' social media and then using some undisclosed criteria to identify students whom the District should "monitor."

Boston's plan - to create, using unclear and capacious criteria, a list of students whom the District will then more closely monitor by physically following them after school and observing them on social media - will inevitably disproportionately harm students of color, particularly Black and Latinx students, and students with disabilities. More than 75 percent of the people listed in Boston's gang database are Black men or teenagers.¹ If Boston proceeds with its plan to

¹ Yawu Miller, *Are there really 160 gangs in Boston?*, BAY STATE BANNER (July 30, 2019), <https://www.baystatebanner.com/2019/07/30/are-there-really-160-gangs-in-boston>. Smith, Sandra, et. al, *Boston's gang database should be dismantled*, the Boston Globe (January 31, 2022), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/01/31/opinion/bostons-gang-database-should-be-dismantled>. The Federal courts

“monitor” young people whom it believes are “at-risk” of gang-involvement, the District will be creating a similar database of Black and Latinx children.

We share Boston’s commitment to building safe school communities. However, increased surveillance of students leads to an “an environment of fear and distrust... and diminished students’ willingness to confide in school staff when they are experiencing problems.”² In order to build truly safe schools, Boston should engage in a community-centered process and build up alternative mechanisms of supporting students, including, for example: meaningful restorative justice; effective and inclusive special education programming;³ leveraging and expanding structured after-school programs; expanding arts, music, and athletic programs; peer mentoring; job placement programs; and dual college enrollment.⁴ We urge the District to move away from the current proposal and instead turn to a trauma-informed approach defined by community involvement, restorative justice, and increased appropriate mental health supports.

Sincerely,
Marlies Spanjaard
Director of Education Advocacy
The EdLaw Project

Black Advocates for Educational Excellence

Citizens for Juvenile Justice

Greater Boston Legal Services
School to Prison Pipeline Intervention Project

Massachusetts Advocates for Children

CC: Mayor Michelle Wu
The Honorable Julia Mejia, City Council

found “flaws in that database [the gang database], including its reliance on an erratic point system built on unsubstantiated inferences.” *Ortiz v. Garland*, No. 19-1620 (1st Cir. 2022).

² Citizens for Juvenile Justice & Strategies for Youth, Fail: School Policing in Massachusetts, (September 2020), available at <https://www.cfjj.org/policing-in-schools>.

³ BPS educators overwhelmingly agree that the District should provide increased mental health supports for students and teachers and reduce teacher to student ratios. Educators for Excellence Boston, 2022 *Voices from the Classroom: A Survey of Boston Educators*

⁴ Communities for Just Schools Fund, Recommendations on School Climate, Discipline, and Safety (December 18, 2020), available at <http://dignityinschools.org/cjsf-recommendations-on-school-climate-discipline-and-safety/>