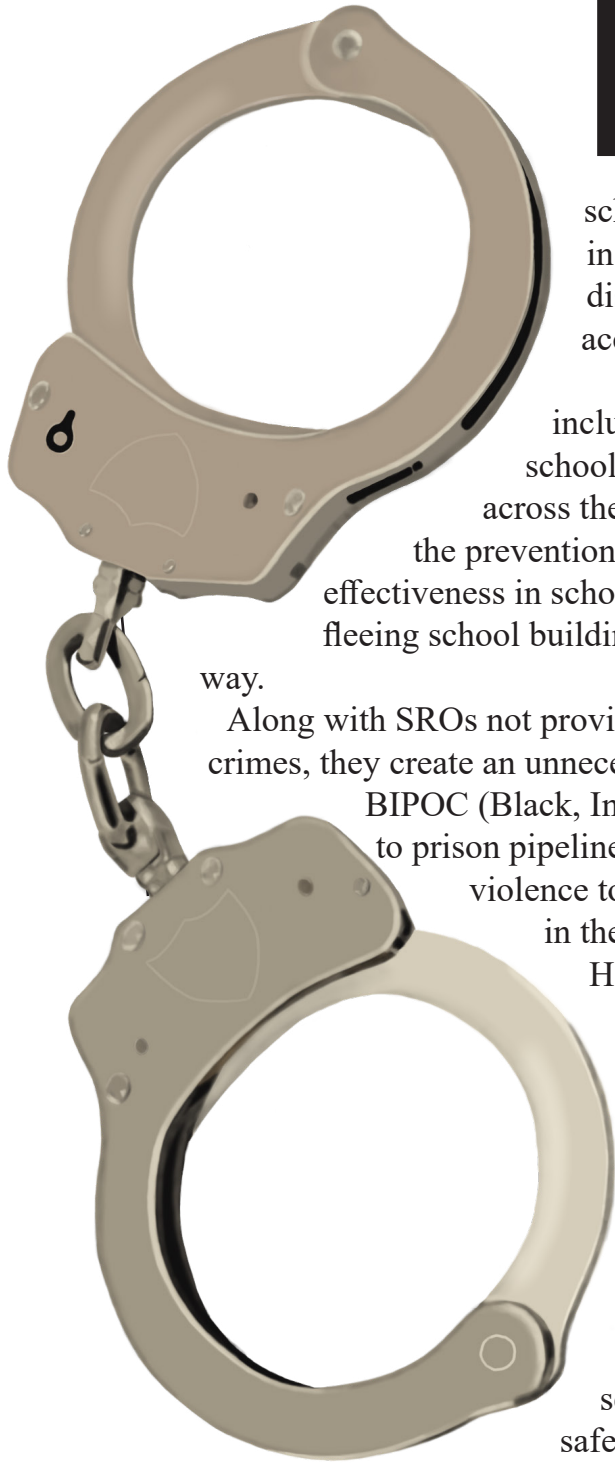




# TOUGH ON CRIME



**P**olice do not belong in learning environments. In early 2020, East High School students Endi Montalvo-Martinez and Lyric Sellers created a racial justice and equity proposal presented to the superintendent for the full removal of school resource officers (SROs). After the racial injustices in summer 2020 and the Des Moines Public School district's anti racist proclamation, their work has rapidly accelerated.

With an increase in school shootings in the 1990s, including the well-known Columbine shooting in 1999, school resource officers began to be widely implemented across the nation. Though their purpose may have been to assist in the prevention of these events, there is no outstanding evidence of their effectiveness in school shooting situations. There are even examples of SROs fleeing school buildings during shootings, leaving students and staff in harm's way.

Along with SROs not providing protection from school shootings and in-school crimes, they create an unnecessary entryway into the criminal justice system for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) students, AKA the school to prison pipeline. Historically, there has been a history of heightened violence towards BIPOC by the police. As the most diverse school in the state, this should be of even more concern for the Hoover community. Students should not be made to feel as if they may become another George Floyd when coming to school.

“Another way this perpetuates the pipeline is that having an officer in the building leads to students thinking they must be bad and need monitoring/policing...that idea being engrained in these children leads to that continual assumption of criminality,” Social Studies teacher Jeanette Carrington said.

According to Sellers and Montalvo-Martinez, “a sense of safety is subjective.” Though some may find safety with police presence in schools, many others feel the opposite. The results from a November survey sent to DMPS students, staff, and families found that only 38% of high school students and 33% of staff found SROs helpful.

“For many students SROs give a very hostile and traumatizing environment. We believe we

# Student leaders reimagine school safety.

**By: Arabia Parkey**  
Media Editor in Chief

can address safety, not just physical but emotional safety in school through restorative justice practices and mental health service. The reality is that almost  $\frac{2}{3}$  of charges made by SROs are minor misdemeanors, the majority of them simply described as ‘disorderly conduct’ which is subject to the discretion of the officer,” Montalvo-Martinez said.

If preventing in-school crimes and shootings are truly of concern, stopping these incidents at the root should be of utmost importance. Many crimes committed by students are commonly related to mental health, home-life problems, and other circumstances that can be addressed by trained professionals instead of police intimidation.

According to staff, counselors are forced to spend much of their time creating schedules and less time addressing other essential services. Reallocating the nearly \$750,000 spent by DMPS on 11 SROs to mental health professionals and restorative justice practices could be monumental in limiting the need for police intervention.

“The funds for SROs need to be reallocated into mental health services and support services for our students, staff and families. We need to invest in restorative justice practices and de-escalation training that is also catered to cultural competency because of our diverse student body,” Sellers said.

As of now, the voices of Des Moines’s student leaders are being heard. The current contract with the Des Moines Police Department has been suspended for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year. The district has also presented a plan for full removal of SROs and the school board is set to vote on the status of the SRO contract in mid-February for the upcoming school year.

Community support for student-led movements is imperative as students are being actively affected by the racist institutions present in schools. Amplify student voices and continue to support this movement as changes are being made. Follow @dmpracialequity on Instagram to find more ways to support the district-wide racial equity team or contact Ms. Carrington and Ms. Paradise-Flores to join the Hoover student racial equity team.



**Native students are 3x more likely to be arrested/given a referral (DMPS, 2020).**

**“SROs make attendance to school a potential entry into the criminal justice system,” Sellers said.**

**Black students have 6x more interactions with SROs than other students (DMPS).**



GRAPHICS AND DESIGN BY ARABIA PARKEY