

Boston Globe

Boston Public Schools nearing agreement with city police to formalize relationship

By [Christopher Huffaker](#) Globe Staff, Updated May 12, 2023, 6:05 p.m.

Boston police and school leaders said Friday that they are close to concluding an agreement formalizing their relationship and outlining when school staff should call police.

The memorandum will not place police back in schools, the officials said, but instead will clarify when educators should call police to respond to incidents. The move to codify the role of police in schools is in line with a [January recommendation by an outside consultant](#), the [Council of Great City Schools](#), but has [followed relatively little public discussion](#), despite the consultant's recommendation that the agreement include community input.

Schools Superintendent Mary Skipper and Police Commissioner Michael Cox shared the update in testimony at a City Council hearing held by Councilors Erin Murphy and Michael Flaherty, who have called for more action to address school violence.

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Skipper emphasized that the agreement will not change city and district policies around information sharing and surveillance, such as a 2021 ordinance prohibiting school officials from including [information like immigration status](#) and gang affiliation in student reports that are shared with police.

Flaherty welcomed the coming agreement and said that he has heard from parents that school leaders were not calling 911, forcing parents to go to the police themselves. In January, Murphy, Flaherty, Councilor Frank Baker, and council President Ed Flynn called for a [restoration of police to schools](#) and for the installation of metal detectors.

Three-quarters of district parents surveyed in a [recent MassINC/Shah Foundation poll](#) supported those measures. Under the current policy, individual schools decide whether to install metal detectors; some schools already have them.

Boston Public Schools stopped [employing police officers](#) in response to the state's 2020 Police Reform Law that required school officers receive about 350 additional hours of training. Rather than provide the training, then-Superintendent Brenda Cassellius opted to replace the police with "safety specialists" who lack arrest powers, uniforms, and handcuffs.

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Police data showed an increase in juvenile weapons arrests last year and an increase in police incidents at all Boston schools, including private institutions, through February of this year.

In early January, police said, a teacher used her body to [shield a student from attack](#) outside Young Achievers Science and Math Pilot School. Later that month, a fight among four Boston Latin Academy middle school students led to one being [taken to the hospital](#). In February, a [knife was confiscated](#) from a Condon School middle school student.

School discipline data, however, paints a much more mixed picture. The Globe reported in March that there were 1,627 incidents resulting in discipline across the system through February of this school year, compared to 1,454 incidents in the same period last school year. Both years' totals were below those in each of the three years before the pandemic.

Fights and assaults resulting in discipline this school year dipped slightly to 490 between September and February, down from 505 during the corresponding period last year. Incidents involving weapons resulting in discipline, however, jumped to 118 during the same period this school year, a marked increase over 82 the previous year, according to BPS statistics.

The district's efforts to [work more closely with city police](#) have [drawn an outcry from juvenile justice advocates](#), who say an increase in the police presence in schools would run contrary to the district's stated commitment to equity. A [2021 analysis from the Center for Public Integrity](#) found Black and Latino students and students with disability are referred to school police at higher rates than their peers. Advocates have also opposed information sharing between police and schools, warning about a 2017 incident where a [school incident report helped trigger a student's deportation](#).