

WBUR

Report recommends Boston schools rebuild relations with police

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A national education nonprofit's latest report on the Boston Public Schools proposes ways to rebuild a police presence inside the district.

The [safety-focused report](#) — prepared by the Council of the Great City Schools — recommends engaging with the Boston police commissioner to promote “positive relationships” between police and students, as well as weighing the re-establishment of an internal police department.

BPS Superintendent Mary Skipper says the report is just a template focused mainly on “emergency management,” and that her team will offer “a package of mitigation strategies” at a future meeting.

But it remains to be seen whether there is popular support for toughening safety measures so soon after they were rolled back.

Boston's school-based officers lost their police powers after a [change in state law](#) in 2021. Thereafter, citing research about the “school-to-prison pipeline,” the district [refocused](#) its efforts instead around “safety specialists,” overseen by its Office of Safety Services, and limited information sharing with the Boston Police Department.

But in [its agreement](#) with state education officials this summer, BPS and Boston Mayor Michelle Wu agreed to improve school safety, in part by establishing a rapid-response system for school-based incidents and commissioning the audit that led to this report.

Unlike other Council reports, like [one presented earlier this month on transportation](#), the full text of the report on school safety was withheld. That's because, as school committee chairwoman Geri Robinson said at a Wednesday meeting, airing its detailed findings could compromise the safety of students and staff in city schools.

In general, disciplinary incidents inside the district have declined since 2016, though emergency referrals jumped to a five-year high in the 2021-22 school year.

The council report suggests rolling back some of the district's recent changes, like when it calls for a new agreement for sharing information with the police.

It also recommends implementing an anonymous reporting system and addressing "low morale" in the district's safety department.

Some parents pushed back on the broad outlines of the report — like Eric Esteves of Roxbury, who said, "More police in schools is not the answer, full stop."

"I'm from an era that saw the school-to-prison pipeline explode as a result of no-excuses policies," Esteves said during public testimony. He said the task is to re-envision school safety without slipping back into criminalization, which he said would take "hard work and resources."

Skipper noted that this report does not discuss strategies like restorative justice or wraparound supports, which she said are "critical" to the district's "holistic approach to student well-being."