

#AssaultAtSpringValley

The legacy of lynching in school policing

2024 Update



#POLICEFREESCHOOLS

ADVANCEMENT
PROJECT

Alliance for
Educational
Justice

2024 UPDATE

This report series analyzes assaults against students by school police officers and security guards (*#AssaultAts*) to help us better understand the extent to which school policing places students at risk of physical and sexual violence. The first edition, published in 2022, presented findings of combined quantitative/qualitative data analysis of 285 incidents of police assaults between the 2011-12 and 2021-22 school years. The subsequent 2023 edition updated those findings through the 2022-23 school year with analysis of 372 assaults and included additional data points, such as the geographic region in which the assault occurred.

This 2024 edition analyzes 460 assaults against students and expands the scope of the report by using two lynching datasets that span from 1882 to 1936 to assess the relationship between the southern era of lynching in the United States (U.S.) and modern violence against students by school police and security guards – both forms of state sanctioned violence disproportionately levied against Black people. In doing so, we also explore the importance of Ida B. Wells’ protest journalism that challenged lynching in the south, connecting her work to our efforts to debunk the myth that police make schools safer and expose the traumatic and lasting harms of school policing.

Additionally, statistical analysis of the assaults has been built upon by examining time trends, geographical spread, and the school level where assaults occur. With these updates, we demonstrate that school policing is tied to a long history of racial oppression through state sanctioned violence and that it currently jeopardizes the physical safety and health of Black students, students with disabilities, girls and young women of color, and students attending predominately low-income schools.

For more information about the National Campaign for Police Free Schools visit:

WWW.POLICEFREESCHOOLS.ORG

For more information about the *#AssaultAt* initiative please visit:

[HTTPS://POLICEFREESCHOOLS.ORG/MAP/](https://POLICEFREESCHOOLS.ORG/MAP/)

SUMMARY OF **KEY FINDINGS**

HOW MANY STUDENTS ARE ASSAULTED BY POLICE AND SECURITY GUARDS AT SCHOOL?

- There were **460 school policing assaults** and **1072 students assaulted** between the 2013-14 and 2023-24 school years.
- The school year with the most school policing assaults is 2022-23 with **83 assaults**.
- The school year with the most students assaulted by school police or school security guards is 2023-24 with **180 students assaulted**.

WHO IS ASSAULTED BY POLICE AND SECURITY GUARDS AT SCHOOL?

- Black students are **84% of school policing assault victims**.
- **56% of assaults** occurred in schools with a majority Black and Latine student population.

HOW ARE STUDENTS BEING ASSAULTED BY POLICE AND SECURITY GUARDS AT SCHOOL?

- **Physical assaults (39%)** and **assaults with a weapon (35%)** are the two most common types of school policing assaults.
- **Sexual assaults are the third most common type of assault (25%)** and are perpetrated against girls and young women more than their male peers. Sexual assaults have also increased over time since students returned to the classroom after COVID-19 pandemic-related closures. Jumping from **10 sexual assaults** in the 2018-19 school year to **37 sexual assaults** in the 2022-23 school year.

WHERE ARE STUDENTS GETTING ASSAULTED BY POLICE AND SECURITY GUARDS?

- **REGIONALLY:** States in the South experience the most school policing assaults - **54% of assaults against students occur in the South**.
- **STATE LEVEL:** At the state level, Florida has the highest number of assaults (**53**), followed by Texas (**39**), North Carolina (**34**), California (**26**), and South Carolina (**24**).
- **COUNTY LEVEL:** Counties with the highest number of assaults are Orange, FL (**9**), Cook, IL (**9**), Clark, NV (**8**), Maricopa, AZ (**8**), Delaware, PA (**7**), Dekalb, GA (**6**), Forsyth, NC (**6**), Dallas, TX (**6**), Montgomery, MD (**6**), and Henrico, VA (**5**).

THE LEGACY OF LYNCHING IN SCHOOL POLICING

- **There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the frequency of lynchings and the frequency of school policing assaults.** As the number of lynchings increased within a county, so too does the number of school policing assaults in the same county.
- Specifically, we find that for every additional **100 lynchings** in a county, there are an additional **4 students** assaulted by school police or security guards.

THE LEGACY OF IDA B. WELLS

Ida B. Wells was an educator, abolitionist, and investigative journalist who used the written word and oration to challenge the lynching of Black people in the Southern U.S. – a practice termed “southern lynch law.” Through her data collection and analysis of the motivations for white lynch mobs, her work debunked racist justifications for mob violence and utilized international influence to create moral and economic pressure that effectively forced governments, newspapers, and businesses to publicly denounce the practice.

Wells was born in 1862 in Holly Springs, Mississippi to enslaved parents.¹ After attending Rust College and Fisk University, she moved to Memphis, TN where she sued the Chesapeake, Ohio, & Southwestern Railroad for not allowing her to ride in the “ladies’ car” despite purchasing a first-class ticket.²

She gained notoriety for publishing her account of the ordeal and began writing regularly for the Black press under the pen name “Iola.”

In Memphis, she worked as a teacher and journalist, eventually purchasing a one-third interest in the *Free Speech and Headlight* – a Black militant journal housed in the Beale Street Baptist Church.

In 1889, Thomas H. Moss, a Black businessman, opened the People’s Grocery Store just outside of Memphis, Tennessee.³ The store soon became a huge success in an increasingly mixed race neighborhood and eventually became the fifth-largest wholesale grocery market in the country.⁴ A white man named William Barrett owned a competing grocery store and became incensed with the success of the People’s Grocery.⁵ In March 1892, following efforts to defend the store against violent attacks, Moss along with two of the grocery store workers, Calvin McDowell and Will Stewart, were lynched by a white mob.⁶ Wells, who

was a close friend of Moss, investigated the lynchings and published protest articles in the *Free Speech and Headlight* that challenged the justifications for the lynchings, demanded the arrest and conviction of all involved, and called for the boycott of Memphis city street cars.⁷

She continued to investigate and publicize lynchings while challenging their justifications, often identifying economic motivations and dispelling the false narrative that Black men were being lynched for raping white women.⁹ Wells bravely and openly challenged the morality of white men who lynched Black people and regularly raped Black women while also challenging the “moral purity” of white women who acquiesced to both.¹⁰ In doing so, she connected the subjugation of Black people through lynching with the oppression of Black women through rape and sexual violence.¹¹

IMAGE

Ida B. Wells



IMAGE

Thomas H. Moss and Calvin McDowell as illustrated in *The Appeal*.⁸



Following numerous death threats and attacks on the *Free Speech and Headlight*, Wells moved North and joined the staff of the *New York Age* and the *Chicago Conservator*.¹² Notable works of this period include *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases* and *A Red Record. Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States*.

Wells saw southern lynching as an attempt to preserve white supremacy at any cost and worked strategically to make it a global issue.

She wrote, financed, and distributed anti-lynching pamphlets at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Between 1893 and 1894, Wells gave more than a hundred lectures throughout Britain and Scotland about southern lynch law and the "moral obligation of English sentiment."¹³ In 1894, Wells' calls for international support were answered through the formation of the London Anti-lynching Committee, which focused on condemning the practice through the collection and publication of information on southern lynchings.¹⁴

Wells' national and international efforts often targeted Memphis specifically, having noticeable local effects. Despite previously justifying lynchings as necessary manifestations of a "higher law,"¹⁵ Memphis newspaper editors soon unequivocally denounced the acts of racial violence. Under the lens of international scrutiny, local civic and business leaders publicly condemned the lynching of six Black men in Memphis in 1894 (soon after Wells returned from Britain) and called for the conviction of 13 lynch mob participants.¹⁶ It would be two decades before another lynching occurred in Memphis.

In 2020, Wells was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting on the violence endured by Black Americans during the southern lynching era.¹⁷

#ASSAULTATCAMPAIGN: CHRONICLING AND PUBLICIZING SCHOOL POLICE VIOLENCE AGAINST STUDENTS OF COLOR

Throughout her career, Wells effectively challenged lynching in the South by using detailed research, investigative journalism, and widely accepted notions of Christian morality to evoke the shame of acquiescence and the fear of economic loss. Works like *Southern Horrors* and *The Red Record* published historical data that erased any benefit of a doubt and left no other conclusion than that of violent racial oppression.

The legacy of Ida B. Wells grounds our efforts to chronicle and expose policing assaults against Black and other students of color and name school policing as a tool of racial control and intimidation, not safety.

On October 26, 2015, a 16-year-old Black girl attending Spring Valley High School in Columbia, South Carolina was placed in a headlock, flipped over in her desk, and dragged and thrown across her classroom by a school police officer.¹⁸ While many of her classmates lowered their heads in fear, others recorded the attack on their phones. One of these videos went viral, exposing many to the shocking actions of Deputy Sheriff Ben Fields (referred to by students as “Officer Slam” even before the incident) which would later be known as the *#AssaultAtSpringValley*. The 16-year-old survivor and a Black girl classmate who recorded the incident were arrested, sent to juvenile detention, and charged with “disturbing a school function” - a law that was later ruled to be unconstitutionally vague.¹⁹

The Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ), a national network of over 30 youth-led and intergenerational grassroots organizations fighting to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, responded to the *#AssaultAtSpringValley* by collecting data to bring attention to the frequent and widespread abuse endured by Black and other students of color at the hands of school police and the school policing infrastructure.²⁰ Similar to Wells’ objective, AEJ hoped to debunk the myth that policing students made schools safer and expose the violent reality endured by Black students on a daily basis. AEJ member organizations and Advancement Project later formed the National Campaign for Police Free Schools (the Campaign) in 2017. Today, the Campaign includes more than 30 local youth organizing groups fighting to achieve a liberatory education system.

In the spirit of Ida B. Wells, the Campaign continues to track and publicize *#AssaultAts*, which are defined as acts of violence (including sexual violence) by law enforcement and security guards against Black and Latine students, other students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ students. The Campaign tracks incidents of police violence against students as reported in the news and on social media and publishes these incidents on the Campaign website:

WWW.POLICEFREESCHOOLS.ORG/MAP/

RECENT AND NOTABLE **#ASSAULTAT** EXAMPLES



#ASSAULTATMIAMINORTHWESTERN

DECEMBER 2023

Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL

A school security guard was arrested for offenses against students by authority figures and one count of battery. The security guard propositioned one of the students for sexual acts and physically assaulted both by slapping them on their buttocks on separate occasions.

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#ASSAULTATMOSSPOINT

NOVEMBER 2023

Moss Point School District, MS

A school resource officer was arrested and charged with three counts of sexual battery and one count of enticing a child for sexual purposes. The school resource officer was previously vice president of the Moss Point School District Board of Trustees.

#ASSAULTATNICHOLSMIDDLE

FEBRUARY 2024

Canton Public School District, MS

A school resource officer at Nichols Middle School forcefully pushed an eighth-grade girl's head against a wall and then slammed her to the ground. The events occurred in front of the student's peers as she was returning to her classroom after taking medication. After an investigation, it was concluded that the officer did not comply with established procedures and protocols, and she was terminated.



#ASSAULTATDEKALBALTERNATIVE

MARCH 2024

Dekalb County School District, GA

A DeKalb County school resource officer was placed on administrative leave after a student says the officer slammed her on her head so hard that she was knocked unconscious. A previous report stated that the same officer was seen punching a student at the school on March 11, 2024.

LYNCHING, STATE SANCTIONED VIOLENCE, AND THE RISE OF SCHOOL POLICING

Lynching is the public extrajudicial killing of a person accused of wrongdoing, including accusations of legal acts that violate the predominant social order. Lynching is a form of state-sanctioned violence because the state refuses to protect the victim prior to the lynching, refuses to stop the lynching as it occurs, is often involved in the lynchings, and refuses to pursue the lynch mob after the murder. Following the formal end of slavery in the U.S., lynchings were perpetrated by white people against Black residents to maintain political and economic dominance through intimidation and discourage them from accessing the promises of Reconstruction.²¹ This included lynching Black people for exercising voting rights, running for and holding elected office, and other political, social, and economic acts viewed by whites as stepping outside of racial boundaries established during slavery and maintained during the Jim Crow era.

1880s-1940s

The southern lynching era began during Reconstruction, most notably observed between the 1880s and 1930s.²² Over 3,265 Black people were killed by lynch mobs from 1883 to 1941, and far more were traumatized through the direct observance of mob violence, public displays of murdered victims, news stories that detailed the incidents, and the horror stories passed down through generations.²³ These state sanctioned murders and the oppressive atmosphere they created influenced institutions and individual attitudes in ways that live on as legacies of lynching.²⁴

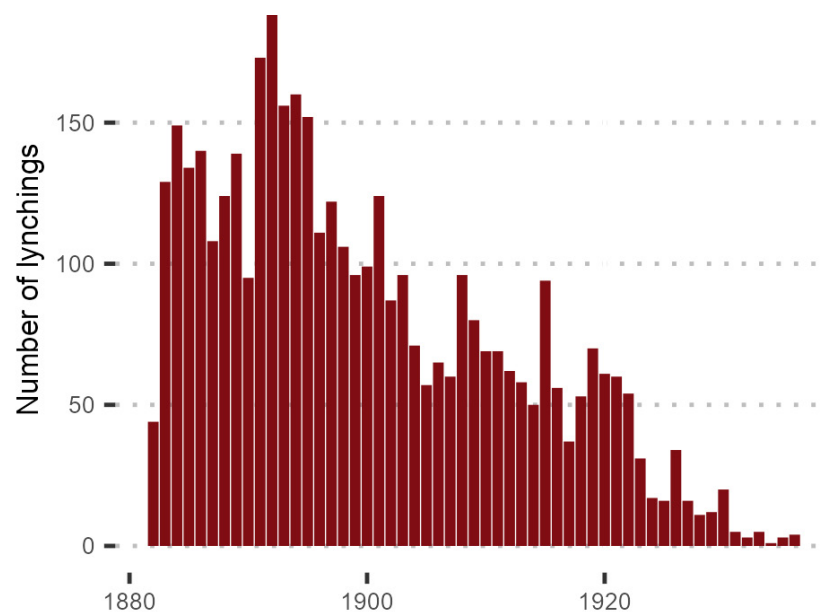


FIGURE 1
Lynchings
in the United
States, by year

MID-1900s

By the mid-1900s, following a series of civil rights wins for the Black population, new methods of racialized violence were needed because lynchings and other more overt forms of racial subjugation were no longer viable.²⁵ **After the mid-1900s, policing and the criminal legal system became the primary tools through which Blacks and other non-whites are subjugated** (e.g., capital executions, arrests, incarceration, and disenfranchisement).²⁶ In fact, research has found that a history of slavery and lynchings in a geographic area are related to occurrences of police violence during the Civil Rights Movement intended to “discourage or punish expression of Black people’s civil and human rights.”²⁷

1953

→ Flint, MI



The use of law enforcement to intimidate Black people and discourage access to civil rights permeated almost every sector of society, including the classroom. **The first School Resource Officer (SRO) program was implemented in Flint, MI in 1953, just a year before the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional in Brown v. Board of Education.**²⁸ Although Flint’s Police School Liaison Program was the first formal School Resource Officer (SRO) program, two similar projects existed in Atlanta, Georgia and Passaic, New Jersey.²⁹ The original goals of the Flint program were threefold:

01

early “detection and prevention of delinquent behavior”

02

creating a liaison between the police, school officials, and the community for “handling juvenile offenses in and around the school”

03

for these groups to communicate on “juvenile problems in a given section of the city.”³⁰

A 1975 evaluation of the Flint SRO program and 14 similar programs throughout Michigan found that SROs spent between 80 - 90% of their time “using the school as a base of operations” to conduct “traditional police functions” which included “investigations... and patrolling school areas.”³¹ The evaluation highlighted concerns related to student interrogations and sharing confidential student data – school policing tactics that are still routinely deployed to criminalize students.³²

1960s

→ Tuscan, AZ
→ Dade County, FL
→ Minneapolis, MN
→ Baltimore, MD
→ NYC, NY

The Flint program nonetheless received positive media coverage, and other states and school districts followed suit. **In the 1960s, school policing programs were established in cities throughout the U.S.,** including Tuscan, AZ (1966), Dade County, FL (1966), Minneapolis, MN (1967), Baltimore City, MD (1967), and New York City (1969).³³ We find it notable that American cities that witnessed major youth-led protests for civil rights during the 1960s and 1970s eventually formed their own school police departments, including the Los Angeles School Police Department, Baltimore City Schools Police Department, Miami-Dade County School Police Department, and the Philadelphia School Police.³⁴

1970s-1980s



By the mid-1970s, President Reagan’s “War on Drugs” created the conditions for the current era of mass incarceration by more aggressively policing people of color, expanding drug laws and mandatory sentencing, and disenfranchising entire communities. The War on Drugs, exacerbated by the rise of the Broken Windows Theory in the 1980s, was used as an opportunity to expand the school policing infrastructure and increase contact between students of color and law enforcement.³⁵

For example, the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program (D.A.R.E.), created by the Los Angeles Police Department in 1983, placed police officers in classrooms on a weekly basis to educate students on the ills of drug use.³⁶ The Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986 provided \$159 million in grant funding for drug prevention programs like D.A.R.E. and other school-based initiatives that enabled officers “to take necessary action in cases of drug possession and supplying of drugs and alcohol to the student population.”³⁷ In 1994, Congress passed the Gun Free Schools Act that included zero tolerance policies requiring exclusionary discipline and referrals to law enforcement.³⁸ The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act was passed the same year, creating the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program which provided almost \$715 million in funding for SROs between 1999 and 2005.³⁹

1990s



In a 1996 speech in favor of the 1994 Crime bill, Hillary Clinton made her now infamous statement that some youth “are often the kinds of kids that are called ‘superpredators’ — no conscience, no empathy. We can talk about why they ended up that way, but first, we have to bring them to heel.”⁴⁰ This demonization of youth of color was completely unfounded, evidenced by declining youth crime rates and a 22% reduction in youth homicides the previous year.⁴¹ **Nonetheless, the superpredator narrative and war on drugs agenda transformed public school campuses and criminalized students** through policing and zero tolerance policies.

The school policing infrastructure expanded during this period and garnered more support after the 1999 Columbine High School shooting. This and subsequent school shootings altered society’s view of school policing, and despite occurring in predominately white schools, are still used as justification for school policing measures that target and harm Black youth. As expected, this increase in the number of school police coincides with a rise in the criminalization of Black students.⁴²

NOW



The number of police officers in schools is currently at an all-time high, and school police remain concentrated in schools with populations that are majority low-income students of color.⁴³ **In 1997, only 10% of schools nationwide had a law enforcement officer - a figure that rose to 58% by the 2017-18 school year.**⁴⁴ The number of school districts forming their own school police departments has also risen, **more than doubling in the last 20 years from 162 school district police departments in 2000 to at least 410 in 2024.**⁴⁵ In total, **state and federal government investments in school resource officers since 1999 are close to \$2 billion,**⁴⁶ and there are currently between **20,000 and 30,000 police officers** in elementary, middle and high schools throughout the U.S.⁴⁷

THE INSTITUTIONAL AND ATTITUDINAL LEGACIES OF LYNCHING IN THE CLASSROOM

Southern lynch law was a pervasive, brutal practice that continues to influence the creation and administration of public institutions. The legacies of lynching live on through institutional and attitudinal forms of racism that occur when state institutions use state-sanctioned violence against Black people as a form of control and intimidation.⁴⁸ Existing research has found several examples of institutional legacies of lynching. For instance, geographic areas with a history of lynching are associated with an increase in the use of the death penalty.⁴⁹ Moreover, authorities are less likely to prosecute hate crimes in places with a history of lynching and large populations of Black people.⁵⁰

While the criminal legal system is often viewed as the mechanism for modern racial oppression, the institutional legacies of lynching also extend into the classroom. Corporal punishment is used more frequently in counties where more lynchings took place and is disproportionately used against Black students.⁵¹ These findings accompany other indicators of institutional racism in education. For example, Black students nationwide are disproportionately disciplined at school and are more likely to be suspended and expelled than their white peers despite not exhibiting higher rates of misbehavior.⁵² Black students are also disproportionately criminalized at school, demonstrated by higher rates of school-based arrests and referrals to law enforcement.⁵³ Intersectional data on race and gender has shown that Black girls are three times more likely to be referred to law enforcement and almost four times more likely to be arrested at school than white girls.⁵⁴ Moreover, strict and harmful security measures are disparately used against students of color, including the use of metal detectors, performing random searches of students and their property, controlling access to campuses, and using surveillance cameras.⁵⁵

Taken together, these findings show that the institution of public education continues to be a mechanism for racial oppression.

The attitudinal legacies of lynching function via the continued influence of “slavery or lynching on White racist attitudes.”⁵⁶ Studies on how Black students are perceived shed light on the potential impact of the attitudinal legacies of lynching on school policing. For example, a study found that police officers perceived Black boys as four and a half years older than their actual age and viewed them as less childlike and more culpable than white boys of the same age suspected of committing the same crimes.⁵⁷ Similarly, research has shown that adults view Black girls as less innocent and in need of less support and protection than their white peers.⁵⁸

These racist attitudes toward Black students have significant carceral consequences. When adults view Black students as older and less innocent, situations that should more appropriately be viewed as opportunities for support or genuine care are seen as criminal acts. These biases impact the type and severity of the school-based response, such as: when teachers and administrators call police and for what behaviors; the degree of force used by school police officers or school security guards when detaining or arresting a student; and whether school police officers choose to release, arrest, or detain a student following an interaction.

The institutional and attitudinal legacies of lynching are more pronounced in the American South where white people lynched and terrorized Black people more frequently. Given the prior findings on the relationship between lynchings and subsequent state sanctioned violence (specifically the use of the death penalty and school-based corporal punishment), we assert that schools continue to be a site of racial oppression and control through school policing. Later in this report we show that, similar to the correlations between lynchings and the death penalty and corporal punishment, there is a statically significant positive relationship between the number of lynchings and the number of school policing assaults at the county level.

SCHOOL POLICING IS INEFFECTIVE AND DOES NOT PREVENT SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Proponents of school policing often cite school shootings and the need to reduce violence as a primary reason for stationing police at schools. However, studies continue to demonstrate that police in schools do not prevent violence. Research on school-based policing found that SROs do not prevent gun-related incidents at schools, but rather increase the use of exclusionary discipline (i.e., suspensions and expulsions) and school-based arrests and referrals to law enforcement, especially for students with disabilities and Black students.⁵⁹ Moreover, a study of 133 school shootings found “no association between having an armed officer and deterrence of violence.”⁶⁰

In fact, research found that none of the current methods to harden schools and prevent gun violence are supported by empirical evidence that proves their effectiveness.⁶¹ Despite this lack of evidence, policy makers and law enforcement officials continue to call for more school policing in response to school shootings. Following the May 2022 shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Community Oriented Policing Services recommended increasing police involvement in the day-to-day operations of schools and militarizing school campuses.⁶² Similarly, after the shooting at The Covenant School in Nashville, the Tennessee General Assembly called a special session on school safety, during which it considered legislation that would allow local law enforcement agencies to assign police to schools without the approval or consent of the local school district.⁶³

IMAGE

Dorothy Bridget Davis and Henry Hobdy are turned away from Murphy High School in Mobile, Alabama by state troopers acting under orders of Governor George Wallace, 1963, *Library of Congress*

Research confirms that these school policing measures will not reduce violence.

Conversely, they will increase the number of Black students pushed out of school, arrested, and ushered into the youth and adult criminal legal systems.

It is clear that a call for more police in schools is a call for more state sanctioned violence and the continued subjugation of Black youth.



SCHOOL POLICING PLACES STUDENTS AT RISK OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Policing students is not only ineffective at preventing violence and disproportionately harmful to Black students, it also places students at risk of sexual assault and harassment by school police officers and security guards. → **A recent Washington Post investigation found that 1 in 10 of the state and local law enforcement officers charged with a crime between 2005 through 2022 were charged with a crime related to child sexual abuse.**⁶⁴

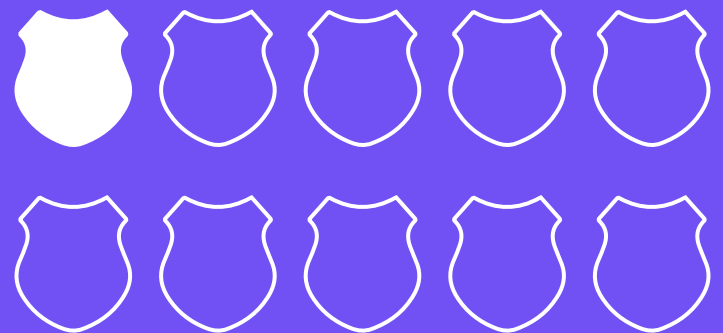
Moreover, a national study found that SROs are significantly more likely than other police officers to be arrested for sex-related crimes and that most of the arrests were for sex-related crimes in which the SRO targeted a victim enrolled at the school where they were assigned.⁶⁵

Police sexual violence disproportionately impacts girls and women of color and is the second most reported form of police misconduct following excessive force.⁶⁶ The asymmetrical power dynamic and infamous “blue wall of silence” lead to both an underreporting of sexual violence and a lack of accountability after incidents of sexual violence are reported.⁶⁷

A recent study found that Black girls and gender nonconforming youth experienced sexual violence and sexual harassment from adults at school which included police and other security personnel.⁶⁸ A similar case study highlighted disturbing and routine acts of sexual harassment and disparate treatment perpetrated by school police and security guards against Black girls in Miami-Dade County Public Schools and the subsequent lack of accountability.⁶⁹ Our analysis affirms these studies, finding that **sexual assault is the third most common type of school police assault, accounting for 25% of all assaults** analyzed in this report, and that girls are the majority of victims.

Just as Ida B. Wells connected state sanctioned violence against Black people to sexual violence against Black women, our analysis illustrates an intersection of violence at which school policing is both a tool for oppressing Black students and a means of sexual violence against girls.

**1 IN 10 STATE & LOCAL
LAW ENFORCEMENT
OFFICERS CHARGED
WITH A CRIME WERE
CHARGED WITH A CRIME
RELATED TO CHILD
SEXUAL ABUSE**



METHODOLOGY

The National Campaign for Police Free Schools partnered with Dr. Kaneesha Johnson, Post-doctoral Fellow at University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, to analyze the #AssaultAt database to better understand the extent to which Black and other students of color are harmed through the violence of school policing.

IDENTIFICATION AND ENTRY OF CASES

A comprehensive search for all news reports on assaults against students by school-based police was conducted by Advancement Project and AEJ staff, identifying all such cases reported in the news media between August 1, 2011 and July 31, 2024. All assaults included in this analysis were documented in local and/or national news outlets, including newspapers, broadcast news, and online news sources. The Huffington Post’s 2018 tracker of the use of tasers, pepper spray, and physical abuse by school police against students was used as a reference against which to check the completeness of coverage of our database.⁷⁰ Because many assaults by police on students are never reported in the media and there is no agency that systemically tracks such assaults, the data presented here are most likely an underestimate of the total number of police assaults against students in and around K-12 schools.

Based on this research, **481 incidents involving an assault on a K-12 student were identified from school years 2011-12 to 2023-24.**⁷¹ The web-based #AssaultAt map and database contain only assaults against Black and Latine students, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities. To ensure accurate assessments of the distribution of assaults across racial and other population categories, additional collection of incidents sought to identify *all* cases of police assault against students, regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability status.

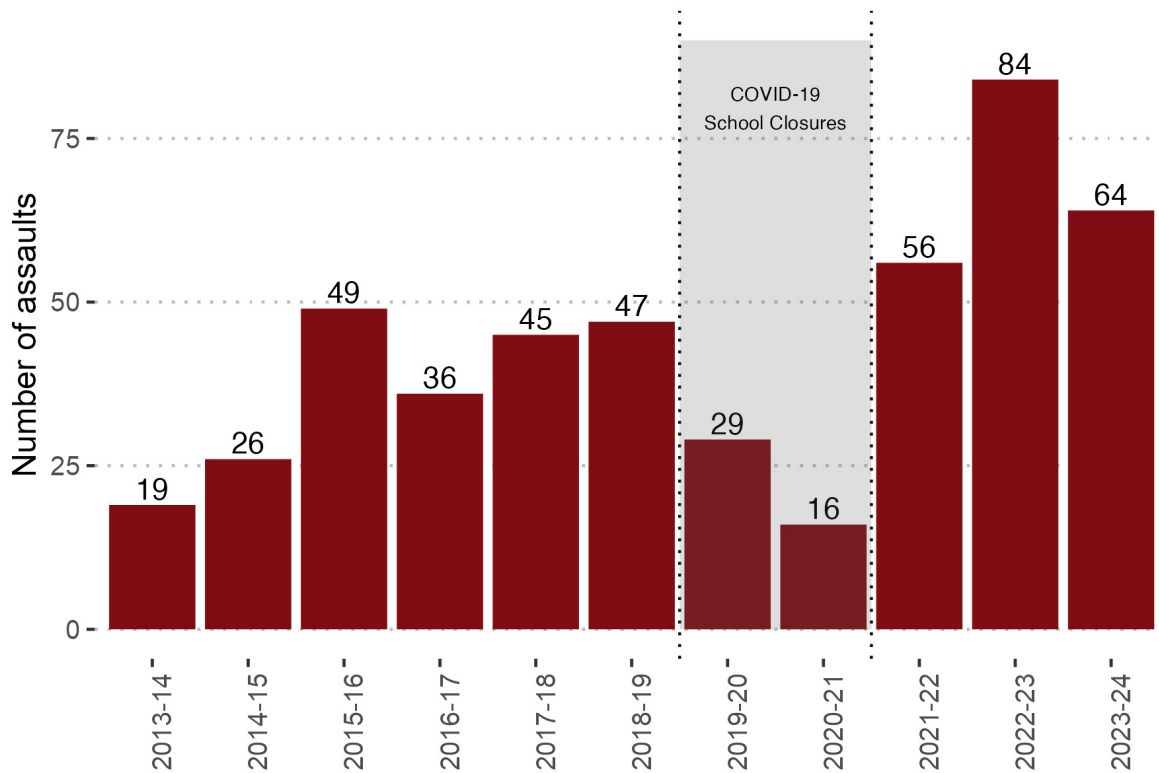
CODING AND ANALYSIS OF CASES: SEE APPENDIX

HAVE POLICE ASSAULTS ON STUDENTS INCREASED OVER TIME?

Despite studies showing that school police do not prevent violence and detrimentally impact the learning environment,⁷² policy-makers continue to call for more school police and increased school militarization. The data suggests that this has led to an increase in police violence at school.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were around 30-40 reported assaults in schools per school year, with no single year accounting for more than 50 assaults. However, since returning to the classroom, there has been an astonishing increase in the number of assaults. **In the 2021-22 school year there were 56 assaults reported, in the 2022-23 school year there were 84 assaults, and in the 2023-24 school year there were 64 assaults** reported.

FIGURE 2
Number of School Policing Assaults

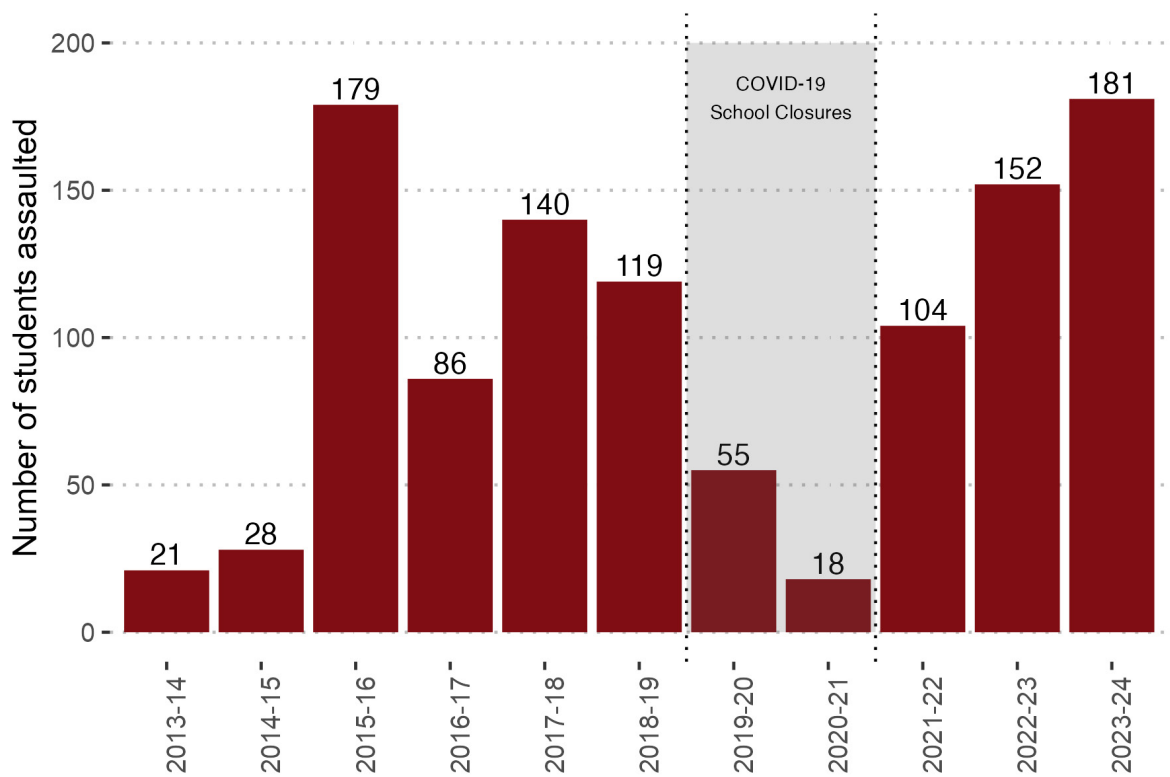


Due to the nature of some assaults, there are likely more students being assaulted than incidents. For example, if an SRO uses pepper spray against a group of 20 students, then it would be counted as a single assault.

Similar to the trends in officer assaults, there was a slow decline prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and a sharp increase in the number of students being assaulted since returning to school in person full time.

School year 2023-24 showed the highest number of students being assaulted, surpassing the 2015-16 school year for the most students being assaulted by an SRO.

FIGURE 3
Number of Students Assaulted



A school resource officer at Central High School physically assaulted an Indigenous autistic student, leaving him with contusions and a concussion. The officer slammed the student face first onto the concrete despite the crowd urging the officer to stop trying to detain the student.

WHICH STUDENTS ARE MOST LIKELY TO BE VICTIMS OF SCHOOL POLICE VIOLENCE?

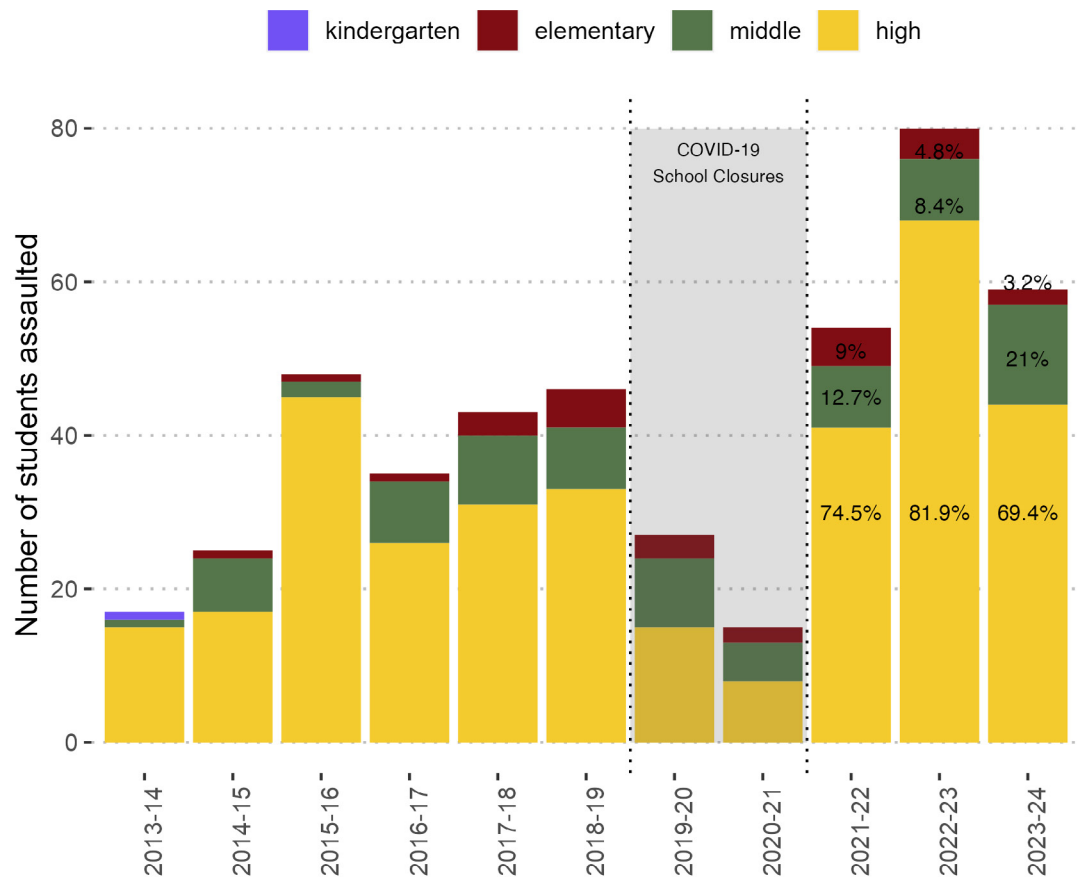
Beyond the number of students that are assaulted over time, the data also allows us to look at *who* is being assaulted.

SCHOOL LEVEL

We begin our analysis by detailing the victims of school policing assaults by school level. There were **470 students assaulted** where we could determine the school level of the student, **360 (76.6 %) of them were high schoolers, 82 (17.4 %) of them were in middle school, 27 (5.7 %) were in elementary school,** and one was a kindergartner. The most recent school year has the highest number of assaults against middle schoolers across all assaults.

FIGURE 4

School Level of Assaulted Students

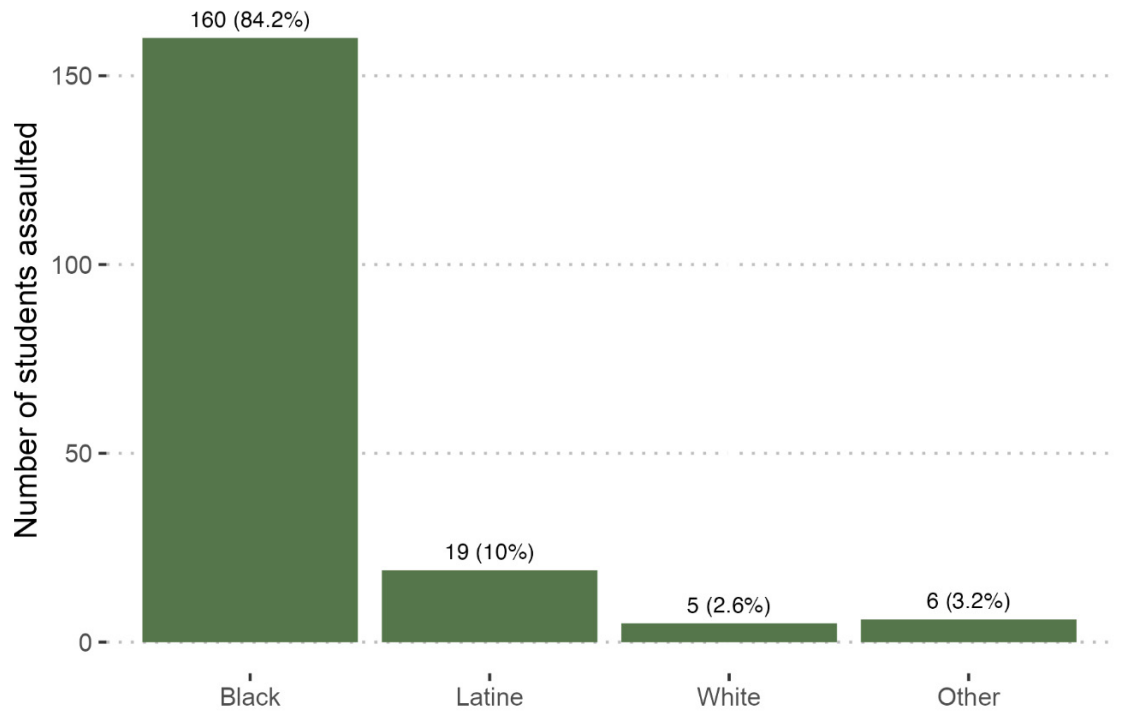


RACE OF STUDENTS

We were able to determine the race of 190 students that were assaulted. Of the 190 students whose race could be identified, vast majority were Black: **160 students were identified as Black (84.2%), 19 were Latine students, 5 were white students, and 6 students were coded as some other race.**

FIGURE 5

Race of
Assaulted Students



SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

Though individual race markers are incomplete, we were able to estimate the percent of students enrolled in a school that are either Black or Hispanic for every school in the U.S.⁷³

Of the schools that appear in the *#AssaultAt* database, the majority of assaults occur in schools that have higher percent of enrolled Black and Latine students. Thirty-six percent of U.S. schools have **more than 50% of students being Black or Latine**, whereas **56% of schools where assaults occur are in schools with majority Black or Hispanic students.**

#ASSAULTATWOODLAWN

OCTOBER 2023 | Woodlawn, PA

While on his way to school, a 16-year-old Black male student was physically assaulted by two officers after trying to speak to them following a fender bender with their patrol vehicle. One of the officers put the student in a headlock and punched him in the head while the other officer grabbed and pulled the student from behind.

FIGURE 6

Percent Black and Latine, U.S. schools

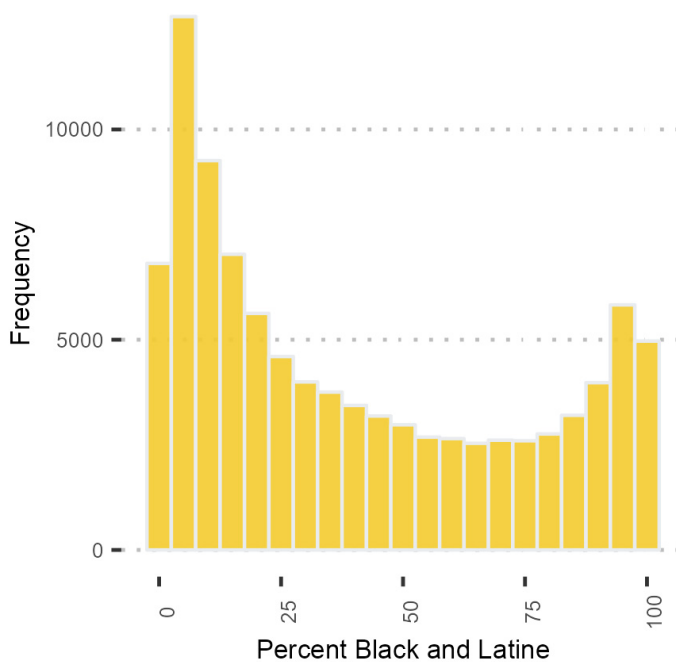
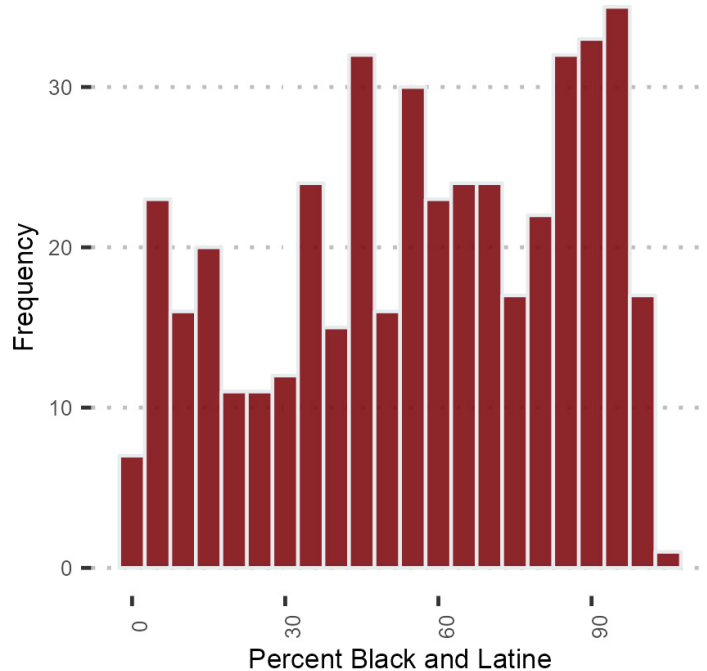


FIGURE 7

Percent Black and Latine, *#AssaultAt* Schools

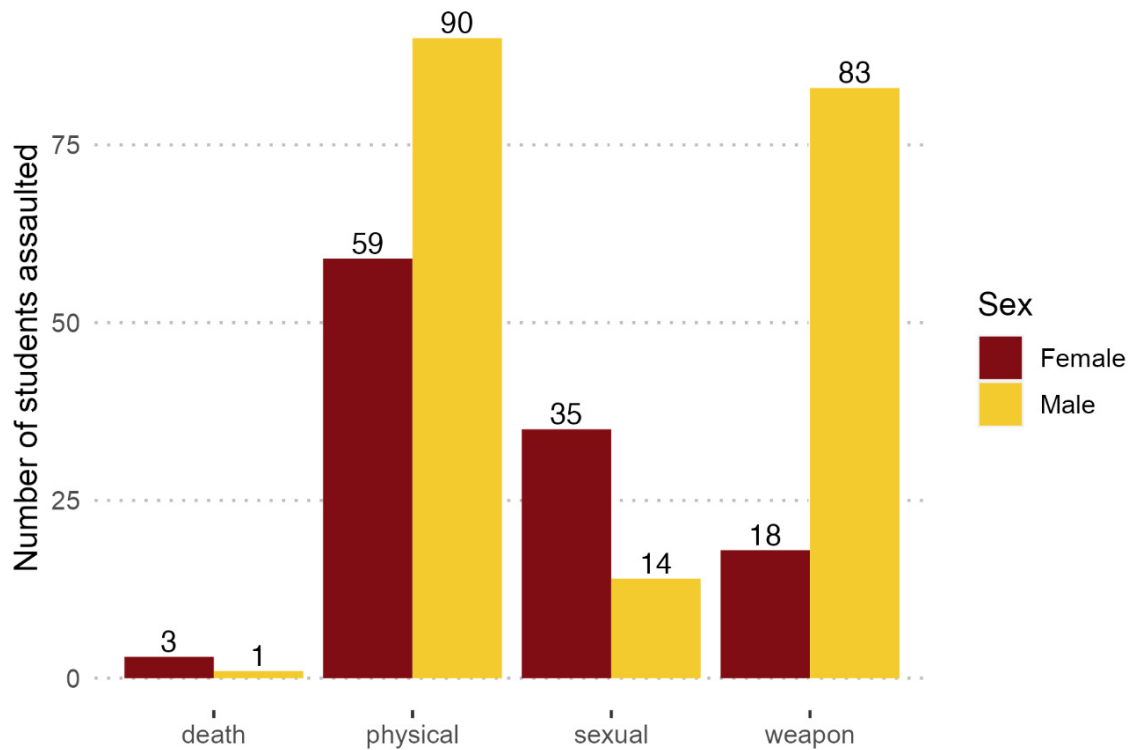


SEX OF STUDENTS

We were able to determine the sex of the student (as noted in media outlets as either male or female and not a student's self-expressed gender) for **303 student victims**. There are more assaults against **male (188)** than **female (115) students**. Moreover, more male students are **physically assaulted (90)** and **assaulted with a weapon (83)**. More **female students (35)** are sexually assaulted than **male students (14)**.

FIGURE 8

Sex of Assaulted Students, by Assault Type



WHAT TYPES OF ASSAULTS DO SCHOOL POLICE COMMIT?

Viral videos like the *#AssaultAtSpringValley* depict adults inflicting violent harm on children and youth at all school levels. Middle schoolers are tased, elementary school students as young as five are placed in handcuffs, children are sexually assaulted, and youth are shot dead – all by officers whose self-proclaimed purpose is to protect and serve.⁷⁴ Our analysis provides a clear picture of the types of harms inflicted upon students by policing schools.

We categorize the type of assault into four general buckets: physical, weapon, sexual, and death. **Physical assaults**, which include body slamming, punching, choke holds, and other instances where an SRO or security guard physically abuses a student, is the most common form of assault (176). **Weapon assaults**, which includes pepper spray, taser, use of a baton, and a gun, is the second most common assault (158).

Sexual assaults are the third most common assault (114), this category includes both physical sexual assaults, such as rape, and non-physical sexual assaults. **Four students were killed from an SRO assault.**

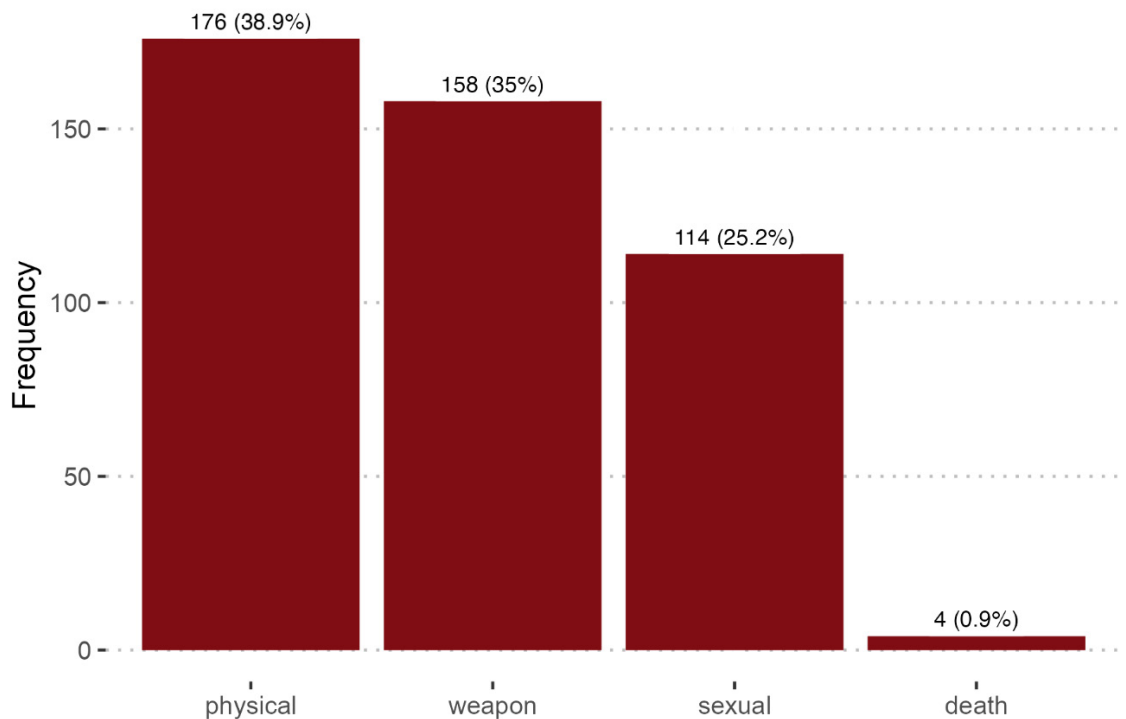
#ASSAULTATROCKHILL

OCTOBER 2023 | Rock Hill, SC

A former Rock Hill security guard was arrested for sexual battery of a student 16 to 17 years of age. The security guard texted the student inappropriate messages, which were not responded to favorably and were reported to officials. The student also reported that the security guard sexually assaulted two other students that she was aware of.

FIGURE 9

Type of School Policing Assault

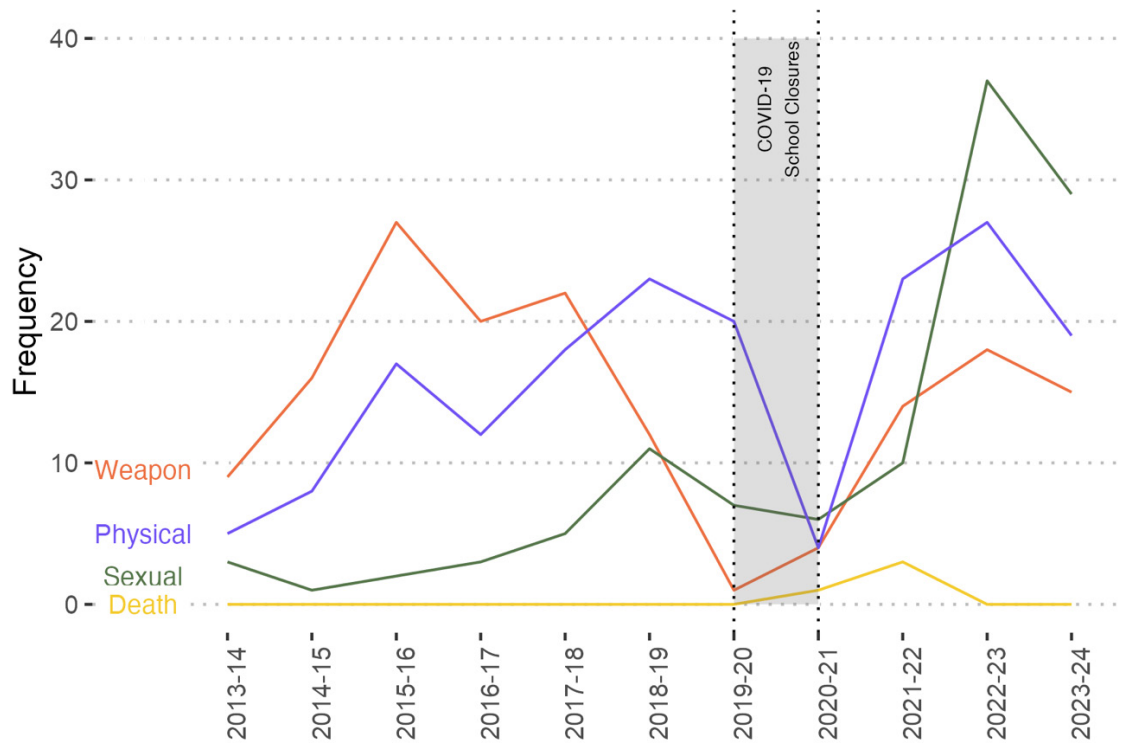


INCREASE IN SEXUAL ASSAULTS AGAINST STUDENTS

Examining the type of assaults over time shows that there has been an increase in most forms of assaults, most notably, sexual assaults experience the highest increase since students returned to schools following the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, the 2018-19 school year was the school year with the highest number of sexual assaults (10). **Since physically returning to schools, the 2022-23 school year showed an increase in sexual assaults by more than 300%, with 37 sexual assaults.**

FIGURE 10

Type of School Policing Assaults, by School Year



TYPES OF WEAPONS USED

When a weapon was used in an assault the use of **a taser was the most common (93)**, followed by **pepper spray (61)**, **baton (2)**, and **gun (2)**.

Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, **tasers were the most used weapon, reaching 19 uses** in the 2015-16 school year. Since returning to school, **pepper spray has become the weapon of choice** among school policing assaults, **reaching 11 uses** in the 2023-24 school year.

FIGURE 11

Type of Weapon Used

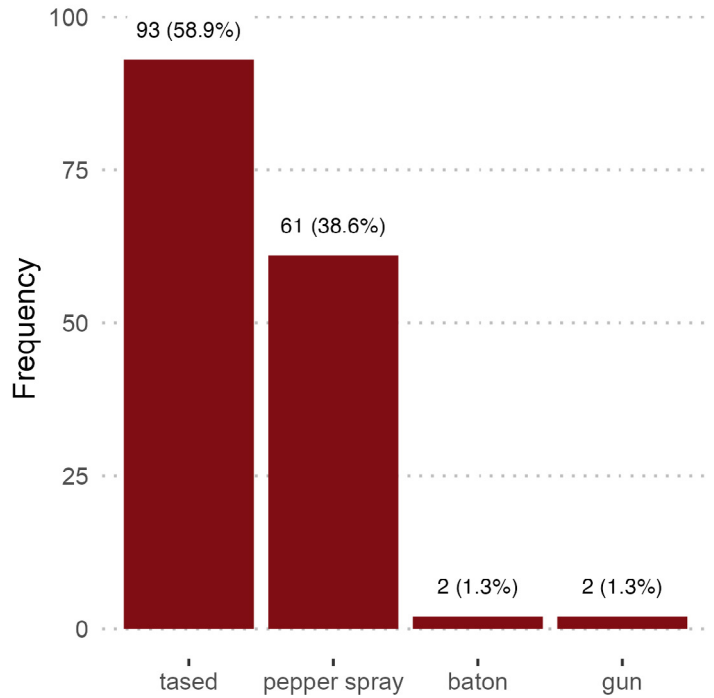
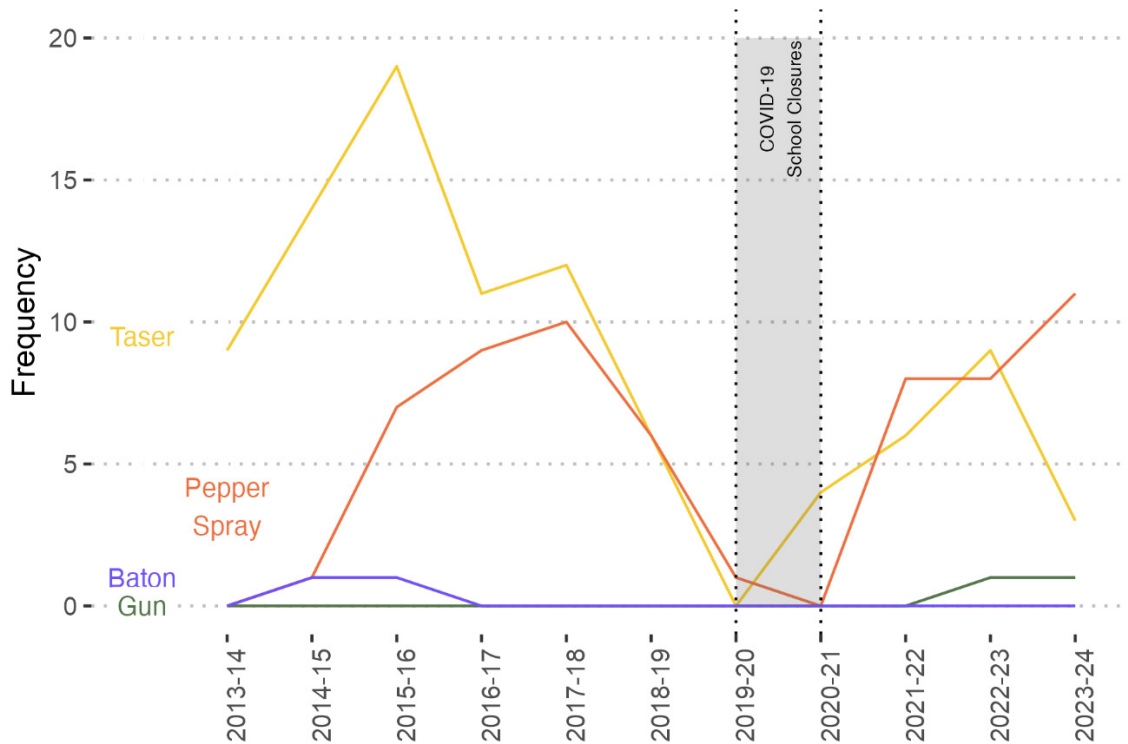


FIGURE 12

Type of weapon used, by school year



FEBRUARY, 2023 | Oviedo, FL

Parents of a 9-year-old student with disabilities filed a federal lawsuit based on extreme behavior and excessive force by an SRO and a police officer. The student was handcuffed even though the county’s policy forbids the use of handcuffs on students with disabilities before the sixth grade. The two officers continued to antagonize the student while handcuffed and threatening him with jail time. The student suffered both physical and mental harm.

WHERE DO POLICE ASSAULTS AGAINST STUDENTS USUALLY OCCUR?

The legacies of lynching, as extended through the War on Drugs into the modern era of criminalization and incarceration, also impact where school policing occurs. The use of state sanctioned violence to control and intimidate Black and other people of color are reflected in our analysis, which found that schools with higher populations of Black and Latine students and low-income youth experience more police assaults. Moreover, the data highlight regional disparities that align with the southern horrors of lynching, demonstrating that institutional and attitudinal legacies impact the choice of who, when, and where to police in schools.

REGION

Despite residents of the South (states included in this category: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Texas, South Carolina, and North Carolina) comprising just 38.9% of the population and 39.1% of the school population,⁷⁵ **53.9% of assaults against students occur in the South.**

STATE

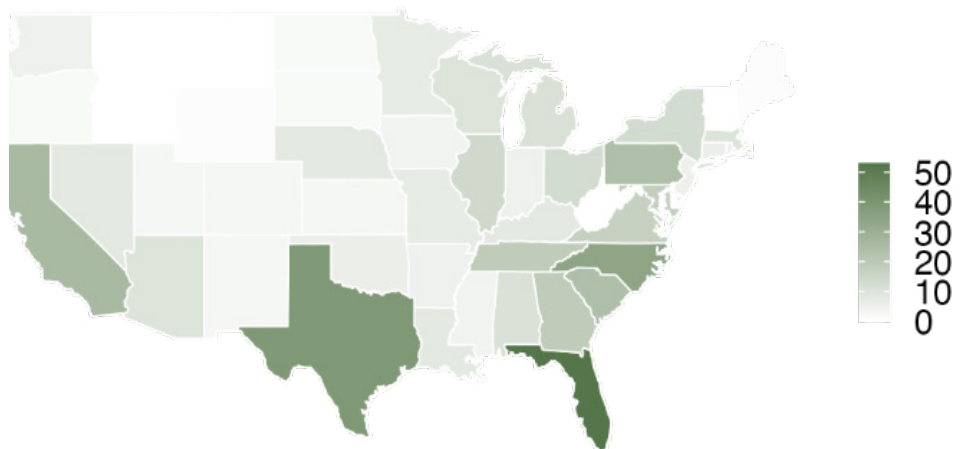
At the state level, we find that **Florida has the highest number of assaults (53)**, followed by Texas (39), North Carolina (34), California (26), and South Carolina (24).

COUNTY

Though assaults against students are widespread across the country, there are a handful of counties that are particularly egregious. Counties with the highest number of assaults are Orange, FL (9), Cook, IL (9), Clark, NV (8), Maricopa, AZ (8), Delaware, PA (7), Dekalb, GA (6), Forsyth, NC (6), Dallas, TX (6), Montgomery, MD (6), and Henrico, VA (5).

FIGURE 13

School Policing Assaults, by State



LEGACY OF LYNCHING IN SCHOOL POLICE ASSAULTS

On November 7th, 1887 an unnamed Black man was lynched in Caddo Parish, Louisiana for the alleged offense of having relations with a white woman. In the years that followed, an additional **22 Black people would be lynched by white mobs:** John Coleman, William Davis, Felton Brigman, Jennie Steer, Philip Davis, Walter Carter, Clinton Thomas, Thomas Jackson, Andrew Harris, Simmie Thomas, Thomas Miles, Charles Tyson, Ernest Williams, Frank Williams, Earl Hamilton, Jobie Lewis, Elijah Durden, Charles Washington, Beard Henderson, Watkins Lewis, Jesse Hammett, and Leslie Legget. Caddo parish has the second highest frequency of recorded lynchings in the U.S.

In the same parish and almost 130 years later to the date in 2017, a Black Northwood High School student with autism was walking back to class from the bathroom when he was tased by an SRO for stimming, a common self-soothing behavior among people with autism.⁷⁶ In April 2024, around 12 miles from Northwood High, at Magnolia School of Excellence in Caddo, Louisiana, **an SRO sprayed around 20 students with pepper spray.**⁷⁷ Northwood High School and Magnolia School of Excellence are **40% and 61% Black** respectively.

The fact that the **23 lynchings and assaults against 21 students** occurred in the same county is not a mere coincidence. The change in the nature of state sanctioned violence against Black bodies has manifested in not only an increased likelihood for a Black student to be assaulted, but an increased likelihood for a Black student to be assaulted on the same soil that Black bodies were lynched.

Using a combination of two prominent lynching datasets, the Tolnay-Beck and Seguin-Rigby data, we can estimate the number of lynchings that occurred at the county level between 1882 and 1936. The height of lynchings occurred in the late 1800s and, like school policing assaults, the majority of lynchings were confined to southern states.

We use an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS)⁷⁸ regression to test whether there is a relationship between the number of lynchings (independent variable) and the frequency of SRO assaults (dependent variable), and we control for the under 18 population at the county level. Though this analysis does not allow us to assert whether there is a causal relationship between the two forms of state sanctioned violence, it does allow us to describe the relationship between them.

We find that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the frequency of lynchings and the frequency of school policing assaults. In other words, as the number of lynchings increased within a county, so too does the number of school policing assaults in the same county.

Specifically, we find that **→ for every additional 100 lynchings in a county, there are an additional 4 students assaulted** by school police or security guards.

As demonstrated by Ida B. Wells in the late 1800s, state violence against Black bodies was widespread and multifaceted. The state stood beside white mobs who took thousands of Black lives under the false pretense of ensuring safety for white lives. Since 2013, **there have been at least 460 youth, the vast majority of whom are Black, assaulted at the hands of state officials** under the false pretense of ensuring safety in schools. Though the practice of lynching has faded away, its underlying sentiment persists.

FIGURE 14

Lynchings by County

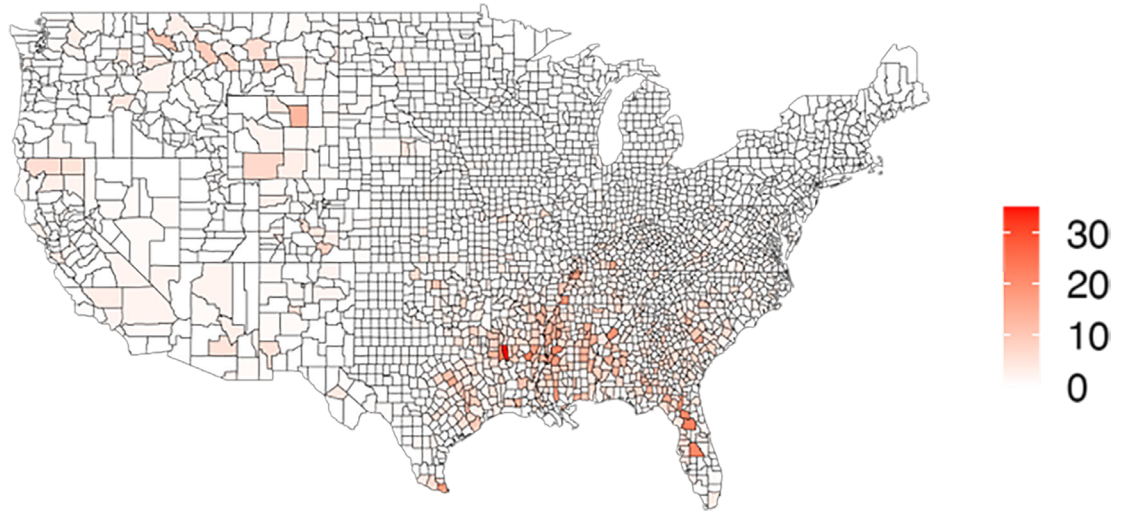
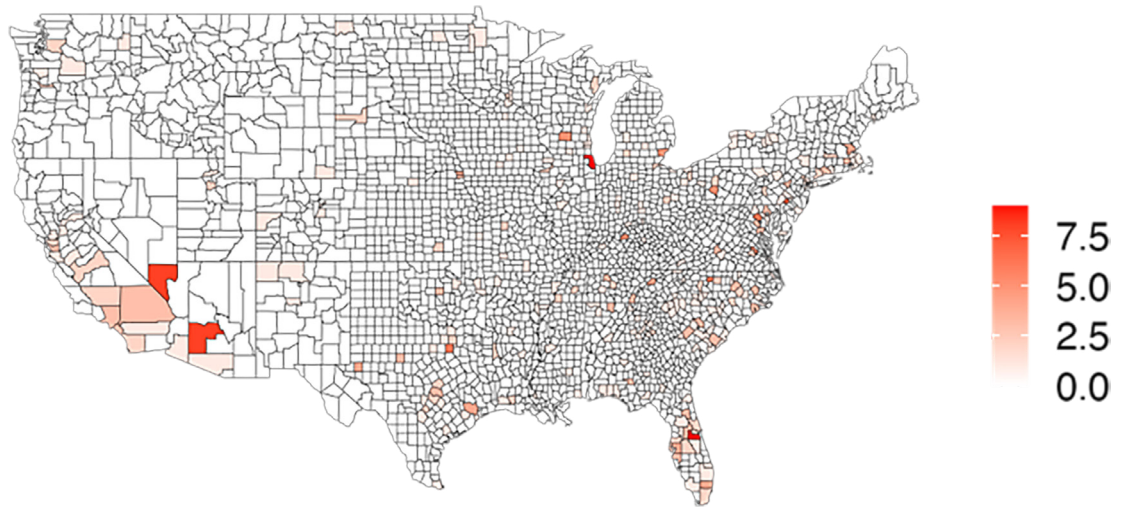
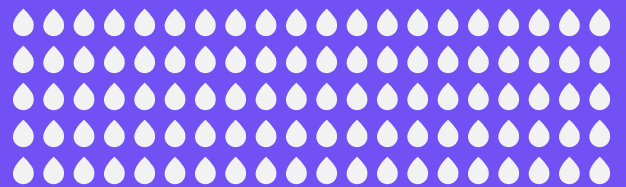


FIGURE 15

Assaults by County



**FOR EVERY 100 LYNCHINGS
PER COUNTY, THERE ARE 4
STUDENTS ASSAULTED**



CONCLUSION

School policing assaults against Black and other students of color are acts of state sanctioned violence that extend the legacies of lynching into the modern classroom. This is demonstrated by a statistically significant positive relationship between the number of lynchings and the number of assaults at the county level. Just as southern lynch law was used to oppress and control Black southerners attempting to exercise their civil rights, school police officers and security guards, especially those placed in southern schools, are tools of violent intimidation used against Black students who represent 84.2% of all school policing assaults. Moreover, school policing continues to result in school-based police sexual violence and leads to increased suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests that disproportionately impact Black students and students with disabilities.

After returning to the classroom, students were not greeted with increased resources to deal with the trauma of a global pandemic. Instead, they were met with more police, security guards, and hardened school campuses. This is particularly true for Black students. Although the increased presence of police is ostensibly to promote safety and prevent violence, it has led to increases in physical and sexual assaults of students by school police and security guards.

Just as Ida B. Wells told the truth about southern lynching, we must tell the truth about school policing and the false pretense of safety and public order. School policing does not prevent violence, it is a harbinger of it. It is the reason why many Black students do not feel safe at school and the means through which they are criminalized and denied the benefits of public education.

To create equitable and nurturing school environments, we must first stop policing students and remove the vestiges of lynching, slavery, and Jim Crow from all educational systems. We must implement education policies that promote care and compassion, not control and fear. We must allocate resources based on the needs voiced by those directly impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline and police brutality. It is time to listen to young people who know what they need to feel safe and supported in schools.

In *A Red Record*, Ida B. Wells instructed her readers to “help disseminate the facts contained in this book by bringing them to the knowledge of every one with whom you come in contact, to the end that public sentiment may be revolutionized. Let the facts speak for themselves, with you as a medium.”⁷⁹ We ask the same of you.

For more information about the National Campaign for Police Free Schools and the #AssaultAt initiative please visit the website and #AssaultAt map at

WWW.POLICEFREESCHOOLS.ORG/MAP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was a collaborative effort between Advancement Project and Alliance for Educational Justice. This report is authored by Tyler Whittenberg, Deputy Director of the Opportunity to Learn program at Advancement Project, and Kaneesha Johnson, Post-doctoral Fellow at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. Previous releases of the report may be found here:

- ***#AssaultAtSpringValley:***

An analysis of police violence against Black and Latine students at school. (2022).

AVAILABLE AT:

POLICEFREESCHOOLS.ORG/RESOURCES/ASSAULTAT-SPRING-VALLEY-AN-ANALYSIS-OF-POLICE-VIOLENCE

- ***#AssaultAtSpringValley: 2023***

An analysis of police violence against Black and Latine students in schools.

AVAILABLE AT:

POLICEFREESCHOOLS.ORG/RESOURCES/ASSAULTATSPRINGVALLEY-2023-ANALYSIS-OF-POLICE-VIOLENCE

We thank the organizations that make up the National Campaign for Police Free Schools and all of the young people and community members fighting for a liberatory education. Special thanks are also extended to: Jonathan Stith, National Director of the Alliance for Educational Justice; Maria Fernandez, Managing Director of Campaign Strategy at Advancement Project; Katherine Dunn, former Program Director of Opportunity to Learn Program at Advancement Project; Megan Rickman Blackwood, Ph.D. Candidate at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill; and everyone who contributed to the organizing and movement building that made this report possible.

The *#AssaultAt* concept and database was created by the Alliance for Educational Justice, a national network of over 30 youth-led and intergenerational grassroots organizations fighting to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. The Alliance for Educational Justice and Advancement Project continue to collect this data and support the National Campaign for Police Free Schools, which includes more than 30 local intergenerational organizing groups fighting to achieve a liberatory education system.

APPENDIX

CODING AND ANALYSIS OF CASES

DATE OF ASSAULTS

Although the full dataset compiled by the Advancement Project and the AEJ contains assaults dating back to 2011, due to the low number of assaults in the first two years of data gathering, we retain only those assaults that occur from the 2013-14 school year and beyond. This drops 30 assaults from the database for analysis

There were a number of assaults that spanned multiple years. For this report, we count the assault as occurring on the date that the abuse was discovered or when a complaint related to the assault was filed, whichever occurred first.

TYPES OF ASSAULTS

It is not uncommon for an assault incident to include multiple forms of assault. For example, an SRO may tackle a student to the ground and then tase them. Previous versions of this report counted the multiple ways that an SRO or security guard assaulted students. For this version of the report, we counted each assault type as mutually exclusive, meaning that each assault is only categorized as a single type of assault. The order of operations for counting assaults was: death, sexual, weapon, physical. There are 12 assaults where the assault type could not be determined

NUMBER OF STUDENTS ASSAULTED

Each school assault is originally counted as an assault incident. This means that if an SRO sexually assaulted a student, then it is counted as a single assault, and if an SRO pepper sprays a group of students, then this is also counted as a single assault. Recognizing that counting in this way underestimates the number of students that experience an assault, we estimate the number of students that are involved in each assault.

In some instances of group assaults, media coverage does not give a specific number, and often uses language such as “crowd”, “large group”, and “several.” Where a number is not specified, we watch video footage of these assaults to estimate the number of students involved in the assault.

RACE AND SEX OF STUDENTS

In documenting the race and sex of the students, we first read through media coverage and supporting documents and made a note of the race and sex. For cases that could not be determined with that method, we watched video recordings of the assaults. By using this strategy, we made determinations of the race of 190 students and the sex of 303 students.

SCHOOL LEVEL

Based on the school in which the assault occurred, the student’s grade, or the age of the student, we estimate the school level that the assault occurred in (kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high schools). We were unable to identify the school level or grade for 11 assaults.

GEOGRAPHY

Though school analyses are typically performed at the school district level, because we are comparing assaults in schools to lynching and other county level demographics, we use the county as the main level of analysis. Because school districts do not always correlate to the county level, we count each school as belonging to the county that the school is physically located within.

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