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## Pasadena leads the way in reducing police role on campuses

Pasadena school officials have agreed to handle most student offenses with campus-based discipline rather than citations or arrests.

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By Teresa Watanabe  
September 21, 2013 | 6:11 p.m.

A new agreement to limit the role of Pasadena police on school campuses marks a California milestone in the national movement to minimize student encounters with the criminal justice system, advocates say.

As school districts in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland and elsewhere grapple with rising concerns about police actions on campuses, Pasadena officials have agreed to handle all but the most serious offenses with school-based disciplinary actions rather than citations and arrests. Police officers will intervene only in cases involving assault, weapons, narcotics sales and other major offenses that state law requires them to handle.

David Sapp, an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, said the pact was "unlike anything we've seen" statewide.



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"No other school district has attempted, in such a clear and defined manner, to identify the exact circumstances when police may engage," Sapp said. "There was a shared understanding that minor things shouldn't lead to police citations and arrests."

The agreement, unanimously approved last week by the Pasadena City Council following passage by the city school board in July, runs counter to the "zero tolerance" policies that took hold after the 1999 school massacre in Littleton, Colo. The mass school shooting in Newtown, Conn., last year amplified calls to expand campus police, whose numbers grew nationally by 40% between 1997 and 2007, according to federal data.

But civil rights and community groups have pushed to reduce police involvement in schools and treat student misbehavior with strategies shown to be more effective, such as incentives and conflict mediation.

They cite numerous studies showing that having more police on campus has led to more arrests of students, often for minor offenses such as disorderly conduct and fights. Research has also shown that arrests and other contact with the criminal justice system is linked to higher dropout rates.

The Los Angeles Unified School District's campus police force, the largest in the nation, had been criticized for years for issuing thousands of citations annually to students as young as 7 for such offenses as truancy, disturbing the peace and tobacco possession.

But efforts by community activists helped result in new policies by L.A. Unified school police last year to end citations for truancy. Instead, the district's students are sent to city youth centers for

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educational counseling and other services to help them with their academic struggles.

The district is currently crafting new guidelines to limit the role of police on campus, as directed in a "school climate bill of rights" passed by the board of education in May and supported by the school police union.

District officials are working with community groups on a possible pilot program to replace citations and arrests for battery and disturbing the peace with community-based alternatives.

But whether a new district policy will go far enough in circumscribing police — and whether community members will have a chance to help shape it — remains to be seen, said Zoe Rawson of the Community Rights Campaign, a Los Angeles organizing effort to minimize police actions on campus. She said she was "encouraged" by district data showing that citations on campuses declined last year over the previous year but remained concerned about the disproportionate impact on African American and Latino youth.

Public Counsel, a Los Angeles pro bono law firm, is also working with the San Francisco and Oakland school districts to forge new campus policing practices, while similar efforts are underway nationally.

Last year, the law firm and L.A. Delinquency Court Judge Donna Groman sponsored a visit to Los Angeles by a Georgia chief juvenile court judge who has launched a nationally recognized program to minimize police arrests in favor of alternatives. The program led to a deep decline in weapons and fights on campus and a 20% increase in high school graduation rates there, Judge Steve Teske said in his L.A. appearance.

In Pasadena, the new agreement directs police to focus on building ties with students, resolving conflicts and creating a safe environment.

It was not prompted by lawsuits or widespread complaints but by an opportunity to improve an existing agreement up for renewal for the city to provide police services to the district, said Eric Sahakian, a district director of child welfare, attendance and safety.

Sahakian said police make about five arrests a month in the district of 17,700 students in 26 schools.

Gary Moody, president of the NAACP's Pasadena branch, agreed that excessive police actions have not generally been a problem in the district but he hailed the move to explicitly limit them.

"School is a place of education," he said. "A police presence would be a distraction."

Sahakian said the policy is in line with a new approach to student discipline adopted two years ago that he credited with driving down student suspensions by 40%.

Under the plan, officials respond to student misbehavior with a graduated series of actions that include incentives, specific classroom management techniques, mentoring and training on how to change behavior.

"The bottom line is that we want our students to succeed," said Sahakian, who worked on the effort with police, elected officials, civil rights attorneys and community activists. "This is really about students' well-being."

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**laurieml** at 1:18 PM September 22, 2013

As usual the race pimps complain that blacks and Latinos are affected more than white kids at LAUSD. Hey dumb butt the district is 92% Latino and black. It is not disproportionate. This is a new way to cover up Latino and Black crime. Why do the race pimps always use stats that reflect race but never the behavior by race. The result is if whites don't do anything wrong then you can't arrest Latinos or blacks because it is unfair. We are already headed in this doomed direction- Latinos and blacks will want everyone let out of jail.


**DavidArizona** at 1:16 PM September 22, 2013

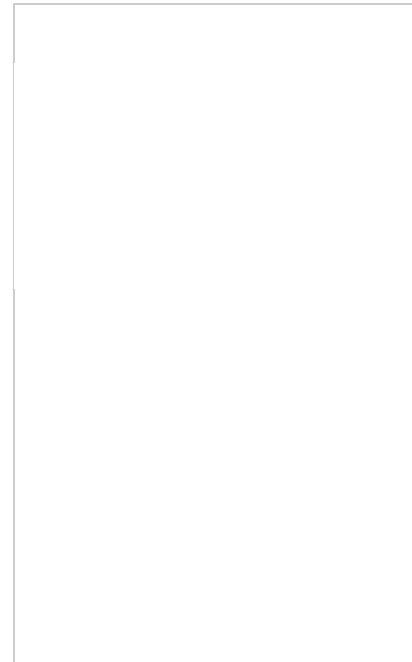
"But but Mr. Administrator the man over there just stole my \$1,000 bicycle form the dorm bike rack." Administrator to the student: "Can't you share?"

**DavidArizona** at 1:12 PM September 22, 2013

The schools want the ghetto enrollees to feel more comfortable in their new environment. But wait until your a victim of assault. The person who asaulted you will have to work in the school library as punishment.

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