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Los Angeles School District Eliminates One-Third of Its Police Officers

The school board also decided to ban the pepper-spraying of students and divert \$25 million to programs for students of color.



By **Shawn Hubler and Kate Taylor**

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SACRAMENTO — After a monthslong push to defund the police in the nation’s second-largest public school system, trustees of the Los Angeles Unified School District on Tuesday approved a plan to cut 133 police positions, ban the use of pepper spray on students and divert \$25 million to programs supporting students of color.

With the decision, Los Angeles joins a growing group of large cities that have significantly rethought the relationship between schools and the police in the wake of nationwide protests last summer over the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

School districts in Minneapolis, Seattle, Portland, Ore., Oakland, and Denver all moved in the wake of the killing to sever their relationships with local police departments.

Tuesday’s vote in Los Angeles was the result of months of meetings on how best to reconfigure public safety in the district, which serves about 650,000 students. The resulting plan eliminates 70 sworn officers, who have arrest powers; 62 nonsworn officers; and one support staff member, leaving 211 officers on the district’s force.

Officers at secondary schools in Los Angeles will be replaced with “climate coaches” from the community who will mentor students, help resolve conflicts and address implicit bias.

Last June, the board voted to cut the budget for the school police force by 35 percent, prompting the resignation of 20 officers and the chief, who objected to eliminating the jobs of scores of officers.

Members of the Los Angeles school board, who met virtually on Tuesday, have been divided on whether to further reduce the police presence on campus.

“This is a big undertaking and required a lot of coordination,” said Kelly Gonez, a board member, “but I know we know and all believe that our Black students are certainly worth this effort.”

George McKenna, another board member, warned that “parents expect us to have safe schools, and if you think the police are the problem, I think you got a problem yourself.”

In a statement, the school district’s new police chief, Leslie Ramirez, said the department had already made changes that would limit the presence of uniformed officers on campus. Chief Ramirez added that the new plan had “potential liabilities, lacks clarity and will result in unintended consequences impacting the safety of students and staff.”

The \$25 million in cuts will also help fund a Black student achievement plan, which will include expanded counseling, teacher development, curriculum changes and other programs to support inclusion. Campus police officers will still monitor schools and be available for emergencies.

A previous districtwide survey found that majorities of parents, students and school staff felt that the police made their schools safer but that only 50 percent of Black parents shared positive views of the school police and only 35 percent of Black students said they felt safer.

On Monday, the district’s superintendent, Austin Beutner, praised the Black student achievement plan in his weekly address.

“We’ve been systematically failing Black children as a country,” Mr. Beutner said. “Schools must be part of the solution, because a great education is the most important part of the path out of poverty.”

Shawn Hubler reported from Sacramento, and Kate Taylor from Cambridge, Mass.