



Texas Appleseed



Texas Center for Justice & Equity
SOLUTIONS FOR SAFE, HEALTHY, JUST COMMUNITIES



EXCELLENCE & ADVANCEMENT FOUNDATION



March 3, 2022

Dr. Stephanie S. Elizalde
Superintendent
Austin Independent School District
stephanie.elizalde@austinisd.org

Via Email

Dear Dr. Elizalde:

We, the undersigned social justice advocacy organizations, write in response to a news report issued last month; according to it, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) is considering eliminating 250 positions in its central office.¹ We understand that the coronavirus pandemic has created difficult conversations around various budget items; however, we were surprised to see that school policing and surveillance budget allocations are not on the table for cuts. Our organizations are deeply committed to ending the school-to-prison pipeline, and, through the stories we've heard in our communities, we recognize that the school-to-prison pipeline is as strong as ever two full years into the pandemic.

Following the tragic police murder of George Floyd, several of our organizations put out [a statement](#) that reflected the calls of many: for racial justice to be actualized in public education, school policing must end.² A year later, the district released an analysis that highlights how racial disparities persist in exclusionary discipline.³ From our examination of anecdotal and empirical evidence, we know that exclusionary discipline and school policing

¹ Maria Mendez, *Austin ISD looks to cut about 250 central office jobs, keep teacher planning periods*, *Austin American-Statesman*, February 13, 2022, available at <https://www.statesman.com/story/news/2022/02/13/austin-isd-board-meeting-jobs-staff-cuts-balance-budget/6746836001/> (last visited on March 3, 2022)

² <https://austinjustice.org/ajcs-letter-to-superintendent-austin-isd-board-and-community-members/>

³ <https://www.austinisd.org/announcements/2021/06/09/austin-isd-looks-tackle-racial-disparities-disciplinary-data-en-espanol>



operate in deep connection with one another to deprive Black and Brown children, LGBTQ young people, and kids with disabilities access to the education they deserve.⁴

AISD, a recognized leading school district in Texas for diversity and inclusion initiatives, stands in an ideal position to push back against school policing and its ever-growing lack of accountability. As the devastation of the coronavirus pandemic continues, we know that the district will need all hands on deck to address the academic, emotional, and social challenges that AISD will face. Accordingly, AISD should prioritize the expertise of central office staff members, particularly child development experts like behavioral specialists and restorative justice coordinators, rather than continually fund the incredibly harmful practice of school policing. Like in other large school districts, central staff members provide invaluable support, both directly and indirectly, to school campuses, teachers, and young people enrolled in AISD.

Even now, as some hybrid forms of learning take place, it is clear that the AISD policing and surveillance budget line items face no threat. In 2022, while every major civil rights organization calls for the removal of police from schools entirely, districts continue to pause on moving forward civil rights for children in this particular area. The moment to act boldly is upon AISD. The district should labor to preserve its central office staff, especially those central office workers who provide the critical support we expressed in the previous paragraph. By drastically cutting the AISD police budget, AISD can create a model for other school districts in Texas to follow – and thereby deliver true racial equity to millions of young people in the state.

We invite you to contact us as this conversation around AISD’s budget continues.

⁴ See, e.g., <https://policefreeschools.org/>



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Sincerely,

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Texas Center for Justice and Equity
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Educators in Solidarity
Austin Justice Coalition