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12-Year-Old Body Slammed by School Resource Officer Shows Continuing Criminalization of Youth of Color

This week [a video surfaced](#) showing Joshua Kehm, a school resource officer, body slam and handcuff a 12-year-old student at Rhodes Middle School in San Antonio, Texas. This video displays the violent and unethical use of excessive force on a child. It is a reminder of why law enforcement personnel should not handle routine student safety or school discipline issues in and around schools.

Across the nation, increasing law enforcement presence in schools has resulted in increased reliance on suspensions, expulsions and arrests to address routine school discipline issues, overwhelmingly targeting students of color as seen in this video.

Seven years ago, Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) member Texas Appleseed, a public interest justice center, called on San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) to release to the public its use of force policies. This would enable parents, students, and the community to be part of the conversation about what constitutes appropriate use of force by school police officers. The district refused to release its policies, and Texas Appleseed lost its open records suit which would have given families access to the important rules that govern SAISD officers' behavior. We need to have policies that prohibit excessive force by law enforcement on students and have those policies made public.

Too many of our schools now look and operate more like prisons. Schools in poor neighborhoods and communities of color have razor wire and security gates, metal detectors, random searches and pat downs, K-9 dogs, and interrogation rooms on campus. Young people face hostile school climates that intimidate the most vulnerable students and threaten system-involved youth with probation violations and incarceration.

"We are deeply concerned and saddened by this most recent incident of another inappropriate use of force by a Texas school police officer," said Deborah Fowler, Executive Director of Texas Appleseed. "It is particularly disturbing given the [similar video](#) that emerged from the same district just two years ago — a district that has even refused to be transparent about its use of force policies. We hope this serves as a wakeup call not only to San Antonio ISD — but to the broader community — that we need a full dialogue around the appropriate role of police in schools."

The Dignity in Schools Campaign calls on SAISD to fully investigate and hold accountable the officer in this video. We call on SAISD and districts across the country to use positive interventions instead of suspensions, expulsions or arrests and to shift funding to replace school police and other law enforcement with counselors, community intervention workers, peacebuilders, transformative justice and positive discipline. Our [Model Code on Education and Dignity](#) provides these and other preventive alternatives that promote positive school climates, rather than punitive and reactionary methods that push students out of school.

“Students are not safe in school when they are body slammed by school resource officers and other law enforcement personnel. Schools should provide a safe climate for all students, not push them into the juvenile and criminal justice system,” says Harold Jordan of the ACLU of Pennsylvania, member of the DSC. We must end the criminalization of youth of color in our schools and communities.

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