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# Why Milwaukee Needs to Get Cops Back in Schools

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By Mike Nichols and Mark Lisheran



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A P R E F A C E T O

# Why Milwaukee Needs to Get Cops Back in Schools

**M**ilwaukee, mired in serious, often violent crime unlike anywhere else in Wisconsin, doesn't have enough cops. That is the irrefutable takeaway from two chapters in the upcoming Crime section of this book.

But there is another problem as well — one born of political kowtowing to the social justice warriors more concerned with adhering to fashionable progressive narratives than keeping kids safe.

A chunk of the crime in Milwaukee is happening at high schools under control of a School Board that won't allow cops to regularly walk the hallways or grounds. This isn't principally a matter of hiring more police officers, although that could help. It's a matter of using common sense to allow Milwaukee Police Department leadership to appropriately deploy the officers the city already has.

Here, we lay out the facts regarding the lack of safety at schools in Milwaukee and what needs to be done about it to give the smart kids who strive for something better a fighting chance. We also propose a way of determining whether the problems in Milwaukee are unique or if other areas of the state also need to quickly redeploy officers into schools.

— *Badger Institute*

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**T**he Milwaukee Police Department responded to 1,310 calls for service at 34 Milwaukee Public Schools-controlled high schools in the 2021-'22 school year alone, an average of 7.2 calls every school day that raises anew questions about the School Board's decisions to stiff-arm law enforcement.

The School Board pulled officers out of schools in 2016 after parents and activists complained that police too often arrested and ticketed students rather than allowing the schools to discipline them.

For a time after that, the district partially funded a continuing presence outside of schools. But in the wake of George Floyd's death in Minneapolis, the School Board then voted unanimously in June 2020 to dissolve its contract for resource officers outside of school buildings as well.

Presented with the numbers, a spokesman for Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson said the mayor hasn't wavered in thinking "police inside schools is a matter that MPD and MPS need to work out together."

"To be clear, the mayor has talked about police assisting in creating safe environments around schools," spokesman Jeff Fleming told the Badger Institute. "And he believes that Milwaukee needs more police officers, not fewer, in order to make Milwaukee safer."

When he was Milwaukee Common Council president, Johnson took heat from activists leading the effort to get police officers out of MPS schools after he called for increased patrols in the wake of a high-speed reckless driving incident in October 2021 at Madison High School.

"It's only a matter of time before those sorts of actions result in somebody's unnecessary death," Johnson said at the time.

Asked to comment about the data provided by their own department to the Badger Institute, MPD wouldn't answer questions but issued a statement.

"Currently, MPD does not have a contract or agreement with MPS to provide school resource officers or extra-duty services for their special events," the statement read. "The safety at all of our schools is a high priority. MPD continues to work with MPS to find solutions to provide a safe environment for students. MPD remains committed to work-

ing with the community and system partners to build sustainable neighborhoods free of crime.”

The Badger Institute contacted MPS for comment and tried again after Jacqueline Mann, the director of its Office of Board Governance, left a message. Mann did not return that second call.

Nor did Cendi Trujillo Tena respond to an email when asked to comment on behalf of Leaders Igniting Transformation (LIT), the organization largely responsible for the drive to get police officers out of the schools. LIT was also a key player in the effort to defund the police in Milwaukee in the weeks and months following Floyd’s death while in Minneapolis police custody in May 2020.

### *The Calls for Service Data*

The Badger Institute requested calls for service data for the past school year based on the high schools listed on the MPS website. We did not include the Milwaukee County Youth Education Center because its students are exclusively Milwaukee County Jail inmates or Lad Lake’s Synergy because it is a residential campus.

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Marshall High School officials made 140 calls for service, far and away the most frequent caller. Washington, Madison and Riverside University high schools, with 91, 90 and 89 calls, respectively, were next. Bradley Tech, Vincent, Hamilton, Pulaski and North Division each made between 80 and 71 calls, according to the MPD data.

The list of schools for which the Badger Institute requested data included all MPS traditional schools as well as charter schools under the control of the School Board. The schools with the largest number of calls were all traditional rather than charter schools.

High schools reported “trouble with juvenile” more than 250 times, well over once a school day, by far the most frequent call for service in the past school year. There were more than 100 reports of “battery,” most frequently at Vincent, Bradley Tech, Riverside and Pulaski, according to the data.

There were 75 reports of a “reckless vehicle,” 39 of “sexual assault,” 39 of a “subject with gun” and 15 of “shots fired,” the data showed.

Nearly three-quarters of the 1,310 calls for service were disposed of by the filing of a report, the inability to locate a complainant, an advisory to school officials or a report of “assignment completed.”

Officers made 71 arrests based on the calls and issued 95 citations, according to the data.

In sum, students in Milwaukee's public high schools who want a better life and know that school is their only way up are being battered, assaulted and exposed to gunfire or other reckless conduct on a daily basis.

### ***Gun Incidents at Schools***

A few incidents make the news, including one incident at Rufus King International High School that started with a social media-fueled fight between a couple of girls outside the building during a basketball game. One of the children involved called an uncle, who showed up with a gun and shot four or five girls and women between the ages of 15 and 20.

Another incident at Bradley Tech didn't get the same attention because nobody got hit.

That incident — just one other example — started out as a fight inside the school between a couple of groups of kids. At least one of the kids told the cops that he and his friends were running around the school “wearing black ski masks” that day. Some members of the other group, he said, were wearing “black ski masks” as well.

Again, one of the students notified a relative. His mother, according to police reports, showed up with her fiancé, sister, daughter, niece and a friend of her daughter. The mother, who has a concealed carry permit, also brought a black 9mm handgun that she placed between the front seats of the car she came in.

Five members of that group, according to the reports, got out of cars and approached the school but weren't allowed inside. When her son came out, she told police, she saw a group of boys running out of a red car parked across the street from the school — at least several of whom were wearing black ski masks and two of whom had guns in their hands. She alleged that one of the boys fired a shot.

Somebody inside her car also fired, according to one police report, although it is unclear who it was. The group had at least one other gun as well, according to that report, but the mother said it was probably a fake and that it did not go off.

Another report filed by an officer who watched video footage stated that six kids in the red car pulled up at 12:48 p.m., got out and ran toward the school. Startled by something, they did an about-face and ran back to the car. One of those kids fired two rounds into the air.

Asked by police what led to the shooting, he stated, “It was a fight, and adults decided to get involved.”

While most of those closest to the problems in an array of schools have had little to say about the increased calls for service, the Milwaukee Police Association has said in the past that it supports putting MPD officers back in MPS schools.

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In May, the Wisconsin Professional Police Association published its annual survey of public perception of law enforcement. And while the survey canvassed 1,000 people statewide, not just in the city of Milwaukee, 63% said they thought having resource officers in schools would increase safety. Just 5% said safety would decrease, a longstanding contention of groups such as LIT.

Responding to the survey, Milwaukee Police Association President Andrew Wagner said, “When you’re talking about kids and their safety and when lives are in danger, seconds and minutes matter, and it’s those response times that would really diminish if we could get those officers back.”

### Recommendations

Put police officers immediately back inside and around Milwaukee’s public schools, especially those with high crime levels.

If possible, make state funding contingent upon putting officers back in schools.

Improve access to and funding for public charter schools and private schools that are part of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.

Require all Wisconsin school districts to collect and report crime data for every school on their district report cards so that state and local leaders can assess where and whether there are problems elsewhere in the state similar to those in Milwaukee.

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