

Joseph L. Parks
Testimony before Texas Senate Education Committee
October 30, 2012

Senators Shapiro and Patrick, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Joseph Parks. I am the Executive Director for Safety and Security Services for the Plano Independent School District, a position I have held since August 2010. I previously served with the Plano Police Department for nearly twenty (20) years and am an honorably retired Lieutenant of that Department. I have been a licensed attorney since 2004. The Plano Independent School District serves 55,000 students with 71 campuses in the cities of Plano, Murphy, Dallas, Richardson and Allen.

I would like to speak with you today about the important role that law enforcement officers play in maintaining a safe learning environment in our public schools. Since the 1980's, the Plano Independent School District, in partnership with the City of Plano, has had school liaison officers or "SLO's" of the Plano Police Department assigned to specific PISD schools. In 2011, with the opening of McMillan High School in Murphy, the Murphy Police Department began a partnership with PISD and assigned an SLO to that campus. Currently, PISD has an "SLO" in each high school, senior high school and one special programs school- for a total of ten (10) campuses served by SLO's. SLO's serve as role models for thousands of students, provide an enhanced level of security for the

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campus, serve as a valuable resource for campus administrators, and can provide an immediate response to a critical or life threatening emergency, such as an intruder or active shooter. Through interlocal agreements and memoranda of understanding, PISD, the Plano Police Department, and the Murphy Police Department delineate “police business” and “school business.” It is understood by all involved that our SLO’s enforce criminal laws – they do not enforce “house rules” –that is school policies the violation of which would not constitute a violation of Texas criminal law.

I am not an educator and do not have a lengthy background in public education. However, in the last year or so, I have become aware of certain advocacy groups who seemingly want to constrain or eliminate the presence of law enforcement officers in the public schools. From my perspective as a school district security director, a retired police commander, and an attorney, I am greatly concerned at the prospect of eliminating or materially limiting the role of law enforcement officers in Texas public schools as proposed by some advocacy groups.

As I am certain the committee is aware, there have been a number of studies or reports issued by various groups which focus on how a student’s encounter with school discipline and campus-based law enforcement may negatively impact that student’s academic success, graduation rate, and future

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involvement with the criminal justice system. The authors of such reports, in general, propose curtailing disciplinary referrals and campus-based law enforcement action. While such studies are undoubtedly well intentioned, I'd like to make a number of observations I believe the committee should consider before acting upon such studies or the data contained therein:

- First, the focus of such reports is singularly on the negative effect disciplinary referrals and law enforcement actions have on those who are disciplined, cited or arrested. A consideration of equal or greater importance is, what will the effect be on the learning environment for *all* of the students on the campus if disciplinary referrals and law enforcement action is curtailed primarily for the benefit of the offending students? That is, will attempts to curtail disciplinary referrals and law enforcement action result in a less optimal learning environment for others?
- Second, limiting, or at least discouraging, the classroom teacher's ability to discipline, remove or, in appropriate circumstances, seek law enforcement assistance, will undoubtedly play a role in a teacher's perceived stress level and longevity. I would urge the committee to seek substantial input from "front line" teachers and campus administrators.

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- Third, as correctly pointed out in at least one report, evaluating student discipline and law enforcement action is exceedingly complicated due to the number of variables that come into play when student conduct triggering such action is evaluated. There is considerable discussion in the reports at issue as to discretionary disciplinary referrals made for “minor” violations of a district’s Student Code of Conduct. Some of these “minor” violations may not seem so “minor” when the totality of the circumstances is considered. Even if not rising to the level of criminal conduct, conduct that intimidates, disrupts, or persistently disrupts, the learning environment of other students in the class or school has the potential to negatively impact the progress of these other students.
- Fourth, the reports and studies I have reviewed appear to have been completed almost exclusively by attorneys and academics. I would urge the committee to seek substantial input from the law enforcement community as to what effect carrying out the suggestions in such reports would have on campus and community safety.

In closing, I would again like to reiterate that within the community that I live and work, the partnership that exists between Plano ISD and the Plano and Murphy police departments is an exceedingly important factor in maintaining

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both the actual and perceived safety of our school system. While disciplinary action and campus-based law enforcement are only two of the many tools in the District's student management and safety tool kit, they are nonetheless *important tools* that should remain available for the security of our students, teachers and campuses.

I thank the committee for this opportunity to appear before you.

Joseph L. Parks