

# THE DAILY CALLER

## Montgomery County, Maryland To Put More Cops In Schools

By Walter Olson

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Montgomery County, Md., the nation's seventh-wealthiest, is not known for violent schools. Quite the contrary: in a system of more than [150,000 students in 200 schools](#), there were [exactly 40 instances of student fighting](#) last year that rose to the level of "serious incidents," of which police were called in to 30.

So what has it just decided to do? Put more police in its schools. According to Donna St. George in [Tuesday's Washington Post](#), "Police will be posted in all 25 Montgomery County high schools next fall as county leaders bolstered the schools' security force in a final budget approved last week."

This will cost money, of course, but the county PTA was in favor of it. Nor are they alone: across the river in Virginia, equally affluent Fairfax and Loudoun counties put police officers in middle schools and high schools.

Conspicuously absent from the report is any sign that children currently face some sort of peril for lack of police presence. What are cops to do at peaceful schools where weeks or even months go by between incidents for which a police response might be necessary?

"Officers might hear of a possible fight or a party, and intercede, help a family in a crisis, work a football game or speak in a law class," one school board member told St. George.

It's not clear why a fight and a party would be considered comparable phenomena, but I even more struck by this argument from PTA officer Susan Burkinshaw:

"What small town of 3,000 people doesn't have an officer in it?" Burkinshaw asked. "To not have an officer on premises to help manage what is like a small city is ludicrous."

Leaving aside the assumption that a police officer is needed to "manage" a school (isn't the principal supposed to do that?) ordinary schools simply don't face the kinds of demands on skilled police services that a town of 3,000 normally does, in the form of highway accidents and traffic work, irate drunks at bar-closing time, domestic incidents and so forth. As it happens,

countless towns with populations well above 3,000 are served by cooperating nearby jurisdictions or county sheriff's departments a quick phone call away.

The *Post* does briefly acknowledge that, expense aside, some critics believe introducing police officers into schools will often do more harm than good.

Nationally, civil rights advocates say a police presence in schools often leads to a spike in law enforcement referrals and arrests on campus for misconduct that would typically be handled by a principal. Montgomery officials say their program will not result in the criminalizing of minor school misbehavior.

With a focus on prevention and intervention, "I think it's going to mean more compassion for kids," [council president Craig] Rice said.

Because when police with handcuffs and nightsticks become a resource for locker checks and petty disciplinary offenses, "compassion" is the [first word that comes to mind, right?](#)

The Sentencing Project, a Washington-based criminal justice reform group that has deplored the "school to prison pipeline, has a fact sheet, "[The Facts About Added Dangers of Police in Schools](#)." It cites evidence that putting cops in ordinarily peaceful schools fails to make them safer, but does make it more likely that petty disciplinary problems will become fodder for the criminal justice system.

I hope the well-meaning officials of Montgomery County will take a moment to read that report. At least that way they can't say they weren't warned.

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