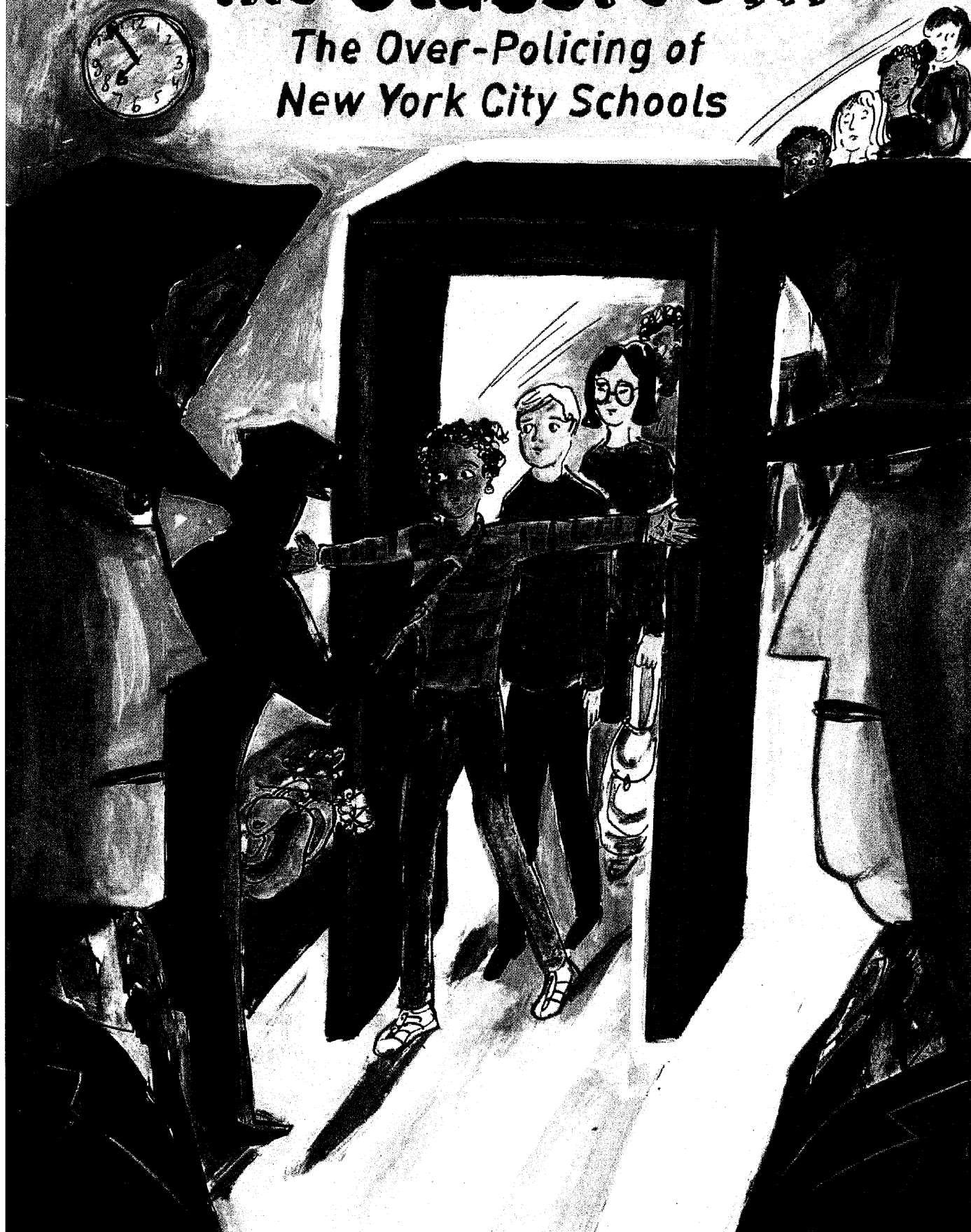


# Criminalizing the Classroom

*The Over-Policing of  
New York City Schools*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the excesses of the New York City school policing program and offers realistic recommendations for reform.

To produce this report, the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) and the Racial Justice Program of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) conducted 1,000 student surveys and analyzed publicly available data. The organizations also interviewed students, parents, teachers, school administrators, school safety agents, and officials from the Department of Education, the United Federation of Teachers, and the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

The conclusions of this research are clear. Students and teachers are entitled to a safe learning environment that is conducive to education. The environment created by the massive deployment of inadequately trained police personnel in schools, in contrast, is often hostile and dysfunctional.

Since the NYPD took control of school safety in 1998, the number of police personnel in schools and the extent of their activity have skyrocketed. At the start of the 2005-2006 school year, the city employed a total of 4,625 School Safety Agents (SSAs) and at least 200 armed police officers assigned exclusively to schools. These numbers would make the NYPD's School Safety Division alone the tenth largest police force in the country – larger than the police forces of Washington, D.C., Detroit, Boston, or Las Vegas.

Because these school-assigned police personnel are not directly subject to the supervisory authority of school administrators, and because they often have not been adequately trained to work in educational settings, SSAs and police officers often arrogate to themselves authority that extends well beyond the narrow mission of securing the safety of the students and teachers. They enforce school rules relating to dress and appearance. They make up their own rules regarding food or other objects that have nothing whatsoever to do with school safety. On occasion they subject educators who question the NYPD's treatment of students to retaliatory arrests. More routinely, according to our interviews and survey, they subject students to inappropriate treatment including:

- derogatory, abusive and discriminatory comments and conduct;
- intrusive searches;
- unauthorized confiscation of students' personal items, including food, cameras and essential school supplies;
- inappropriate sexual attention;
- physical abuse; and
- arrest for minor non-criminal violations of school rules.

These types of police interventions create flashpoints for confrontations and divert students and teachers from invaluable classroom time. They make students feel diminished, and are wholly incompatible with a positive educational environment.

Statistical analysis shows that all students are not equally likely to bear the brunt of over-policing in New York City schools. The burden falls primarily on the schools with permanent metal detectors, which are attended by the city's most vulnerable children. The students attending these high schools are disproportionately poor, Black, and Latino compared to citywide averages, and they are more often confronted by police personnel in school for "non-criminal" incidents than their peers citywide. These children receive grossly less per-pupil funding on direct educational services than city averages. Their schools are likely to be large and overcrowded, and to have unusually high suspension and drop-out rates.

The report offers the following recommendations for reforming New York City's school policing program – all of which can be accomplished without any sacrifice to school safety:

- Authority over school safety must be restored to school administrators.
- School safety personnel must be trained to function in accordance with sound educational practices and to respect the differences between street and school environments.
- The role of police personnel in schools must be limited to legitimate security concerns for children and educators.
- Students, families and educators must be given meaningful mechanisms, including access to the Civilian Complaint Review Board, to report wrongdoing by school-based police personnel.