



Office of Inspector General County of Los Angeles

Allegations of Racial Disparities in Contacts with High School Students by the Sheriff's Department's Lancaster Station

June 15, 2022

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SUMMARY

On September 16, 2021, the website “LAist” published an online news report regarding a video of a School Resource Deputy at Lancaster High body slamming a Black student, MiKayla Robinson. The article also reported that community groups were advocating for the severing of campus security contracts with the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department (Sheriff’s Department).¹ On September 21, 2021, Office of Inspector General staff met with the Captain of the Lancaster station regarding the use of force on Ms. Robinson and requested the following items:

- the name and identification number of the involved deputy
- the URN number associated with the incident
- the FO number assigned to the force investigation
- the WCSCR number of the service comment report filed regarding the incident²
- All videos of the incident, including but not limited to videos from: security camera(s), body-worn camera(s), and/or mobile phone camera(s)

After providing the Sheriff’s Department with a draft of this report, on June 10, 2022, nearly nine months after the request, the Sheriff’s Department provided the first three items requested. Following additional communications, on June 14, 2022 the Sheriff’s Department agreed to provide a copy of the body-worn camera video.³ Because the information has not been provided, the Office of Inspector General was unable to investigate the reason for the deputy’s contact with Ms. Robinson or whether the use of force violates Sheriff’s Department’s policies or Ms. Robinson’s civil rights.

¹ Martinez, Lita and Dugdale, Emily Elena, “Video Captured A Deputy Body Slamming A Black Student At Lancaster High. Now Community Groups Want Sheriffs Off Campus,” LAist, September 16, 2021.

<https://laist.com/news/criminal-justice/video-captured-a-deputy-body-slamming-a-black-student-at-lancaster-high-now-community-groups-want-sheriffs-off-campus>

² URN is the uniform report number assigned to all investigative reports by the Sheriff’s Department. Force investigations are assigned an FO number. Complaints are commendations that are assigned a Watch Commander Service Comment Report number or WCSCR.

³ The Sheriff’s Department refused to provide the requested information to the Office of Inspector General on the basis that the force investigation was on-going. Government Code sections 25303 and 25303.7 authorize the Office of Inspector General to request and receive this information. Additionally, the Office of Inspector General ordinance specifically empowers the Office of Inspector General with authority to review “the Department’s investigations of force.” See LACC6.44.190 (F)(2) at [https://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/0234f496-d2b7-00b6-17a4-b43e949b70a2/66746b05-7019-42e0-931e-ad1df5a8cf47/6_44_190_Office_of_Inspector_General%20\(2020\).pdf](https://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/0234f496-d2b7-00b6-17a4-b43e949b70a2/66746b05-7019-42e0-931e-ad1df5a8cf47/6_44_190_Office_of_Inspector_General%20(2020).pdf). Requesting to review evidence relating to an ongoing investigation generally does not interfere with the investigation. The Office of Inspector General has requested that the Sheriff’s Department provide unfettered viewing access to body-worn camera video; providing a video of one incident does not fulfill the Sheriff’s Department obligations under state and county oversight laws cited above.

On September 29, 2021, the ProPublica⁴ investigative journalism website, in partnership with KPCC/LAist,⁵ published an article entitled: *Racial Justice -- In a California Desert, Sheriff's Deputies Settle Schoolyard Disputes. Black Teens Bear the Brunt*.⁶ The central theme of this article was the alleged disparate treatment of Black students in Lancaster high schools by Sheriff's Department deputies and school administrators. The article highlighted the incident involving 16-year-old MiKayla Robinson, as earlier reported, as an example of the disparate treatment of Black students.⁷ The ProPublica article alleges that Black high school students in Lancaster were disproportionately contacted by Sheriff's deputies and disproportionately punished for school discipline issues.

The ProPublica article found that Black teenagers accounted for 60 percent of Sheriff's deputy contacts in Lancaster high schools, although they were only about 20 percent of the enrollment in those schools.⁸ According to the ProPublica and KPCC/LAist analysis of Sheriff's Department data, Black teenagers at several Lancaster high schools were stopped by Sheriff's deputies up to four times more than would be expected based on their percentage of the population in those schools. The ProPublica article also cited disciplinary data that purportedly showed that Black students were suspended three times more than White students.

The ProPublica article based its findings on publicly available data which was downloaded from the Sheriff's Automated Contact Reporting System (SACR).⁹ The SACR system was designed to comply with the data tracking mandates of the Racial

⁴ ProPublica is an independent nonprofit organization that produces investigative journalism that focuses on abuses of power and betrayals of public trust. See <https://www.propublica.org/about/>.

⁵ KPCC is part of Southern California Public Radio (SCPR). SCPR is a member-supported public media network that operates across the region, reaching from Santa Barbara down to Los Angeles and Orange Counties, and out to Riverside and the Coachella Valley. SCPR includes KPCC, LAist, and LAist Studios. SCPR's mission is to strengthen the civic and cultural bonds that unite Southern California's diverse communities by providing the highest quality news and information across multiple platforms. See, <https://www.kpcc.org/about-kpcc>.

⁶ *Racial Justice: In a California Desert, Sheriff's Deputies Settle Schoolyard Disputes. Black Teens Bear the Brunt*, by Emily Elena Dugdale, KPCC/LAist, and Irena Hwang, ProPublica, Sept. 29, 2021 at <https://www.propublica.org/article/in-a-california-desert-sheriffs-deputies-settle-schoolyard-disputes-black-teens-bear-the-brunt>.

⁷ Ibid. See also, "Video shows deputy slam Lancaster student to the ground at school," Los Angeles Times, October 8, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-10-08/sheriffs-deputy-body-slam-antelope-valley-teen>.

⁸ The ProPublica analysis focused on six Antelope Valley high schools: Antelope Valley High, Desert Winds Continuation High, Eastside High, Lancaster High, Quartz Hill High and Phoenix High Community Day. Their analysis was further filtered to only include those contacts where the basis for the contact was listed as "reasonable suspicion that the person was engaged in criminal activity".

⁹ See, Sheriff's Automated Contact Reporting website at https://lasd.org/SACR_opendata.html.

and Identity Profiling Act of 2015.¹⁰ SACR data is accessed through the Sheriff's Department "Open Data Portal" website.¹¹ The SACR system contains information about deputy contacts with civilians such as the perceived race of an individual, location of contact, outcome of the contact, whether the contact involved a student, as well as other information.

The SACR system is inaccurate and significantly underreports significant data. The Office of Inspector General reviewed the accuracy of the SACR system in a separate report and found that it underreported at least 50,731 observation-based stops and at least 71,462 arrests over a one-year period between 2018 and 2019. The Office of Inspector General also found significant accuracy issues in SACR system totals relating to backseat detentions, consent searches, and reasonable suspicion stops.¹² As a result, any finding based upon this review of SACR data likely **understates** the issues identified in this report, particularly those relating to racial disparities.¹³

In response to the ProPublica article, the Office of Inspector General conducted an independent review of the disparate treatment cited by ProPublica's reporting. This report does not seek to replicate the ProPublica analysis. Rather, the Office of Inspector General conducted an independent review of publicly available information to determine whether the statistical issues highlighted in the ProPublica article could be independently corroborated. Our analysis of data from the 2019-2020 school year indicates that Black students in high schools patrolled by Lancaster Station deputies were contacted by law enforcement, issued citations, subjected to arrest, suspended, and expelled at disproportionately higher rates than other racial groups.

In addition to refusing to provide body camera footage pursuant to Government Code section 25303 and 25303.7, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department denied the validity of

¹⁰ See, Assembly Bill 953: The Racial and Identity Profiling Act of 2015 (2015) at https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB953 (Accessed December 28, 2021). RIPA adds sections relating to data collection and racial profiling training to Government Code section 12525.5 and Penal Code sections 13012 and 13519.4. RIPA required the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department to begin reporting data by April 1, 2019. California Government Code section 12525.5(a)(2).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See, Office of Inspector General's report titled, *The Sheriff's Department's Underreporting of Civilian Stop Data to the California Attorney General*, June 10, 2022. <https://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/0234f496-d2b7-00b6-17a4-b43e949b70a2/ee467145-85c7-450c-a739-93e1f1d79f78/The%20Sheriff%E2%80%99s%20Department%E2%80%99s%20Underreporting%20of%20Civilian%20Stop%20Data%20to%20the%20California%20Attorney%20General.pdf>.

¹³ The Office of Inspector General found indications that underreporting may have occurred during the period of our analysis as evidenced by the ProPublica article which reported that for the 2019-2020 school year, Lancaster deputies responded to more than 500 calls from administrators to "document or investigate criminal-related incidents" of which two-thirds involved Black students. For the same time-period, Office of Inspector General identified only 422 SACR system contacts by Lancaster deputies as being made in a K-12 school.

ProPublica's analysis but has failed to provide any support for its claims. Office of Inspector General staff repeatedly arranged meetings with assigned members of the Sheriff's Department that were either canceled or used for the purpose of obtaining work papers from OIG rather than providing any analysis. The Sheriff's Department ultimately agreed to provide its analysis after review of OIG work papers. Although OIG provided its papers, the Sheriff's Department failed to provide its analysis by January of this year as agreed and still has not done so.

The practice of making public denials without factual support is fundamentally inconsistent with California law controlling the conduct of law enforcement officers.¹⁴ The ProPublica analysis appears fundamentally correct. The Sheriff's Department claims to the contrary appear to be unsupported.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

To conduct this review, the Office of Inspector General analyzed three sets of data: (1) the Sheriff's Automated Contact Reporting system (SACR); (2) discipline and demographic data for selected high schools in the Antelope Valley reported to the California State Department of Education; and (3) demographic information from the United States Census Bureau for the City of Lancaster.

The Office of Inspector General analyzed 16,929 individual contacts¹⁵ by Lancaster Station deputies that were entered into the SACR system during the 2019-2020 school year.¹⁶ Although the SACR system contained a data field to capture contacts that occurred at a school, we found that this data field was not consistently completed. As a result, we determined the number of high school contacts by filtering for the location of the contacts (block number and street name of a high school), the age of the persons being contacted (14-18 years), and the time of the contact (during school hours). This yielded a data set of contacts conducted by both School Resource Deputies and patrol

¹⁴ See, e.g., California Penal Code section 13510.8(b)(1),(5),(8).

¹⁵ For this report, a deputy contact is defined as an incident such as a pedestrian, bicycle, or vehicle stop or a call for service which resulted in a detention, search or arrest. See, *Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Field Operations Directive* 18-004. A detention is defined as a seizure of a person by an officer that results from physical restraint, unequivocal verbal commands, or words or conduct by an officer that would result in a reasonable person believing that he or she is not free to leave or otherwise disregard the officer. 11 CCR 999.224(a)(7).

¹⁶ Office of Inspector General selected data corresponding with the 2019-2020 school year of the Antelope Valley Union High School District, which covered the period of July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2020, because this time period represented the most recent complete data range available in both the SACR and California Department of Education data sets.

deputies from the Lancaster Station¹⁷ at a block and street location of a high school, involving a person of high school age, during school hours. The Office of Inspector General identified 359¹⁸ such contacts which were conducted at or around eleven high schools¹⁹ in the Antelope Valley patrolled by Lancaster Station deputies.

The second data set used in our review contained discipline and demographic statistics reported by the Antelope Valley Union High School District to the California State Department of Education (CDE) for the 2019-2020 school year.²⁰ The Office of Inspector General obtained this data from the CDE's Data Quest website.²¹ Information from this website included racial demographics of students, suspension statistics, and expulsion statistics for each of the schools that we analyzed.

Lastly, we accessed information from the United States Census Bureau²² to obtain the latest (2020) overall racial demographics for the City of Lancaster.

A REVIEW OF ALL DEPUTY CONTACTS IN THE CITY OF LANCASTER BY RACE: BLACK PEOPLE WERE CONTACTED MORE THAN ANY OTHER RACE

To establish a baseline for Lancaster Station deputy contacts with the public, the Office of Inspector General reviewed all contacts (adult and juvenile) by Lancaster Station deputies and categorized them by the race of the person contacted and compared this to the racial demographics for City of Lancaster reported by the United States Census Bureau. "Figure 1" below shows the distribution of those contacts by race.

¹⁷ Publicly available data from the SACR system does not differentiate between School Resource Deputies assigned to a particular high school and patrol deputies policing the area in which a high school is located. Therefore, the Office of Inspector General cannot limit this analysis to contacts conducted only by School Resources Deputies.

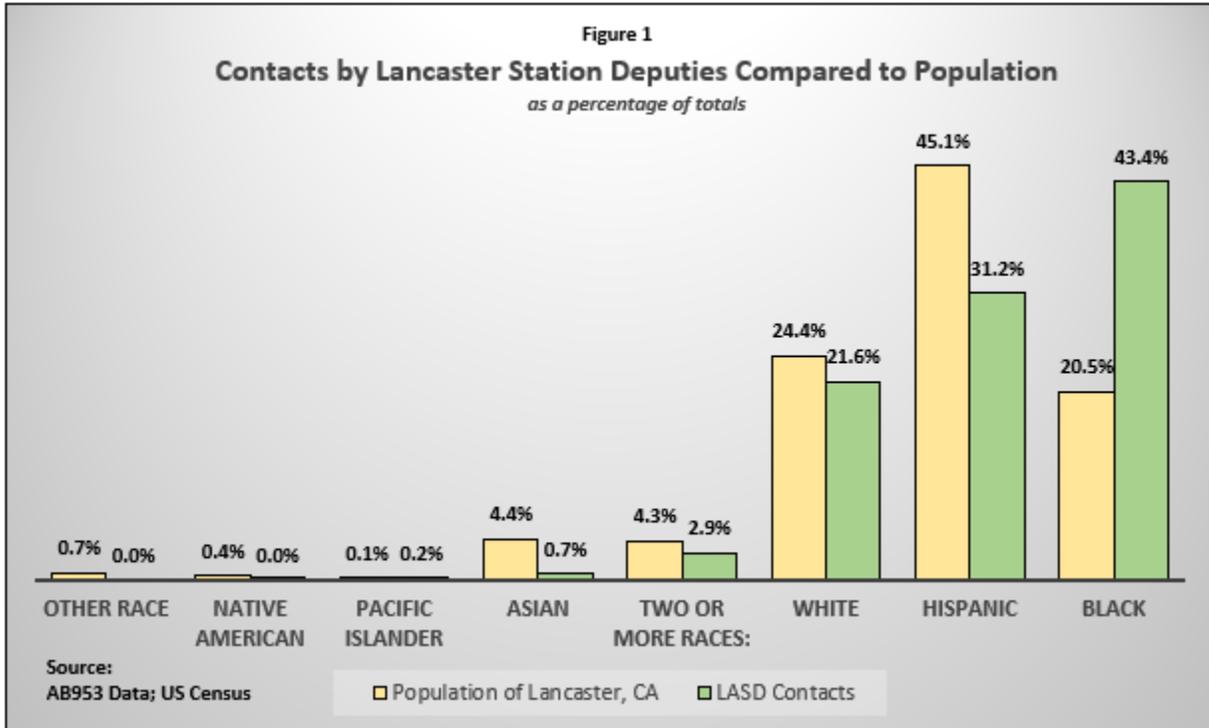
¹⁸ These contacts consisted of those where the deputies indicated that the reason for the contact was due to a "reasonable suspicion that the person was engaged in criminal activity." These are the same types of contacts that were analyzed in the ProPublica article.

¹⁹ Antelope Valley High, Eastside High, Highland High, Lancaster High, Littlerock High, Palmdale High, Quartz Hills High, William J. (Pete) Knight High; Desert Winds Continuation High, Phoenix High Community Day and R. Rex Parris High. Patrol deputies and School Resource Deputies from the Lancaster Station provided police services to these eleven high schools.

²⁰ Please note that the Covid-19 pandemic affected this data since the Antelope Valley Union High School District transitioned all students to remote learning in March of 2020 which resulted in a corresponding decrease in the frequency of school contacts.

²¹ See, <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

²² See, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=lancaster,%20california&tid=DECENNIALPL2020>. p2.



For the period under review, there were a total of 16,929 civilian contacts by Lancaster Station deputies²³. Black people were the only racial group that was disproportionately contacted more than their respective percentage of the population. Black people accounted for 43.4 percent of all contacts while making up only 20.5 percent of the population of Lancaster. The percentage of overall contacts for Whites and Hispanics were less than their respective population percentages at 21.6 percent (24.4% population) and 31.2 percent (45.1% population).

Based on this review, Black people appear to have been disproportionately contacted by Lancaster Station deputies when compared to their percentage of the population of the City of Lancaster. It must be stressed that the number of contacts of Black people alone does not necessarily indicate racial bias as other factors could account for the observed disparity in this data set. However, when taken together with other observed disparities in factors that occurred during a deputy contact, the disproportionate contact numbers may be viewed with a greater degree of concern.

²³ These civilian contacts include those contacts within the City of Lancaster and in the unincorporated county areas served by the Lancaster station. The United States Census Bureau data does not include racial demographic data for the particular unincorporated areas served by the Lancaster station. The Office of Inspector General’s analysis assumes that the racial demographics in the surrounding unincorporated areas is the same or similar to the racial demographics in the City of Lancaster. No contrary data has been provided by the Sheriff’s Department in response to receiving a draft of this report.

RACIAL DISPARITIES IN BACKSEAT DETENTIONS, FIREARMS POINTED AT A PERSON, AND SEARCHES

The Office of Inspector General identified additional racial disparities in circumstances that occurred during deputy contacts, such as: backseat detentions, firearms pointed at a person, and persons being searched. Black people were subject to these additional circumstances at significantly higher rates than other races.

Table 1.-Factors Occurring During Deputy Contact²⁴					
Factor	# of Contacts	Black	Hispanic	White	All Others
Backseat Detention	1698	50.5%	26.0%	21.3%	2.2%
Firearm Pointed at Person	144	54.2%	20.8%	24.3%	0.7%
Non-Moving Traffic Violations ²⁵	6805	46.8%	29.3%	20.5%	3.5%
Search of Person Conducted	4859	48.1%	27.5%	20.7%	3.7%

With respect to contacts involving backseat detentions, firearms pointed at people, non-moving traffic violations,²⁶ and searches of a person, Black people were disproportionately subject to these circumstances at rates that both exceeded their percentage of the population of Lancaster (20.5%) as well as their share of overall contacts by deputies (43.4%).

The data indicates that Black people were placed in the backseat of a patrol vehicle, stopped for non-moving violations, had a firearm pointed at them, and searched at disproportionately higher rates than any other race group.

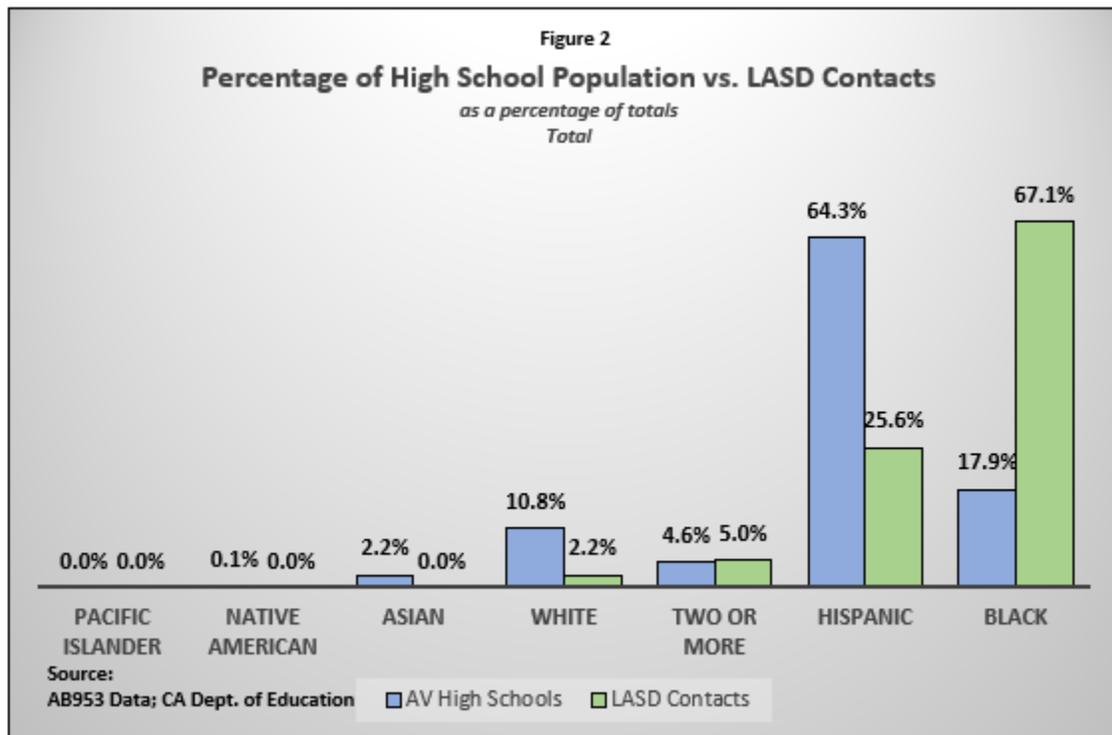
²⁴ The data set forth in this table lists only Blacks, Hispanics and Whites because these contacts accounted for over 96 percent of all stops conducted for the period under analysis. Contacts for all other groups are combined in the "All Others" column.

²⁵ Non-moving violations include equipment violations.

²⁶ The observed disparity in non-moving violations (traffic stops for equipment citations such as a broken taillight may be significant because such violations have been used as "pre-textual" stops by law enforcement. A "pretextual" stop is a stop in which the officer detains a person for a minor crime (i.e., traffic offense) because the officer suspects the person of involvement in a more significant crime (i.e., drug possession). See, Whren v. U.S.(1996) 517 U.S. 806).

SCHOOL CONTACTS BY DEPUTIES: BLACK STUDENTS WERE CONTACTED MORE THAN ANY OTHER RACE

According to the ProPublica article, Black teenagers accounted for 60 percent of the deputy contacts on high school campuses while making up only 20 percent of the school population and nearly two-thirds of the citations issued by deputies were issued to Black students. Our analysis found disparities consistent with the findings of the ProPublica article. “Figure 2” below shows a comparison between the percentage of the overall high school population for each racial group²⁷ compared to their percentage of the contacts with Lancaster Station deputies:



²⁷ Note the designation of “2 or More Races” means that the person stopped was perceived to be of two or more racial groups. When unsure, deputies may identify all racial groups to which a person may belong.

For the 2019-2020 school year, the Office of Inspector General identified 359 contacts on high school aged people by Lancaster Station deputies at or around high school locations.²⁸ Black students accounted for 67.1 percent of the contacts made by Lancaster Station deputies but made up only 17.9 percent of total school enrollment. Whereas Hispanic students accounted for only 25.6 percent deputy contacts, but they comprised 64.4 percent of total student enrollment. White students made up 2.2 percent of deputy contacts, while accounting for 10.8 percent of total enrollment.

The Office of Inspector General's review found that Black students experienced a disproportionately higher number of contacts with deputies than any other racial group. This finding is consistent with the assertions in the ProPublica article.

School Citations by Race: Black Students Were Cited More Than Any Other Race

The Office of Inspector General's analysis of the results of deputy contacts showed that out of the 359 contacts, 282 (78.5%) resulted in the issuance of a citation to the student. Of the 282 citations issued, Black students were issued 69.8 percent of the citations. Hispanics were issued 24.8 percent of the citations and Whites were issues only 2.1 percent of the citations.

Black students contacted by deputies were issued citations at a higher rate than any other race. This finding is consistent with the assertions in the ProPublica article.

School Arrests by Race: Black Students Were Arrested More Than Any Other Race

Lastly, 67 (18.6%) of the 359 contacts resulted in an arrest of the student. Black students made up 59.7 percent of the arrests, while Hispanics made up 23.8 percent, and Whites made up only 2.9 percent.

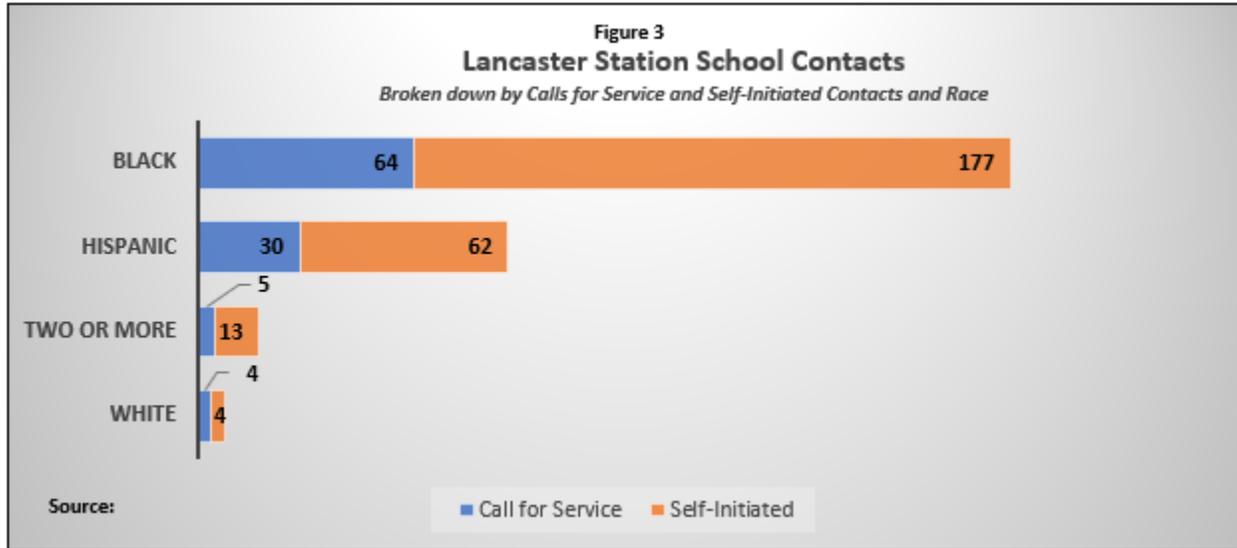
Black students contacted by LASD deputies were arrested at a higher rate than any other racial group. This finding is consistent with the assertions in the ProPublica article.

²⁸ For this report, a deputy contact is defined as an incident such as a pedestrian, bicycle, or vehicle stop or a call for service which resulted in a detention, search or arrest. See, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Field Operations Directive 18-004. A detention is defined as a seizure of a person by an officer that results from physical restraint, unequivocal verbal commands, or words or conduct by an officer that would result in a reasonable person believing that he or she is not free to leave or otherwise disregard the officer. 11 CCR 999.224(a)(7). A student may be stopped by non-law enforcement personnel, but if an officer arrives after the stop and interacts with the student by or words or conduct that would result in a reasonable person believing that he or she is not free to leave, the officer continues the detention and must make a SACR system entry.

Referrals by School Staff: Black Students Were the Subject of Calls for Service More Than Any Other Race

The ProPublica article quoted a Sheriff's Department representative who stated that the "vast majority" of deputy contacts on high school campuses were based on referrals from school staff and administrators and not self-initiated by the deputies. However, the Office of Inspector General found that the majority of school contacts were self-initiated by deputies²⁹. "Figure 3" sets forth high school contacts with students categorized by how the contacts were initiated – a call for service by a third-party or self-initiated by a deputy.

²⁹ In response to receiving a draft of this report, the Sheriff's Department disputes that most contacts were self-initiated and asserts that many of the contacts the Office of Inspector General labeled as such were referrals from school officials. The Office of Inspector General's analysis of the Department's own data as reported in the SACR system shows that the majority of the contacts were not coded as calls for service. The Sheriff's Department contends that referrals from school officials are not a call for service unless the call is routed through its central dispatch. California Code of Regulations Title 11 section 999.226 states that the data element "Stop Made in Response to a Call for Service," should be selected "if the stop was made in response to a call for service, radio call, or dispatch." An informal response by the California Department of Justice to an inquiry made by the Office of Inspector General regarding selection of this data element opined that responding to a radio call or a request from a school administrator constitutes a call for service. Any under representation of calls for service is attributable to the Sheriff's Department's data entries. It is notable that a settlement agreement between the County of Los Angeles on behalf of the Sheriff's Department involved the referral of cases to the Sheriff's Department by Housing Authority agents. That settlement agreement states at paragraph 54, "LASD-AV deputies shall only be involved with a Section 8 compliance check where the housing authority agent has sufficiently articulated legitimate safety concerns." (See Settlement Agreement in *United States of America v. The County of Los Angeles and The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department*, Case No. CV-15-0317, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/case-document/file/934156/download> and the United States Justice Department press release dated April 25, 2018 at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-and-los-angeles-county-sheriffs-department-agree-policing-reforms-and>.) Similar concerns are raised with regard to school resource deputies stopping students based on a referral from school administrator's unless there is a Constitutionally permissible reason to conduct the stop.



Of the 359 school contacts analyzed, a total of 103 contacts were initiated as a call for service and 256 contacts were the result of a self-initiated action by deputies.³⁰ Deputy contacts of Black students resulted from 64 calls for service and 177 self-initiated actions by deputies. Deputy contacts of Hispanic students resulted from 30 calls for service and 62 self-initiated actions by deputies. Deputy contacts of White students resulted from 4 calls for service and 4 self-initiated actions by deputies. The majority of Sheriff's Department contacts with all students occurred as the result of self-initiated actions by deputies. Moreover, deputies conducted self-initiated contacts with Black students at a rate greater than any other racial group.

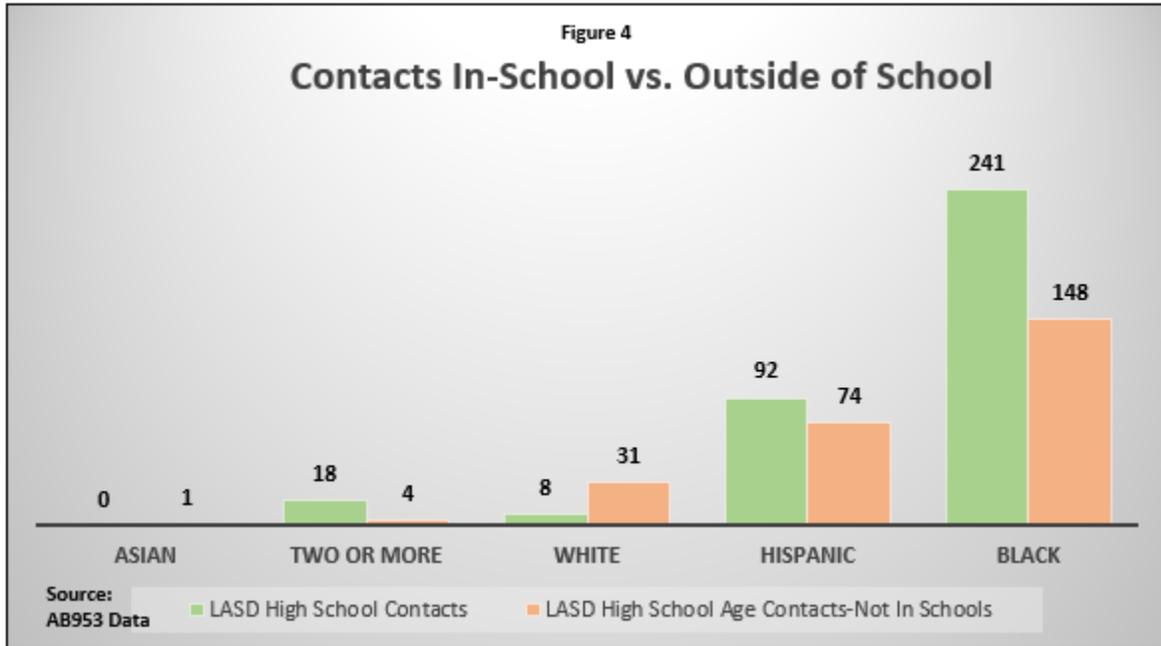
Contacts of High School Aged Youths Outside of School

The number of student contacts by Lancaster Station deputies may have been influenced by the actions of school administrators who called upon deputies to deal with student incidents. To assess the potential influence of this issue on deputy contact totals, the Office of Inspector General examined deputy contacts with high school age persons that occurred outside of school (258 contacts)³¹ and compared them to the number of contacts that occurred within the high schools we reviewed (359 in-school

³⁰ In the SACR dataset, there is a column to indicate if the contact was a call for service. This field is completed with either a "TRUE" or "FALSE" indicator. For the purposes of this analysis, a "TRUE" indicator was counted as a call for service and a "FALSE" indicator was counted as a self-initiated contact.

³¹ The outside-of-school contacts used in this analysis consisted of incidents where deputies indicated that the reason for the contact was due to a "reasonable suspicion that the person was engaged in criminal activity." As such, these outside-of-school contacts would then be comparable to the "reasonable suspicion" contacts we analyzed which were conducted in the high schools.

contacts). “Figure 4” below shows that comparison of the two types of contacts (inside versus outside of high schools):



When we compared “in-school” versus “outside of school” contacts, we found that high school aged Black youth had fewer contacts with deputies outside of school, with 148 contacts occurring outside school and 241 contacts occurring in school. The same is true for Hispanics, who were contacted 74 times outside school and 92 times in a school. Notably, Whites were contacted over three times more outside of school than they were in school with 31 and 8 contacts respectively.

Contacts within schools are generally limited to school hours on school days, while contacts outside of school can occur at any time, including nights and weekends. Given that the opportunity to contact students during school hours is limited, one might expect that in-school contacts would be fewer than outside of school contacts; however, we found the opposite to be true.

Notably, Black students were contacted by LASD deputies in school at a much higher rate than they were contacted outside of a school. This disparity suggests that the actions of school administrators may have an effect on the observed racial disparities of in-school contacts by deputies.

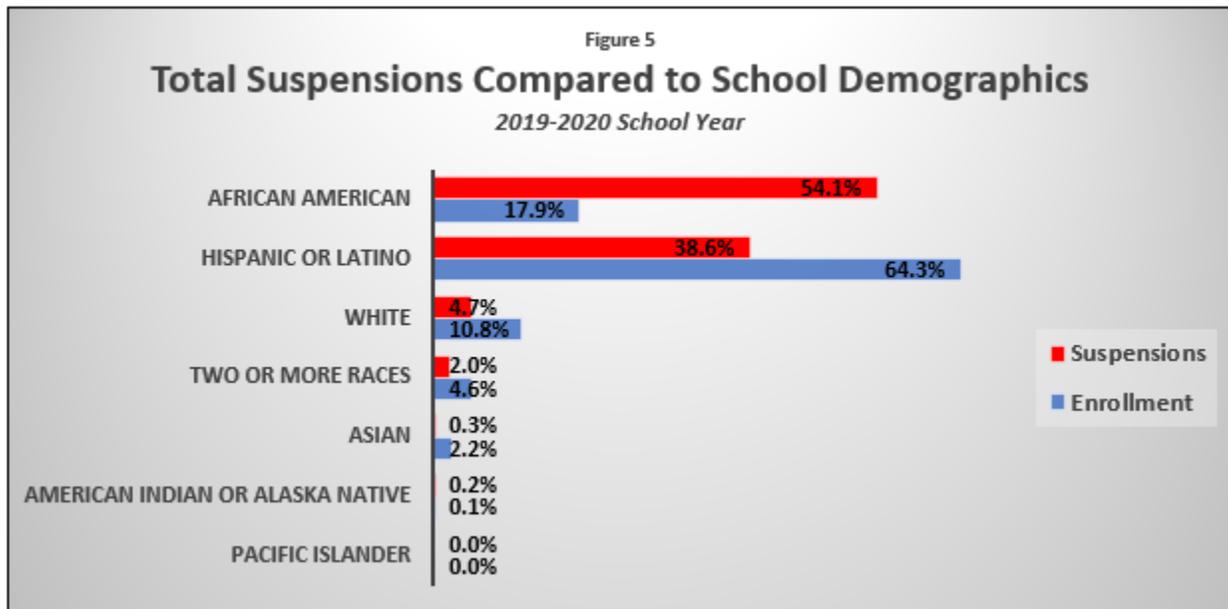
SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

The ProPublica article alleged that Black students in Lancaster high schools were given harsher discipline in comparison to similar cases involving White students. Additionally, the ProPublica article reported the suspension rate for Black students was over three times the rate for White students and much higher than the statewide rate for all high school students.

Suspensions vs. Percentage of Population: Black Students Were Suspended at Disproportionately Higher Rates Than Their Percentage of the School Population

During the 2019-2020 school year, there were a total of 23,443 students enrolled at the high schools we reviewed, of those, the Office of Inspector General identified 1,799 suspensions. Black students made up 54.1 percent of those suspensions while making up only 17.9 percent of the population of those schools. Suspensions of Hispanic and White students were significantly lower than their share of school's population. Hispanic students made up 38.6 percent of the suspensions while representing 64.3 percent of the population. White students made up only 4.7 percent of the suspensions while representing 10.8 percent of the population.

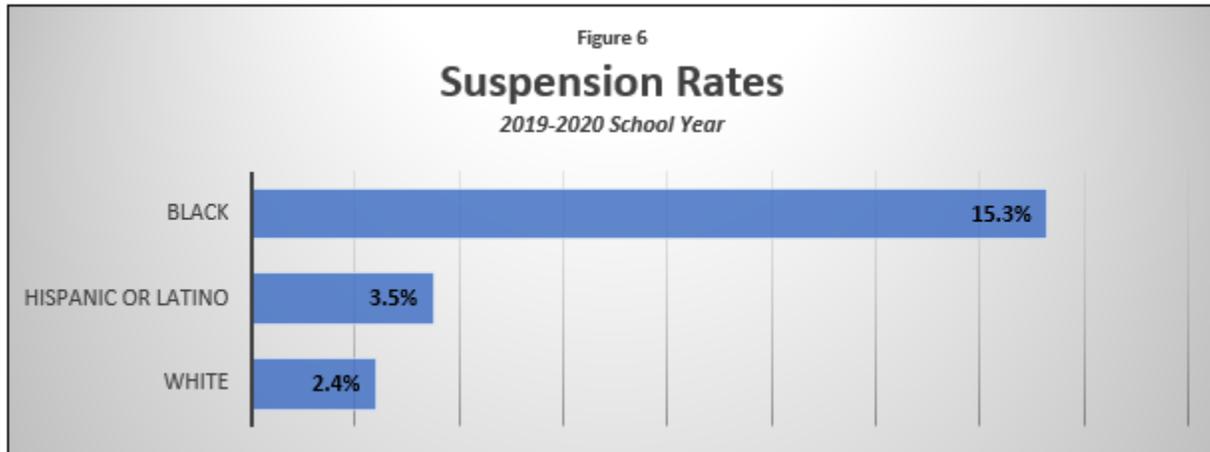
"Figure 5" below compares the overall suspension percentages to the racial demographics of the high schools analyzed in this report.



Black students were suspended at disproportionately higher rates than their percentage of the school population. This finding is consistent with the assertions in the ProPublica article.

Suspensions Rates by Race: Black Students Were Suspended at Far Higher Rates Than Other Races

Black students were also suspended at far higher rates than Hispanic and White students as shown in “Figure 6” below:



To put the above chart in perspective, approximately 1 out of every 7 Black students (15.3%) in the high schools reviewed in this report have been suspended. In comparison, 1 out of every 29 Hispanic students (3.5%) and 1 out of every 41 White students (2.4%) were suspended.³²

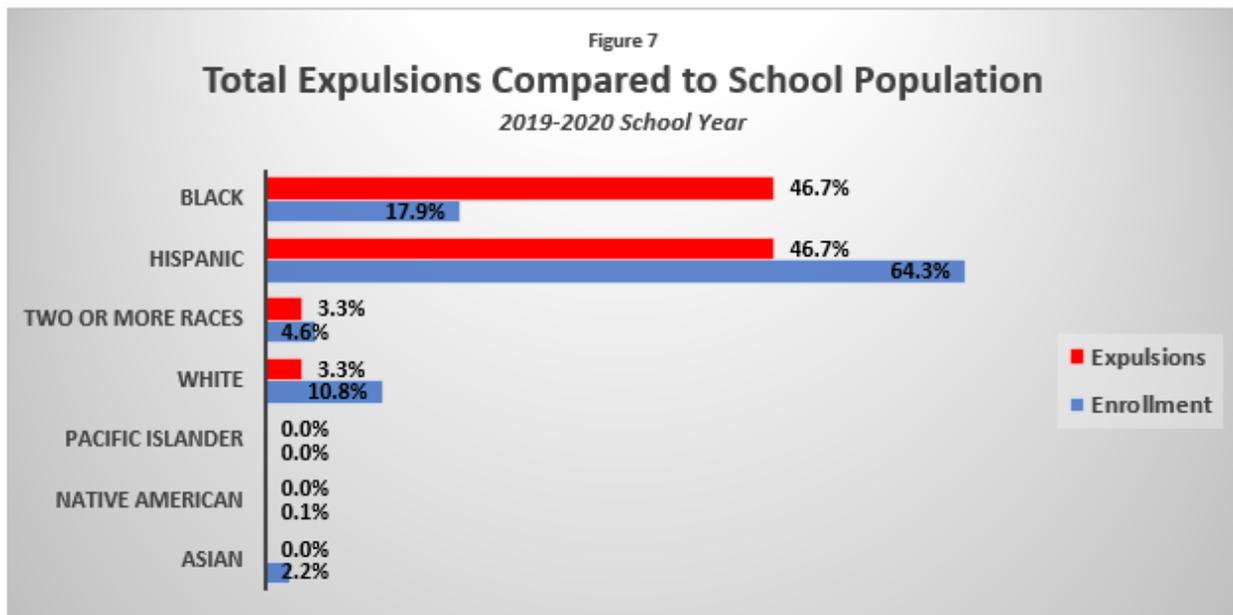
Black students have a much lower statewide suspension rate at 6.8 percent (1 of 14), while Hispanic and White statewide suspension rates were 2.5 percent (1 of 40) and 2.0 percent (1 of 50), respectively.

Black students enrolled in high schools patrolled by Lancaster Station deputies constituted the majority of all suspensions for the 2019-2020 school year and their suspension rates far exceeded those of Hispanic and White students. Additionally, the suspension rates for Black students were over twice the statewide averages. This finding is consistent with the assertions in the ProPublica article.

³² Suspension rates are calculated by dividing unique suspensions by the total enrollment of each group. Unique suspensions account for individual suspensions disregarding multiple suspensions for the same individual.

Total Expulsions by Race: Black Students Were Expelled at Disproportionately Higher Rates Than Their Percentage of the School Population

Expulsions represent the most severe form of discipline that can be imposed on a student and are therefore not as common as suspensions. However, here again, we observed that Black students were expelled at disproportionately higher rates. See “Figure 7” below:



During the 2019-2020 school year, there were 30 expulsions of which 46.7 percent (14 of 30) involved the expulsion of a Black student, 46.7 percent (14 of 30) of a Hispanic student, 3.3 percent (1 of 30) involved a student of mixed race, and 3.3 percent (1 of 30) involved a White student.

Black students were expelled at a disproportionately higher rate when compared to their percentage of the high school population (46.7% of expulsions vs. 17.9% of school population). This finding is consistent with the assertions in the ProPublica article.

CONCLUSION

The Office of Inspector General’s review of data for the 2019-2020 school year confirms the assertions in the ProPublica article that Black high school aged youth in Lancaster were contacted by law enforcement, arrested, cited, suspended, and expelled at disproportionately higher rates than other racial groups. Moreover, given the accuracy issues affecting the SACR system, any findings based upon this review of SACR data likely understates the issues identified in this report.

These findings are especially troubling given that in 2013, the U.S. Department of Justice found that Sheriff's Department's Lancaster and Palmdale stations had engaged in a pattern and practice of conducting stops, searches, and seizures that were unreasonable and in violation of the Constitution and federal law. This resulted in a federal settlement agreement mandating Sheriff's Department reforms as well as oversight by a Federal Monitor.³³ Seven years later, the Office of Inspector General's review of Sheriff's Department data from 2019-2020 shows that Black people still are disproportionately contacted by Lancaster Station deputies when compared to their percentage of the population in the City of Lancaster. Black people accounted for 43.4 percent of all contacts by Lancaster Station deputies while making up only 20.5 percent of the population of Lancaster.

It must be stressed that the number of contacts of Black people alone does not necessarily indicate a racial bias. However, this trend was also observed amongst Black youth contacted in and around Lancaster high schools. Our review found that Black high school aged youth were contacted by Sheriff's Deputies more than any other race group at or around Lancaster high schools. For the 2019-2020 school year, Black high school aged youth made up only 17.9 percent of total student enrollment, but they comprised over 66 percent of the contacts made by Lancaster Station deputies. Black youth were also cited and arrested at disproportionately higher rates than other race groups.

The ProPublica article also alleged disparate treatment of Black students in Lancaster High Schools for discipline related issues. The article alleged that Black students were more frequently referred to law enforcement than other students. The Office of Inspector General's review confirmed that Lancaster Station deputies responded to calls for service involving Black students more than any other racial group in and around the high schools reviewed in this report. The ProPublica article also quoted a Sheriff's Department representative who stated that the "vast majority" of deputy contacts on high school campuses were based on referrals from school staff and administrators and not self-initiated by the deputies. Contrary to this assertion, the Office of Inspector General's review found over 71 percent of deputy contacts (256 of 359) originated from self-initiated contacts by deputies. We also found that Black youth constituted the majority of contacts across all racial groups.

To determine whether the number of school contacts by Lancaster Station deputies with Black students was influenced by referrals from school administrators, the Office of Inspector General examined deputy contacts with high school age persons that

³³ See, *Monitoring of the Antelope Valley Settlement Agreement* at <http://antelopevalleysettlementmonitoring.info/>.

occurred outside of a school location. We found that high school aged Black youth had fewer contacts with deputies outside of school. Conversely, White youth were contacted by Sheriff's Department deputies over three times more outside of school than they were in school. In addition, the Office of Inspector General found that Black students were suspended and expelled by school administrators at disproportionately higher rates than other racial groups. These findings indicate a need for an analysis of the process used by Lancaster high school staff to refer in school student incidents for handling by deputies.

All stakeholders in Lancaster and throughout the County of Los Angeles must appreciate that law enforcement contacts can have serious and life-altering effects on a child. An ever-expanding volume of scholarly literature has documented the negative social, economic, and health impacts of youth contacts with the criminal justice system.³⁴ A key aspect of the Office of Inspector General's role in Sheriff's Department oversight is to ensure that deputies respect the rights of youth, follow the law, and utilize best practices in their tactics and training to ensure that such contacts are appropriate and lawful.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) acted on some of the issues discussed in this report. On June 8, 2021, the Board passed a motion entitled *Strengthening Oversight of School Law Enforcement Services (Motion)*.³⁵ Pursuant to this motion, the Inspector General now has the power to review and approve each amendment to the contract(s) between the Sheriff's Department and school districts for the provision of on-campus police services prior to the execution of those contract amendments. The Motion further instructs the Director of the Office of Diversion and Reentry, in collaboration with County, school district and community stakeholders, to report back in writing on the existing support and community interventions currently implemented throughout school districts within the County that eliminate or reduce the need for law enforcement intervention. This work is on-going with the full support of the Office of Inspector General.

³⁴ Kirk, David S., and Sampson, Robert J. (2013). "Juvenile Arrest & Collateral Educational Damage in the Transition to Adulthood." *Sociology of Education* 86(1) (December 19): 36-62; Gatti, U., Tremblay, R. E., & Vitaro, F. (2009). Iatrogenic effect of juvenile justice. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 50, 991-998; Seigle, E., Walsh, N., & Weber, J. (2014). *Core principles for reducing recidivism and improving other outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system*. New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center; Farn, Amber. (2018). "Improving Outcomes for Justice-Involved Youth Through Evidence-Based Decision Making and Diversion." Center for Justice Reform, Georgetown University.

³⁵ See Motion at <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/158962.pdf>.

The Office of Inspector General sets forth the following recommendations aimed at increasing the transparency, accuracy, and efficacy of oversight of School Resource Deputies and the safety of community youth.

IDENTIFYING MECHANISMS FOR REFORM AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Sheriff's Department should comply with Government Code section 25303.7 and Penal Code section 13510.8(8) and provide unimpeded access to government records and personnel to permit this office to discharge its monitoring and investigative duties.
2. The Sheriff's Department should provide the Office of Inspector General with viewing access to all body-worn camera videos and amend its audit policy to provide the Office of Inspector General with unrestricted viewing access. ([See Office of Inspector General's Fourth Report Back on Implementing Body-Worn Cameras in Los Angeles County dated March 22, 2021](#) for recommendation as to auditing by the Office of Inspector General.)
3. The Board has taken steps to ensure that School Resource Deputy services enhance school safety and security, avoid over-criminalization, and support schools in their efforts to improve student well-being and enhance academic achievement. The Board has put in place County infrastructure and implemented alternative strategies via programs like the Department of Mental Health's School Threat Assessment Response Team and the Division of Youth Development and Diversion (YDD) under the Office of Diversion and Reentry to improve the safety and well-being of youth on school campuses.³⁶

The Board has also noted that comprehensive school-based programming like those facilitated by Social Justice Learning Institute, California Conference for Equality and Justice, and the Brotherhood Crusade Bloom Initiative have demonstrated the value of providing youth with targeted academic, professional, social, emotional, and cultural development opportunities.³⁷

In many instances, Sheriff's Department deputies are the County's first point of contact with at-risk youth or youth in crisis. As part of the Sheriff's Department's School Resource Deputy forty-hour training program, deputies are trained in their roles as informal counselors to youth and their ability to work with YDD and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to divert qualifying youth away from the criminal process and into wholistic programming aimed at preventing recidivism.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Id.

- a. The Sheriff's Department should work with its County partners and CBO stakeholders to expand its training curriculum to educate all patrol-related deputies on their opportunity to act as informal counselors and gateways for at-risk youth to non-criminal County services. This training should be refreshed on a regular basis.
 - b. To reduce the potential race disparities in the process of referring incidents to School Resource Deputies, the Sheriff's Department should work with its County partners and CBO stakeholders to formulate standardized referral guidelines with school administrators.
4. The June 8, 2021, Motion also requires that the county's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Director of Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR) report back in writing with a proposed set of quarterly data points and a plan to collect and publish data relating to Sheriff's Department contacts with youth.³⁸
- a. One of the main sources of data for Sheriff's Department contacts with youth is the SACR system. However, the Office of Inspector General has found that the SACR system suffers from significant accuracy issues. Therefore, the Sheriff's Department should implement the recommendations set forth in the Office of Inspector General's report entitled [*The Sheriff's Department's Underreporting of Civilian Stop Data to the California Attorney General*](#) published June 10, 2022, to improve the accuracy and oversight of the SACR system data.
 - b. Further, publicly available data from the SACR system does not differentiate between School Resource Deputies assigned to a particular high school and patrol deputies policing the area in which a high school is located. Therefore, the Office of Inspector General could not limit this analysis to contacts conducted only by School Resources Deputies.

However, this data is available on the Sheriff's Department's Computer Aided Dispatch System (CAD). The CAD system is the Sheriff's Department's primary data system for tracking patrol-related contacts with the public. As such, the CAD system data is an invaluable source of data points for CEO and ODR review and analysis.

³⁸ Id.

The Sheriff's Department should publish CAD system data on all deputy contacts with students including data points listed in the Board's June 8, 2021, Motion with appropriate privacy redactions.

- c. The Sheriff's Department should conduct a quarterly comprehensive audit of data points relating to School Resource Deputy contacts with youth in the CAD system and reconcile those totals with the data reflected in the SACR system to verify SACR system accuracy.
5. The Sheriff's Department's Youth Services Unit (YSU) oversees the School Resource Deputy Program. The YSU has established good working relationships with CBO stakeholders and other County partners. The YSU is the primary point of contact and coordination within the Sheriff's Department for youth related issues.

The County has placed a high priority on addressing the needs and ensuring the safety of our youth. In response to this, YSU staffing should be increased to expand the Sheriff's Department's ability to coordinate, cooperate, and collaborate with the Board, Civilian Oversight Commission, CBOs, school districts, other County partners, and individual families within the community.

In addition to the School Resource Officer program, the YSU oversees all Youth Activity Leagues, the Stop Hate and Respect Everyone (SHARE) Tolerance program, Sheriff Explorer programs, and Vital Interventions and the Directional Alternatives program, throughout Los Angeles County. The following programs are integral to serving youths in the community:

- a. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's Youth Activities Leagues (YAL) are long established programs that provide safe spaces for community youth to build self-esteem, self-discipline, and character through athletics. The YAL also helps to create trust and positive ties between the Sheriff's Department and the communities it serves.
- b. The SHARE Tolerance Program is led in a mobile classroom that provides resources designed to educate, inform, and empower community youth by providing them with the essential tools needed to combat hatred, intolerance, bullying, cyberbullying, religious bigotry, as well as other topics affecting youth in their communities.

- c. Vital Intervention and Directional Alternatives (VIDA) is a structured 16-week program for non-violent, at-risk youth between the ages of eleven and seventeen. At risk youth are identified and referred for services from the Department of Children and Family Services, Probation Department, courts, law enforcement, school districts, parents, and religious institutions. Through collaboration with CBOs, volunteers, schools, and families, the VIDA program teaches youth the value of effective decision-making and taking responsibility for their futures.

- d. Since 1969, The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's Deputy Explorer Program has provided several thousands of youths with training and experiences that assist them in maturing and becoming more responsible, compassionate, independent, and self-confident members of their communities.

Each of these programs is well established and have all been shown to have a positive impact on community youth, create stronger working relationships between the Sheriff's Department and CBOs, and strengthen trust between the Sheriff's Department and the communities that it serves. The Sheriff's Department should strongly consider allocating a higher percentage of its funding to these programs to maximize their scope and impact.