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FM3

*Public Opinion Research
& Strategy*

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz and Curtis Below
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RE: Key Findings from a Recent Survey on Safety and Oakland's Public Schools

DATE: April 14, 2015

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed a telephone survey of 400 Oakland voters to assess opinions about safety in the community and specifically in Oakland's public schools.¹ The results found that while voters continue to view crime as one of the most pressing issues in Oakland, they are similarly concerned about issues related to school graduation rates, school funding levels, and employment opportunities, all factors that play contributing roles to crime rates. Additionally, throughout the survey, voters expressed the opinion that making Oakland safer was not merely a matter of increasing police services. Voters feel schools, parents, community groups, and police all share a responsibility to make Oakland safer, and education and employment opportunities play critical roles in reducing crime.

Consequently, 64 percent of voters feel Oakland's city government should make investing more in *violence prevention and intervention services* a higher priority than *police protection*. Furthermore, 71 percent would like to see the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) *reduce spending on police and invest more in prevention*. These two positions are held broadly across the entire Oakland community and among parents and non-parents alike. Not surprisingly, voters react very positively to a variety of Restorative Justice and Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports strategies to improve safety in Oakland's public schools that emphasize working with students to get at the root causes of the student problems and help them learn from mistakes, rather than referring challenging students directly to the criminal justice system.

Overall, the results suggest that voters want to see the role of police in Oakland's public schools reduced and additional resources instead invested in programs that help students avoid conflict in the first place, provide job training, and expand youth development programs.

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Among the key specific findings of the survey are the following:

- Oakland voters are particularly concerned about low graduation rates, crime, school funding levels, and insufficient employment opportunities, both broadly, but particularly for local youth.** Survey respondents were presented with a list of problems facing Oakland and asked to indicate how serious of a problem they feel each to be. As shown in **Figure 1**, the problems seen as most pressing by voters were low graduation rates for students of color, crime and insufficient school funding levels, all of which were seen as “extremely” or “very” serious problems by more than four in five voters. Following close behind those first tier problems were other closely related issues, such as gang violence, overall low graduation rates, and a lack of jobs for youth and general unemployment. Collectively, these results suggest voters are most concerned about Oakland’s public schools, crime, and employment issues.

FIGURE 1
Voters’ Views on the Most Serious Problems Facing Oakland

Problem	Severity of Problem		
	Extremely Serious	Very Serious	Total Extremely/Very Serious
Low high school graduation rates <u>for students of color</u> in Oakland public schools	51%	32%	83%
Crime	48%	34%	82%
A lack of funding for Oakland public schools	47%	33%	81%
A lack of jobs for local youth	38%	39%	77%
Gangs and juvenile violence	36%	37%	73%
Low high school graduation rates in Oakland public schools	39%	33%	72%
Unemployment	36%	33%	69%
The quality of Oakland public schools	32%	33%	64%
A lack of after-school and summer programs for youth	20%	34%	53%
A lack of police presence	22%	24%	46%
A lack of safety in Oakland public schools	16%	28%	44%
Too many suspensions and expulsions in Oakland public schools	21%	21%	41%
Discipline problems in the Oakland public schools	15%	27%	41%

Notably, several of the items were seen as “extremely” or “very” serious problems by less than half of voters. These include insufficient police presence, safety in Oakland’s schools, and issues related to school discipline. Many respondents were unfamiliar with the issues related

to school safety and discipline, with between one-quarter and one-third indicating that they were unsure or had no opinion about those challenges.

- Voters feel that education, employment opportunities, and adult role models all make major contributions to making Oakland safe.** Survey respondents were also presented with a list of factors contributing to making Oakland a safe place to live and asked to indicate how much of a role each plays. The big picture takeaway is that large majorities of voters feel that all of these factors have a role to play in making Oakland safe, with only *having police in Oakland public schools* (69%) seen by less than 90 percent as having a “major” or “minor” role (**Figure 2**). At the top of the list were four items that more than 90 percent of voters see as having a “major” role, including ensuring youth have strong, positive adult figures in their lives, providing all Oakland children with quality education, keeping youth in school, and having adequate middle-class jobs for families in the community.

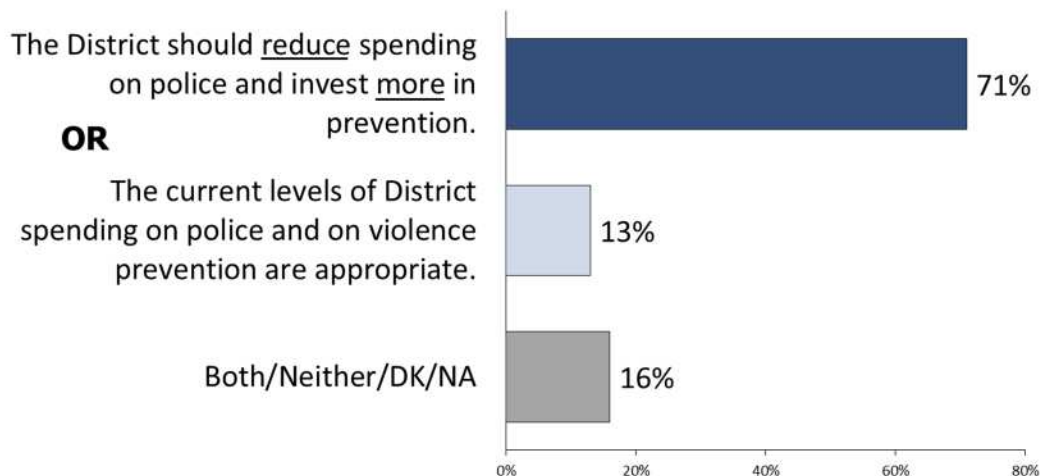
FIGURE 2
Voters’ Views on Factors Contributing to Safety in Oakland

Factor	Role in Making Oakland Safe		
	Major Role	Minor Role	Total Major/ Minor Role
Ensuring that children and youth have strong, positive adult figures in their lives	94%	6%	99%
Ensuring that all Oakland children receive a good education	94%	5%	98%
Ensuring that all Oakland youth are in school	91%	8%	99%
Having lots of good, family-supporting middle-class jobs in the community	91%	7%	98%
Ensuring that all families have a stable place to live	82%	15%	97%
Having adequate access to mental health care	82%	10%	92%
Having well-maintained parks and recreation areas for children and youth	80%	18%	98%
Ensuring that all Oaklanders have access to adequate health care	79%	16%	95%
Having thriving community organizations, local businesses and churches	77%	20%	97%
Having an adequate amount of positive after-school activities for youth, such as sports, music, and drama	74%	22%	96%
Having low rates of alcohol and drug abuse	74%	19%	93%
Having more police on the streets	60%	31%	90%
Having police in Oakland public schools	26%	43%	69%

- Voters clearly feel that OUSD should spend less on police and more on prevention.** Survey respondents were provided with some background information about OUSD’s current spending levels on police and programs specifically designed to prevent and reduce violence and resolve conflicts, and then asked indicate whether they felt that ratio was appropriate or whether the District should reduce spending on police and invest more in prevention. As shown in **Figure 3**, voters overwhelmingly (71%) feel OUSD should reprioritize spending and place more of an emphasis on prevention. Much like voters’ broad-based preference for the City to prioritize violence prevention and intervention services over police protection, majorities of voters of all demographic and geographic subgroups would rather OUSD spend more on prevention and less on police.

FIGURE 3
How Voters View OUSD’s Relative Spending Levels on Police and Prevention

Currently, the Oakland Unified School District spends more than \$7 million per year on its own, internal school police department, including police officers and security guards. In comparison, the District spends approximately \$2.5 million per year on programs specifically designed to prevent and reduce violence and resolve conflict in schools. This means that the District spends nearly three times as much on police as on violence prevention. Which of the following statements comes closest to your opinion?



Additionally, this result was consistent with voters’ overall feelings about how the City should prioritize public safety spending. When presented with a choice of investments City government can make to make the Oakland safer, by a three-to-one ratio (64% to 21%) respondents indicated that *violence prevention and intervention services* should be a higher priority than *police protection*.

- The most effective strategies for improving school safety are believed to be job training, youth development programs, and working with kids to overcome mistakes.** Survey respondents were presented with a list of suggested strategies for improving the safety of

Oakland’s public schools and asked to rate how effective they thought each would be using a seven-point scale where “1” means “not effective at all” and “7” means “extremely effective.” As shown in **Figure 4**, the majority of these strategies were seen as “extremely effective,” with voters only really dismissing hiring more police and security guards and allowing victims a say in determining punishment. It is also worth noting how voters reacted very positively to many elements of Restorative Justice and Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports (PBIS) approaches, suggesting that voters want to see schools working with students, getting to the root causes of the student problems and conflicts, helping students learn from mistakes, receive mental health and social emotional support, and stay in school. This is consistent with the fact that 93 percent of voters feel “extremely” or “very” concerned about OUSD’s ratio of one school counselor for every 1,854 students.

FIGURE 4
Voters’ Views on the Effectiveness of Strategies to Make Oakland’s Schools Safer

Strategy	Level of Effectiveness	
	Extremely Effective (“7”)	Mean Score
Offering positive youth development programs for African American and Latino students	63%	6.4
Providing job training and job programs for African-American and Latino teens in the community	60%	6.4
Helping kids who have made mistakes get back on track	59%	6.3
Providing job training and job programs for youth in the community	60%	6.2
Expanding student access to mental health and substance abuse services	52%	6.2
Having more adults on school campuses trained in conflict resolution and teaching students to be responsible for their actions	52%	6.2
Offering positive youth development programs for students	54%	6.1
Expanding student access to counseling services	52%	6.1
Teaching students character development, how to manage emotions, and resolve conflict in early grades to avoid violence and substance abuse in higher grades	52%	6.1
Empowering adults on school campuses to work with students to address the root cause of misbehavior, instead of removing those students from school or referring them to police	52%	6
Expanding gang intervention programs	43%	5.8
Requiring students who violate school rules to perform community service or pay restitution	38%	5.2
Establishing programs that allow victims a say in determining punishment	18%	4.4
Hiring more security guards on school campuses	16%	4.4
Hiring more police officers on school campuses	14%	4.1

CONCLUSION

Taken together, these survey results show that while voters feel police play an important role in making Oakland safer, they feel that responsibility is shared with schools, parents and the broader community. Additionally, there is clearly a strong desire to see crime prevented before it happens, and voters view Oakland's schools as a critical place where violence prevention and intervention can and should take place. **Consequently, voters want to see additional resources invested in programs that help students avoid conflict in the first place and the role of police in Oakland's public schools reduced.** Much of these feeling also appear rooted in a feeling that kids should be allowed to be to kids, and make and learn from mistakes without punishments from those mistakes haunting them for a lifetime.

ⁱ **Methodology:** From March 25-29, 2015, FM3 completed 400 telephone interviews (on landlines and cell phones, and in English, Spanish and Chinese) with randomly-selected Oakland voters. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.9% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within each sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.