

# Florida schools to allow real-time video monitoring by the police

**Our reporter**  
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Broward County, Florida school board officials have authorized police to conduct real-time monitoring of students in school via video surveillance cameras. The action is one of a number of new police measures being instituted nationally in what President Donald Trump called the “hardening” of schools in the aftermath of the mass shooting last year in Parkland.

While hundreds of millions of dollars are being allocated nationally to arm more police in schools, the real causes of mass shootings—never-ending predatory wars, the glorification of the military, historic levels of social inequality, the general brutalization of social relations, and the destruction of social programs and health care—are being covered up. Instead, horrific actions, like those of Parkland shooter Nikolas Cruz, are being used as a pretext to build up the repressive apparatus of the state.

Almost exactly one year ago, on February 14, 2018, 19-year-old Cruz entered Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School armed with an AR-15 semi-automatic assault rifle and killed 17 people, including 14 students, two teachers, and a staff member. Cruz was later captured by the police and charged with 17 counts of premeditated murder. If convicted, he could face the death penalty.

For the time being, the Broward County Sheriff’s department will only have access to the video feeds during emergencies. This compromise was reached after some school board members, including superintendent Robert Runcie, raised concerns that the monitoring would violate the privacy rights of students.

The Broward County school district has also purchased a new \$621,000 dollar surveillance system that will be installed in 36 schools in the district. The new system will have artificial intelligence capabilities, including facial recognition software. Attempts to install similar systems in schools in New York and Arkansas faced opposition from the ACLU, which has argued that the advanced

technology involved in the new surveillance systems is both invasive and vulnerable to hacking.

Other measures taken in the aftermath of last year’s mass shooting include providing spaces inside classrooms where students can hide from potential shooters, limiting access points on each campus to a single point of entry, and improving the existing public address systems in each school.

The announcement of increased police surveillance comes in the wake of the release of a 446-page report at the beginning of January by the 15-member Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission which recommended arming teachers, a policy advocated by Trump.

The report details the tragic circumstances of Cruz’s life. Born in 1998, he and his younger brother were adopted by a middle-aged couple, Roger and Lynda Cruz. Roger Cruz died at age 67 in 2004, followed by his wife Linda in 2017. The Cruz brothers moved in with another family, who Nikolas did not get along with.

The life of Nikolas Cruz is a clear indictment of the collapse of the mental health system in the US. According to the commission report, from the time Cruz was a child onward he was displaying emotional and behavioral problems. Between the age of three in 2002 to age 19 in January 2018, there were, “69 documented incidents where Cruz threatened someone, engaged in violence, talked about guns or other weapons or engaged in other concerning behavior...As early as three years old, Cruz demonstrated violent behavior.”

The Broward County Sheriff’s office visited the Cruz family 42 times before February of 2018. Twenty-one of the incidents involved Nikolas. This included a call in 2014 after he killed a neighbor’s chicken with a pellet gun. In February of 2016, deputies visited Cruz after he had posted a photo of himself on Instagram holding a gun along with the caption “I am going to get this gun when I

turn eighteen and shoot up the school.”

In September of 2016, the administration at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas conducted a threat assessment of Cruz, “due to reports concerning Cruz’s patterns of behavior, resulting in Cruz being prohibited from carrying a backpack to school.” In November of 2017, the sheriff’s department received another warning about Cruz, this time from a friend of the boy’s late mother who warned that, “Nikolas Cruz had weapons and wanted to join the military to kill people,” and that Cruz “might be a Columbine in the making.”

Both the Democratic and Republican parties have sought to militarize schools and downplay all the growing indicators of a universally dysfunctional society which find tragic in expression in figures like Cruz and the horrific shootings which they carry out on a regular basis in the United States. They have jointly cut hundreds of millions of dollars from mental health, social programs, schools and communities, presiding over the growth of social inequality, while portraying all the resulting problems as a police matter.

At the same time, the number of school counselors who are on the front lines of identifying and assisting students are declining because of the de-funding of public education. State funding for public education in Florida was cut 22 percent between 2008 and 2015, the second largest drop in the United States.

Among the most critical issues in the recent Los Angeles teachers’ strike was the demand for more school counselors, desperately needed by schools across the US. A report issued in February shows that the average student-counselor ratio was 482 to 1 in 2014-15, the most recent year for which data are available. In Florida that ratio was 485 to 1 and the number of counselors fell over the past decade.

Instead of providing help to troubled students, schools and campuses are responding to the tragic events in Parkland and other outbreaks of violence with increased surveillance and the militarization of schools.

After the Parkland shooting, Florida enacted statewide measures to require police or armed guards at every school in the state. The Arkansas legislature is considering a bill to require video surveillance in all special education classrooms. Mississippi is considering a bill that would require the state to reimburse schools for the hiring more police.

Only 1 percent of US schools had police presence in 1975. In the aftermath of the Columbine shooting in 1999, Democratic President Bill Clinton began the push for

more police in schools utilizing federal grants. By 2004, 36 percent of schools had police presence, today it is 24 percent of middle schools and 42 percent of high schools.

Since 2010, the Department of Justice has spent more than \$1 billion to hire new police officers for public schools while the education budget was cut significantly over the same period, with support from both the Democrats and Republicans. A report by the *New York Times* documented that over 100 school districts and public universities have hired surveillance companies to monitor students’ social media accounts.

A direct outcome of the proliferation of “school resource officers” has been the growing criminalization of young people. According to an ACLU report in 2017, “Every day in our nation’s schools, children as young as five are charged with ‘crimes’ for everyday misbehavior: throwing a paper airplane, kicking a trashcan, and wearing sagging pants. In the 2013-14 school year, the most recent year for which statistics are available, schools reported over 223,000 referrals to law enforcement...The criminalization of typical youth behavior has engendered a bizarre reality—students are arrested in schools, places meant to provide safe haven, for behavior that is noncriminal in any other venue...”

On the pretext of protecting students, schools throughout the US are increasingly bristling with the weapons of war. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for example, is considering a proposal to create a 40-person “mobile force platoon” to respond to campus events at a cost of \$2 million annually, plus \$500,000 in equipment costs. At least 117 campus police departments have been recipients of surplus war materiel from the Defense Department under the 1033 equipment transfer program, acquiring M-16 assault rifles, grenade launchers and bayonets.



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