

Why Are Metal Detectors Necessary?

By Yosyiah Griffin, Loyola Academy St. Louis 6th Grader (see bio below)



I had my first encounter with metal detectors as a second grader. Imagine me, new to public school, barely four feet tall, barely fifty pounds, walking through what seemed like mile high aluminum door frames that emitted a cacophony of blaring beeps. These two giant door frames, towering above me, on my left and right, greeted me before any human did, and I was terrified.

My school security guard, the first person you see when you enter the building, offered a smile that was followed by a “Do you have anything in your pockets?” As a seven-year-old, I did not understand what “public school” meant or why this new school had metal detectors, but I knew then, in that moment, that it was going to be different. I wondered if metal detectors and security guards are supposed to make students feel safe, then why do I feel so afraid?

According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), traumatic events have a significant sensory influence in young children. For example, “fearful visual cues and loud noises,” such as those produced regularly by metal detectors, may destroy children’s sense of safety. To elaborate, another unsettling thing about metal detectors is that they can produce a “jail-ized” mentality, further allowing the child to view themselves and their community as criminal or deserving of jail.

According to a partial list of mass shootings in 2021 by the *New York Times*, shootings have occurred all over the country in predominantly white communities. So I ask again why are there metal detectors and security guards in schools like mine where these precautions aren’t needed?

To summarize, the decision being made is that communities where black people live are dangerous and daunting, but only when you are looking from the outside. In reality, my community is safe because of connection, as though we are one big family. In this family there are people and volunteers who would do the work of supporting schools and abolishing the supposed need for policing and metal detectors.

We see examples of this in communities like New York City, where the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) envisioned NeighborhoodStat as a technique for bringing residents and city authorities together to collectively solve recurrent difficulties in the city’s public housing developments. Mayor Bill de Blasio introduced NeighborhoodStat in 2016 as part of the Mayor’s

Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety, a public safety effort in 15 public housing developments across the city to address the core causes of violence. NeighborhoodStat gives residents the power to create their own agendas for tackling issues that influence their areas' safety, and it puts in place a system that allows them to work with local leaders to make their vision a reality.

According to an article in the *Seattle Times*, following Columbine and each subsequent high-profile school shooting in the United States, schools have focused on ways to "harden" themselves as targets by implementing increased security measures such as surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and stationing armed police officers on campus, known as school resource officers.

Since 2000, the US government has granted approximately \$1 billion in school resource officer funding to schools around the country. Conspicuous security, including the presence of school resource officers, has little to no effect in preventing school shootings or lowering casualties, according to accumulating evidence.

In addition to community safety efforts, the money that goes to policing could instead be used to address inefficiencies in the school systems, such as, enrichments, better lunches, extra class materials, and a good library selection; at my old school, the variety of books was limited at times. There were also times when I felt like our after-school program could have had a study hall and enrichments like baking, robotics, comic book club, etc.

To conclude, metal detectors are promoted as a way to assist, but along the way they can cause some issues.

Biography

Hello my name is Yosiyah Griffin, but you can call me Yosiyah, Dr. Griffin (I have no real PhD, but you can't prove that), and I'm hoping that you'll call me your friend. I was born in Atlanta, Georgia, but we moved to East St. Louis when I was 3. I currently attend Loyola Academy of St. Louis.

Some of my favorite things to do are play with legos, build legos, and play video games every once in a while. My favorite song would be *That's What I like* by Bruno Mars and my favorite food would be sushi, especially when it's nigiri.

I was drawn into this work when I wanted to educate people on the importance of social injustices in our communities.