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**IMPORTANT NEW REPORT SHEDS LIGHT ON
LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS IN WAKE COUNTY SCHOOLS**

Alternative Policies Proposed to Create Safer Schools and Save Money

Raleigh, NC—February 3, 2011—A new report from Advocates for Children's Services calls attention to critical concerns over the use of law enforcement officers in the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS). School Resource Officers (SROs) are not required to have any experience or training in working with children and youth.

“Law Enforcement Officers in Wake County Schools: The Human, Educational, and Financial Costs,” describes current SRO policies and practices as “misguided,” and criticizes them as “financially unsound and educationally imprudent.” The report points to a number of successful models in other school districts across the nation where progressive reforms have reduced the school-to-prison pipeline, while keeping schools safe and saving taxpayer dollars.

A co-author of the report, Jason Langberg, Equal Justice Works Fellow at Advocates for Children's Services observed, “We don't know if SROs increase school safety, yet we do know, from research and investigation, that they are extremely expensive and criminalize the learning environment. At the very least, before letting SROs into schools, WCPSS should require that there is adequate training, limitations, oversight, and accountability.”

The report notes that although the state, local municipalities, and WCPSS are currently in a budget crisis and laying off employees, no cuts in school security expenses have been proposed. In 2009-2010, the average SRO salary in WCPSS was \$50,291. In contrast, a national board-certified teacher with a bachelor's degree would need six years of licensed experience before earning the average SRO salary. Also, in recent years, WCPSS paid for security personnel to attend workshops on interrogation techniques, but no money was spent to train SROs on adolescent psychology, working with students who have disabilities, or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Among several recommendations offered in the report are:

- **Positive alternatives** to suspensions, arrests, and court referrals meted out by law enforcement, including restorative justice, community service, restitution, and other programs that teachers and principals can administer;
- **Specialized mandatory, intensive, on-going training** for all SROs;
- **Prohibition of arrests and delinquency and criminal charges** against students who commit **minor offenses** in schools; and
- **Strict limitations on the use of guns, TASERs, and pepper spray** on school campuses.

Notes co-author Barbara Fedders, Assistant Clinical Professor of Law at the UNC School of Law, "Students and their parents deserve to be educated in schools that value fairness and equality. The proliferation of armed police officers in schools, often operating without oversight from school officials, may threaten these values. We hope that this report serves as an occasion for North Carolina's educational and political leaders to rethink the way in which we can best secure safe and nurturing schools."

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About Advocates for Children's Services (ACS):

ACS is a statewide project of Legal Aid of North Carolina that advocates for the idea that at-risk children are rights-bearing citizens who are entitled to safe, permanent homes and should receive the medical and educational services promised by law. Since 2008, ACS' primary objective has been to end the school-to-prison pipeline in North Carolina. Toward that end, ACS primarily engages in two types of activities:

- providing high-quality, free legal advice and representation for children from low-income families who are facing school push out as a result of suspension, expulsion, academic failure, unmet special education needs, or enrollment problems; and
- community education in the form of presentations, trainings, media outreach, social media, and publications.

For more information, please visit: www.legalaidnc.org/acs.

About Legal Aid of North Carolina (LANC):

LANC is a statewide nonprofit law firm that provides free legal services in civil matters to low-income people in order to ensure equal access to justice and to remove legal barriers to economic opportunity. LANC serves all 100 counties of North Carolina through 24 geographically located offices across the state.