

BREAKING THE CHAINS

The School-To-Prison Pipeline, Implicit Bias,
and Racial Trauma: An Executive Summary



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A NATIONAL CRISIS: —THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

INTRODUCTION

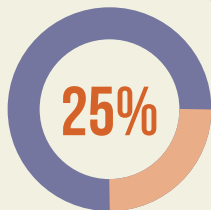
WE HAVE BETRAYED THOUSANDS OF OUR CHILDREN by criminalizing them instead of providing them with supportive and inclusive school environments. The U.S. incarcerates more of its children than any other country in the world. The school-to-prison pipeline is a key component of this system that imprisons around 70,000 children per year. Increasingly, harsh school discipline policies that start with suspension or expulsion of students lead to a downward spiral into the criminal justice system. Students removed from the school environment fall behind academically, are at higher risk of getting in trouble, feel stigmatized when they return to school, and are more likely to drop out, never obtaining high school diplomas.

STRIKINGLY, THOSE MOST IMPACTED BY HARSH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICIES are the children who need the most support. Students of color, students with disabilities, LGBTQ youth, and trauma-affected children are disproportionately impacted through highly subjective school discipline practices. Many factors play into the disproportionate suspension or expulsion of these vulnerable students and their eventual path into the criminal justice system. Among these factors are the lack of teacher training and support, the increased placement of police officers at schools, the consequent application of law enforcement tactics on students, implicit bias, the use of broad discretion in school discipline, racial anxiety and trauma, and lack of diversity and cultural sensitivity among teachers and administrators.

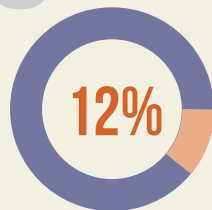
THE PIPELINE: WHAT COMMUNITIES ARE MOST AFFECTED?

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

REFERRED TO LAW ENFORCEMENT



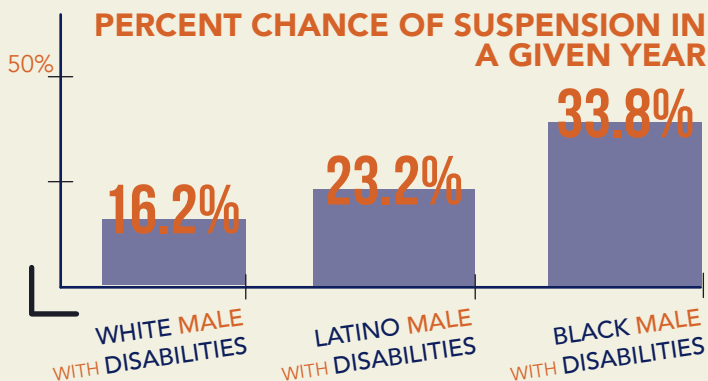
OF GENERAL POPULATION



BLACK STUDENTS ARE 3.8X MORE LIKELY TO BE SUSPENDED THAN WHITES

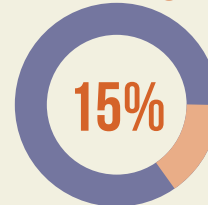
ONE DISTRICT SUSPENDED 44.7% OF ITS NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS IN 2009-2010

PERCENT CHANCE OF SUSPENSION IN A GIVEN YEAR

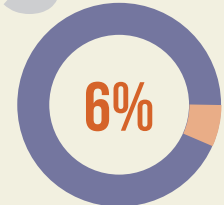


LGBTQ STUDENTS

IN JUVENILE DETENTION



OF GENERAL POPULATION



THE STAGGERING NUMBERS*

- About 3 million children are suspended at least once from school every year.
- In 2011-12, more than 1.5 million youth were suspended at least twice.
- U.S. students miss around 18 million days of instruction each year. Even a single suspension often has a profound impact on a student's academic and personal life trajectory.

TARGETING OUR MOST VULNERABLE

Students of color are disproportionately targeted by such policies.


- Black students are 3.8 times more likely to be suspended than White students.
- Black girls are 6 times more likely to be suspended than White girls.
- Latino students represent 21% of suspensions and 25% of expulsions.
- One in every 13 Native American students is suspended nationally. Students with disabilities, students of color with disabilities, LGBTQ students, and trauma-exposed students are also subject to disproportionate targeting in school discipline.
- Students with disabilities face extreme discipline and physical force and were more than twice as likely to be suspended in 2013-14.
- More than 200,000 students with disabilities were physically restrained or secluded in public schools during 2011-12.
- Black boys with disabilities have a 33.8% chance of being suspended compared to only a 16.2% chance for White boys with disabilities.
- 9% of LGBTQ students were disciplined for simply identifying as LGBTQ.

BY THE NUMBERS

A FLORIDA LONGITUDINAL STUDY AND A TEXAS STUDY FOUND THE FOLLOWING DATA:

•DISCIPLINE AFFECTS LIKELINESS TO GRADUATE


1 SUSPENSION AS EARLY AS 9TH GRADE



33% CORRELATED TO A DECREASE IN GRADUATION RATES

•SUSPENSIONS, EXPULSIONS, AND CRIMINALITY

STUDENTS WITH 1 SUSPENSION OR EXPULSION



ARE 3X MORE LIKELY TO ENTER THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM THE FOLLOWING YEAR

TARGETING OUR MOST VULNERABLE, CONT'D.

- 37.3% of children 17 or younger had been physically assaulted in the previous year, 15.2% had been maltreated by a caregiver, and 5.8% had witnessed violence between parents, according to a 2014 survey. Neuro-scientific studies have shown such traumatic experiences affect the neuro pathways of the brain and negatively impact children's high order thinking and ability to perform in school.

ACTION PLAN TO DISMANTLE THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

Tackling a phenomenon as entrenched as the school-to-prison pipeline requires a multi-pronged approach. A fundamental shift in discipline philosophies is crucial.

- Instead of treating our children like criminals, we should adopt positive interventions and institute supportive approaches such as restorative discipline.
- We should focus on strengthening student-teacher relationships and trust, while prioritizing an inclusive and equitable school climate.
- We must provide teachers with additional support and training, including training in implicit bias, relevant neuroscience and psychology findings, and trauma-informed strategies.
- We must also make it a priority to recruit teachers and administrators from diverse backgrounds.
- We must hold school districts accountable through data collection and reporting.
- Finally, we must eliminate zero-tolerance discipline policies and discretionary discipline.

*For references and to read the full report, visit: <https://equaljusticesociety.org/breakingthechains/>•

IN BRIEF

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

REFORM CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Invest in positive behavioral intervention and restorative justice training and strategies.

BETTER TEACHER TRAINING

Teachers should be trained to reduce bias and best manage a diverse student body, including those affected by trauma.

ENCOURAGE LEARNING, FOCUS ON SCHOOL CLIMATE

Teachers and authority figures should maintain empathetic and supportive reactions to students' behavior and create a school environment where students feel safe.

COLLECT DATA, MAINTAIN ACCOUNTABILITY

Administrators should collect discipline data – disaggregated by race, disability, and gender – to keep track of what works and what does not.

CHANGE POLICY

It is important to eliminate education codes that allow for discretionary discipline, like suspensions for "willful defiance" and other infractions subject to teacher bias.