

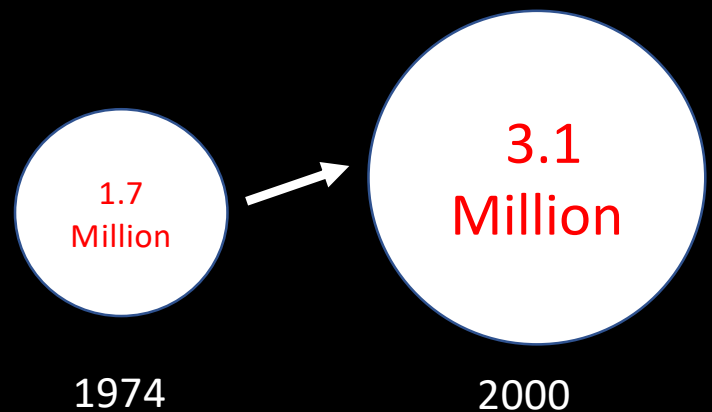
School Discipline and the School-To-Prison Pipeline

The school-to-prison pipeline is the process of students being pushed out of public schools and into the criminal justice system. A significant contributor to the pipeline is increasingly harsh punishments for schoolchildren's misbehavior.

ISS and OSS

Students are receiving **“extreme discipline and being kicked out of school for behavior that used to get students sent to the principal's office or guidance counselor”**.² In-school and out-of-school suspensions are not effective discipline; they disregard the root cause of the behavior and cause students to miss valuable class time. Research has found that “suspension increases the possibility that a student will repeat a grade, drop out of school, and become involved in the juvenile justice system” and that “students who received just one suspension in 9th grade are two times more likely to drop out of school”.² Even worse than suspension, students are also being arrested and given criminal charges for school misbehavior.

Students Suspended Annually¹⁵



“suspensions often result from minor incidents that escalate due to a lack of resources, training, and effective alternatives”²

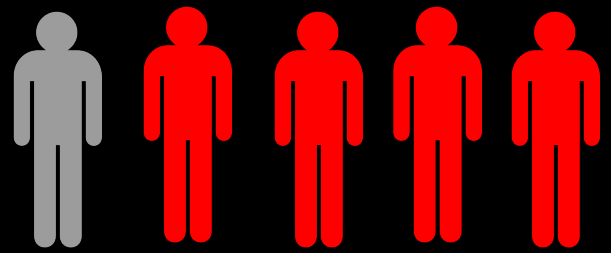
Arrests, Criminal Charges, and SROs

Students are being arrested and given tickets for typical misbehaviors such as disorderly conduct and disruption of class. In a 6-year period, 2,000 Texas **elementary school students** were given class C misdemeanor tickets.³ Heightened rates of student arrests can be partially accountable to an increase in school resource officers (SROs). 2015 showed a 250% increase in SROs from 1996.⁴ Minor infractions are now being handled by law-enforcement more than through conflict management or intervention strategies.⁵ SROs are not necessarily trained in child and adolescent development nor on how to effectively work with students with disabilities.⁵ Because of this, some **SROs “tend to approach misbehaving students as adult criminals rather than seeking out and addressing the underlying needs behind students' misbehavior”**⁶ which results in students carrying the burden of a criminal record. A student who is arrested in high school has a doubled chance of dropping out and a student involved in court has a quadrupled chance.⁶ Research suggests that the juvenile system does not help youth but “serves instead to criminalize and diminish the educational, economic, and health outcomes” of affected students.⁷

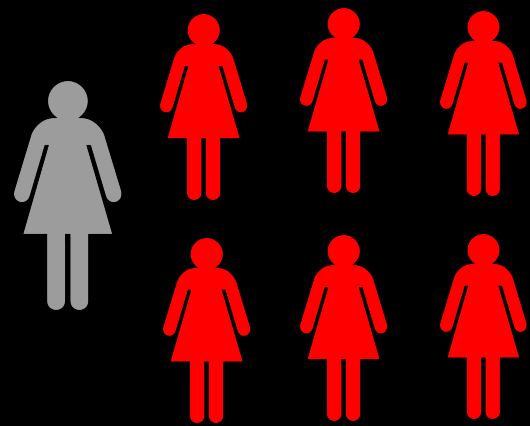
Disparities among Race, Gender, and Sexuality

The situation is worsened by the inequalities. **LGBTQ students, minority students, and youth with disabilities have been found to be “punished more often and more harshly than their peers for the same behavior”.**² In NC, black students are 4 times more likely than their white peers to be suspended;⁶ they are punished for behavior that is less serious and more subjective than their peers.⁸ Also, LGBTQ students are three times more likely to receive harsh discipline than non-LGBTQ students.¹⁰ This difference has been found to not be “the result of a difference in behavior but instead due to a difference in treatment”.²

“although schools have always encountered students fighting, skipping class, and breaking school rules, many of these infractions are now being handled by law-enforcement rather than on-site conflict management or intervention strategies”¹



Black students are four times more likely to be suspended than their white peers⁶



Black female students are 6 times as likely to receive school discipline than their white female peers¹¹

What Needs to Change?

- When Baltimore City Public schools updated their school policy to focus on prevention and intervention strategies and reduce out-of-school suspensions, their **graduation rates reached record highs.**²
- A school showed the largest test score increase in their district after changing their code of conduct to form a group of “respected teachers who mentored suspended students academically and socially for 10 weeks”¹²
- In Clayton, Georgia, a school that developed protocol to prohibit its students who commit minor offenses from being brought to the juvenile justice system saw dramatic decreases in weapons on campus and fighting and increases in graduation rates.²

As demonstrated in the examples above, the benefits of changing disciplinary procedures are clear and can help to direct children on a path focused on education instead of punishment and incarceration. Schools should use prevention and intervention strategies, prohibit students from entering the juvenile justice system for minor offenses, reduce in-school and out-of-school suspensions, and limit their use of SROs for student discipline.

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