

---

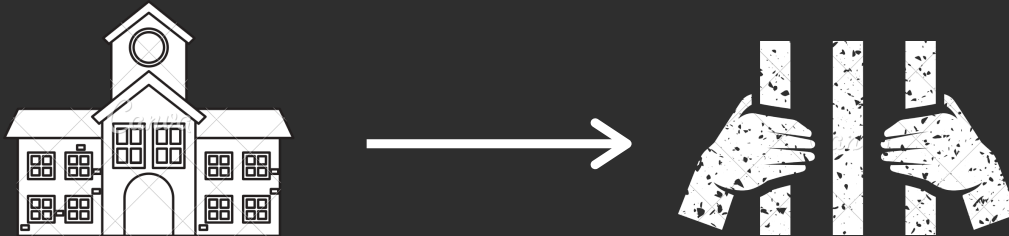
---

# THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

A POLICY BRIEF BY KAITLIN DISHAROON

---

---



---

## BACKGROUND:

---

The school-to-prison pipeline represents the intersection of the K-12 educational system and the juvenile justice system.

The pipeline is a one-way flow of students, taking them out of schools and into the hands of the juvenile justice system, often with a difficult or nonexistent journey back into education.

It is perpetuated by zero-tolerance policies, which criminalize schools and classrooms by creating strict regulations that schools must follow.

These policies began with the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, requiring schools to refer students to criminal justice or juvenile delinquency if they were found with a weapon or firearm on campus, and increased in popularity after the Columbine Shooting.<sup>1</sup>

---

## INTENT VS. REALITY:

---

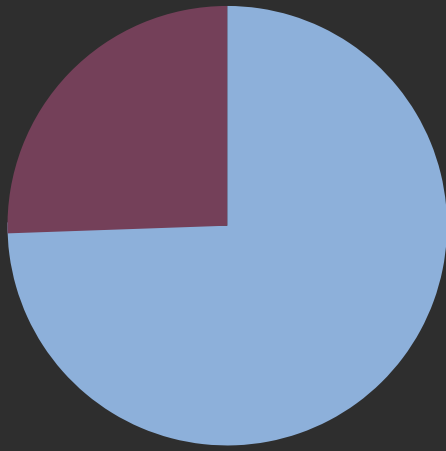
While these policies were originally created to curb the prevalence of violence in schools help keep students safe, as of 2019, there have been

**220 school shootings** since Columbine.<sup>2</sup>

Over time, these policies have evolved greatly. Current zero-tolerance policies cover a large array of things, and **oftentimes the punishment does not meet the crime.**

For example, HERE ARE SOME REAL PUNISHMENTS GIVEN THROUGH ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES:

Over 67% of school-related arrests are misdemeanor charges.<sup>3</sup>



- Sixth grader arrested for refusing to participate in the pledge of allegiance <sup>4</sup>
- Fourth grader suspended for having a Lego policeman with a gun on its waist <sup>5</sup>
- 12-year old girl arrested for writing her name on a desk <sup>6</sup>
- 13-year old boy with autism suspended for drawing the Nintendo 64 game "Bomberman" <sup>7</sup>

DISPARITIES:

The school-to-prison pipeline unfairly targets specific youth. Often, the students affected are low-income, students of color, ESL students, homeless students, students in foster care, and students with disabilities.<sup>8</sup>

Over 70% of students involved in school-related arrest or referred to law enforcement are African-American or Latinx.<sup>3</sup>



African-American youths make up 16% of the nation's overall juvenile population, but account for 45% of juvenile arrests.<sup>8</sup>

Black students are 3x more likely to be suspended or expelled for the same behavior as their white peers.<sup>9</sup>

85% of children in juvenile detention have disabilities that make them eligible for special education, but only 37% receive these services while in school.<sup>8</sup>

Students with disabilities only account for 12% of the overall student population but are 7% more likely to receive out-of-school suspension and make up 25% of all school-related arrest.<sup>8</sup>



---

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

---

CHILDREN INCARCERATED AS A JUVENILE ARE **39%** LESS LIKELY TO GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL AND ARE **41%** MORE LIKELY TO HAVE ENTERED ADULT PRISON BY AGE 25.<sup>10</sup>

When children suffer, so do their communities.

As the youth are losing out on their potential futures, their communities lose the potential talents that they would offer and consequently commit to expending vast resources to address the problems that these students pose when they become adults.<sup>11</sup>



---

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

---

Because the roots to the school-to-prison pipeline run so deep within our society, the best way to combat it is through preventative methods. The journey down pipeline begins with discipline, and therefore, the journey to prevention should as well.

**State governments should enact a law that requires schools to consider using restorative justice methods and alternatives to suspension as alternatives to zero-tolerance policies in terms of discipline.**

The focus of restorative justice is to build on a student's strengths and finding solutions to problems. Restorative justice aims to hold an offender accountable for their actions and provides an opportunity for students to learn from their misconduct and the consequences of their actions.<sup>11</sup>

Alternatives to suspension provide services to youth on short-term suspensions from school by focusing on their strengths and resilience so that they may develop the skills and strategies to reconnect with their schools, communities, and families and achieve their goals.<sup>11</sup>

Studies have shown that restorative justice is a useful method of keeping students in school while promoting positive relationships. The data collected suggests that restorative justice and suspension alternatives result in better outcomes for students.<sup>11</sup>

Teaching students how to take accountability for their own actions is extremely valuable. Simply suspending children as punishment for behavior is taking away from key learning moments that allow these children to grow mentally and emotionally. These methods further a child's education by teaching them about themselves and how to grow from their mistakes instead of pushing them out of their educational environments and starting the cycle.

---