

## School to Prison Pipeline

The “school to prison pipeline” refers to the alarming trend of so many youth being routed from school directly into the juvenile justice system.

In the past few decades, public schools increasingly began to adopt “zero tolerance” discipline models in response to fears about school safety.

Zero tolerance discipline has caused a dramatic increase in the use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion to punish even low level infractions. In one state a study found that only 5% of students who were suspended were for a “serious infraction.”<sup>203</sup>

These cultural trends have been reinforced by “tough on crime” education policy such as the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 requiring an entire year’s out-of-school suspension for any student who brings a weapon into a school. Many schools applied this punishment to pocket knives or even toy weapons, resulting in an education denied and a child outside of the system. These policies disproportionately affect children of color.

Another piece of legislation that has been linked to the school-to-prison pipeline is No Child Left Behind.<sup>204</sup> The serious ramifications for schools that do not meet the law’s standards have prompted administrators to remove problematic students, thus presenting a more successful profile to the government. And when students return from

the juvenile justice system, administrators are reluctant to accept them, since they carry a risk of hurting the school as a whole.

The significant increase of Student Resource Officers (SROs), police officers based in schools, has contributed to criminalizing even minor discipline infractions. Though the intent may be student safety, evidence shows that the officers mostly respond to low-level discipline issues unrelated to safety. A report by the Justice Policy Institute found that schools with SROs were 500% more likely than schools without officers to

arrest students for the vague category of “disorderly conduct,” even controlling across school districts’ poverty level.<sup>205</sup> Such school-related arrests are extremely racially skewed, with African American and Latino students accounting for 70% of the arrests and thus beginning the process of racially disproportionate incarceration.<sup>206</sup>

### Jerusalem Talmud *Hagiga* 1:71

**Rabbi Simeon Bar Yohai taught: If you see towns which have been uprooted from their original location in the Land of Israel, you should know that the inhabitants did not faithfully pay the fee of their scribes and teachers. What is the scriptural basis for this statement? It is written: “Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through? And the Lord says: Because they have forsaken My Torah which I set before them.” (Jeremiah 9:11-12)**

[Translation by CAJE]



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203 [http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/Suspended\\_Education.pdf](http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/Suspended_Education.pdf)

204 <http://www.thenation.com/article/205129/states-are-required-educate-students-behind-bars-heres-what-really-happens>

205 <http://www.vox.com/2015/2/24/8101289/school-discipline-race>

206 [http://b.3cdn.net/advancement/0d4633c0e97bcf061f\\_q4m6igky2.pdf](http://b.3cdn.net/advancement/0d4633c0e97bcf061f_q4m6igky2.pdf)

Instead of criminalizing students, school districts would do well to invest in guidance counselors, social workers, and training staff in alternative models of discipline and conflict resolution.<sup>207</sup> Schools should be teaching children to effectively deal with problems in a healthy and effective manner rather than sending them to jail.

## Sample Partner Organizations

- Dignity in Schools: Their work includes the National Week of Action Against School Pushout, Solutions Not Suspension Initiative, and a Model Code on Education and School Discipline. [www.dignityinschools.org](http://www.dignityinschools.org)

- Advancement Project: <http://www.advancementproject.org/issues/stopping-the-school-to-prison-pipeline>

- ACLU: [www.aclu.org/school-prison-pipeline](http://www.aclu.org/school-prison-pipeline)

- Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC): <http://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do/children-at-risk>

- Suspension Stories is a youth-led participatory action research project to understand the school to prison pipeline: <http://www.suspensionstories.com>. This initiative is the result of a collaboration between the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team ([www.rogersparkywat.org](http://www.rogersparkywat.org)) and Project NIA ([www.project-nia.org](http://www.project-nia.org)).

- Numerous local student-led organizations have released reports and led campaigns, such as Youth United for Change (YUC) in Philadelphia or Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE).

## The Peace Room

**A few years back, a student leadership development organization called Umoja set out to confront [the school to prison pipeline] by establishing a program that carves out a little corner of Manley High School [Chicago's most violent school in 2007], the "peace room," as a home base for restorative justice practices... Nowadays, friends of kids who've been harmed or done harm or threatened to hurt someone or talked about fighting may bring them to the peace room—especially if those friends have experienced healing there themselves... The peace room aims to be a safe community, woven into the fabric of the school... a stark contrast to in-school suspension rooms, where kids are often punished by near-abandonment in a classroom free of teaching and learning, left to drift toward boredom and frustration... The circles and informal chats that happen here helped [Gloria] say her feelings out loud, to figure out why fights happen and what she can do to prevent them... [she] chimes in, "This room just safens things." ... That's why the room needs to be here every day, living inside the body of the school.**

- Schenwar, Maya. *Locked Down, Locked Out: Why Prison Doesn't Work and How We Can Do Better*, p. 160-162, 171

## Talmud, Sanhedrin 71a

**Rabbi Shimon taught: Just because a boy ate a triens [about three ounces] of meat and drank half a log [about 1/4 liter] of Italian wine, should his father and mother take him out and stone him? Such a thing [a rebellious son] has never existed and will never exist.**

<sup>207</sup> See, e.g., <http://www.npr.org/blogs/ed/2014/12/17/347383068/an-alternative-to-suspension-and-expulsion-circle-up>