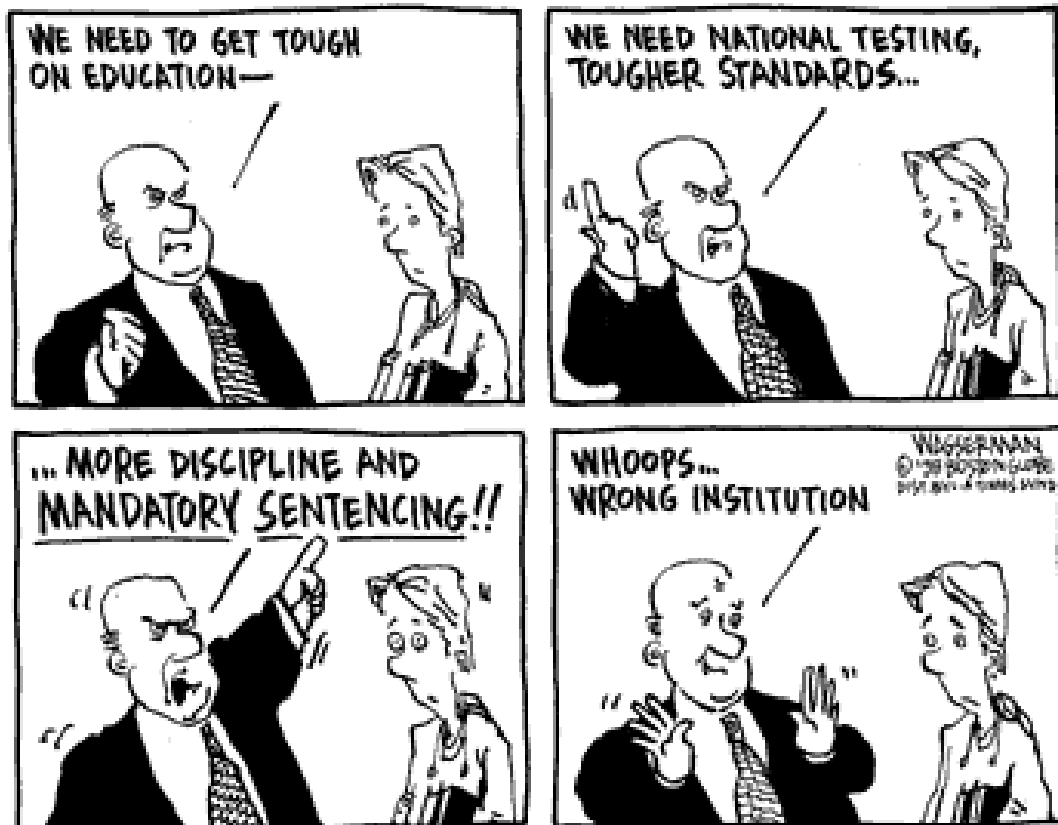


Challenging Harsh Disciplinary Policies in Schools: A Tool Kit (Adapted by Mariame Kaba from material by the NAACP)

Harsh disciplinary policies, such as zero tolerance, contribute to the *school to prison pipeline* by criminalizing students and pushing them out of school. Restorative practices, on the other hand, offer an opportunity to repair & move forward after a problem arises, keeping more students engaged in their education.

The Problem

Nationwide, students of color experience rates of punishments in school - ranging from office referrals to corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion - that far exceed their numbers in the school population or the share of offenses they commit. When school districts adopt a "zero tolerance" policy that relies heavily on exclusion from the classroom as a discipline strategy, such policies often have a disproportionate impact on students of color. In the short term, expulsions and suspensions typically results in missed instructional time and, for some students, only speed up a cycle of academic failure, disengagement, and escalating rule breaking. Long term, repeated suspensions and expulsions have been linked with lower academic achievement, dropping out and delayed high school graduation. When discipline incidents are referred to school officers or juvenile justice officials, it is often a gateway to repeated involvement with the criminal justice system, perpetuating a school to prison pipeline



This toolkit can help advocates disrupt that pipeline to prison and change school discipline policies by working to eliminate zero tolerance policies and reduce the use of punishments that take students out of the classroom, denying them opportunity to learn.

The facts

- Nationwide, **African Americans are arrested at 2.1 times the rate of white youth**. For violent crimes, African Americans are arrested at 3.5 times the rate of white youth.
- Largely as a result of zero tolerance policies, African American public school students are suspended **three times more** than their white counterparts.
- Students who have been suspended from school are **three times more likely** to drop out than those who have never been suspended.
- Students who drop out of school are **three times more likely** to be incarcerated.
- There is **no evidence that zero tolerance policies have been effective** in changing behavior or making schools safer. Out of school suspensions have not proven to be a deterrent, and in some cases seem to increase the likelihood that students will encounter law enforcement

Take Action to Eliminate Zero Tolerance and Exclusionary Discipline

What you can do:

1. Form a group or join an existing group in your community to address this issue
2. Target your efforts to a particular school in your community
3. Decide which of the following actions (or a combination of them) will be most effective in disrupting the school to prison pipeline by eliminating zero tolerance policies that push kids out of schools.

School Leader Interventions – strategies to educate and sensitize principals individually or collectively to the impacts of discipline policies and make them aware of alternative discipline methods that don't exclude students from school

Policy Review – forming a commission of stakeholders (parents, university researchers, students, teachers etc) to review a school or district's discipline policy – especially if it is a zero-tolerance policy – and compare it to more beneficial policies from around the country

Disparities Report – putting together a report that highlights the disparate impact of discipline policies on students of color and poor students in a school or district.



"So much for the presumption of innocence."

Note: Discipline, school climate and school safety are issues that are particularly ripe for youth involvement. Young people experience the results of discipline practices daily. Youth, with the support of adult allies, can work to establish peer juries and school governance structures where students use peer pressure to positively influence the behavior of others, learn to settle disputes peacefully and practice mediation and conflict resolution skills. Research has shown that schools where students play a central role in rule-making increase their chances of an orderly, safe school campus where everyone can learn.

Useful Resources

Appleseed School to Jail Pipeline Project Report

http://www.texasappleseed.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21&Itemid=102

Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools? An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations by the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2006) -

<http://www.apa.org/ed/cpse/zttfreport.pdf>.

Arresting Development: Addressing the School Discipline Crisis in Florida by Florida State Conference NAACP, Advancement Project, and NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (2006) - <http://www.advancementproject.org/publications.html>.

Criminalizing the Classroom, The Over-Policing of New York City Schools by New York Civil Liberties Union and ACLU Racial Justice Program (2007) -

http://www.nyclu.org/files/criminalizing_the_classroom_report.pdf.

Deprived of Dignity, Degrading Treatment and Abusive Discipline in New York City & Los Angeles Public Schools by National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (2007) -

http://www.nesri.org/programs/Deprived_of_Dignity_07.pdf.

Derailed! The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track by Judith A. Browne of the Advancement Project (2003) -- <http://www.advancementproject.org/publications.html>.

Dignity in School Resources on Pushout: <http://www.dignityinschools.org/pushout-factors>

Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline by NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. -- www.naacpldf.org/content/pdf/pipeline.org

Education on Lockdown: the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track by the Advancement Project (2005) -- <http://www.advancementproject.org/publications.html>.

First Do No Harm: How Educators & Police Can Work Together More Effectively to Preserve School Safety & Protect Vulnerable Students by Johanna Wald & Lisa Thureau of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race & Justice at Harvard Law School. <http://charleshamiltonhouston.org/assets/documents/news/FINAL%20Do%20No%20Harm.pdf>

Hard Lessons: School Resource Officer Programs and School-Based Arrests in Three Connecticut Towns by the American Civil Liberties Union (November 2008) -- <http://www.aclu.org/racial-justice/edu/37767pub20081117.html>.

Opportunities Suspended: the Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline by the Advancement Project and the Harvard Civil Rights Project (2000) -- <http://www.advancementproject.org/publications.html>.

Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis (2010) -- <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/school-discipline/suspended-education-urban-middle-schools-in-crisis>

Teachers Talk: School Culture, Safety and Human Rights by National Economic & Social Rights Initiative (2008) -- www.nesri.org.

Unintended Consequences: the Impact of Zero Tolerance and Other Exclusionary Policies on Kentucky Students by Building Blocks for Youth Initiative (2003) -- <http://www.buildingblocksforyouth.org/kentucky/kentucky.html>.