



RACIAL DISPARITIES IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

FACT SHEET

What we know:

- Criminal activity among youth has decreased in the past twenty years, as has overall crime. However, nine percent of male youth aged 10-17 years are arrested annually, and one quarter of those arrests occur at school.
- Children are much more likely today to be arrested at school than their parents were a generation ago.
- Increased presence of law enforcement in schools contributes to more juvenile arrests made at schools for infractions that, a generation ago, would have been handled by teachers or administrators.
- Exclusionary discipline practices include suspension from school, expulsion, or involuntary placement into a disciplinary alternative education program. Such practices increase a student's likelihood to come into contact with the juvenile or adult justice systems.
- A pattern of racial disparity in school discipline has been well-documented over the past 35 years.



- In 2006, black students represented 17% of all public school students, but they accounted for 37.4% of all suspensions and 37.9% percent of all expulsions.
 - Black students are twice as likely as white students to be educated in a more restrictive environment, such as an alternative education program.
 - Minorities are more likely to be given extreme forms of punishment, despite not being involved in more serious acts.
 - Harsher sanctions for minor behaviors such as tardiness, absences, noncompliance, and disrespect have cultivated a systematic way to push black students out of school.
- Arrest has a direct effect on high school dropout rates, especially among minority students
 - Arrest decreases the odds of high school graduation by over 70%.
 - School-based arrest can also result in devastating psychological effects, including public humiliation, diminished self-worth, distrust of law enforcement, distrust of the school personnel, and ultimately alienation from school.

What we recommend:

- 1) Schools and children's advocates should address the school-to-prison link in elementary and intermediate grades.
- 2) Legislators, educational policy-makers, and educational institutions must take a holistic approach to eliminating race disparities in disciplinary action, and should adopt incentives that encourage fairness and educational success for all children.



- 3) Educational institutions should recognize the impact of outside factors on student behavior that may also lead to discipline disparities, including:
 - a. Residential segregation and unequal housing which create isolated, poor schools;
 - b. Extreme punitive approaches to misconduct in the criminal justice system;
 - c. Existing incentives for school administrators to exclude students; and
 - d. Perceptions of poor and minority students that encourage marginalization.
- 4) States should provide incentives to increase accountability in several areas, including:
 - a. Operation of alternative education programs that provide quality education.
 - b. Increasing graduation rates, beginning with incentives in intermediate grades.
 - c. Elimination of zero-tolerance policies.
 - d. Adoption of restorative justice and positive behavior support practices.
 - e. Implementation of stringent due process procedures for school discipline matters.
 - f. Quality cultural and diversity training for all school personnel who interact with students, including school resource officers.
 - g. Promotion of respectful school climates.