

# Draining the School-to-Prison Pipeline

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*"Draining the School-to-Prison Pipeline" is a monthly publication addressing issues of community school reintegration, sharing practical recommendations to support returning students, tracking relevant public policy and legislation, and addressing racial and other inequities in Pennsylvania's educational system.*

## Using an Inclusive Curriculum to Decrease Student Exposure to the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Over the past several years, the question of what students should learn in school has become a matter of increasing public attention -- and debate. One aspect of the discussion that is attracting attention is the need for inclusive curricula within schools. An inclusive curriculum is one that: incorporates the needs of all children by including culturally relevant themes and contributions from minority and marginalized communities, seeks to eliminate the use of gender-conforming narratives and language, and adapts the curriculum to the learning style of all students (1). Inclusive curricula have been developed to reflect the lives and contributions of people of different races, ethnicities and religions, of people who identify as LGBTQIA+, and of people with disabilities.

The use of an inclusive curriculum is beneficial both for individual students as well as for the overall school environment and community (2). Some identified benefits to using an inclusive curriculum are that it: structures teaching to the needs of the students, destigmatizes differences among students, provides support for all students, and increases the expectation threshold for all students (3). Fostering learning environments that are reflective of the overall school community can have a positive and lifelong impact on students that will support adaptable life skills (4).

Inclusive curricula and school environments can prevent exposure to the school-to-prison pipeline in several ways. First the use of inclusive curricula encourages educators to build relationships with their students through a lens of cultural understanding and enables them to incorporate that understanding into their lessons (5). Second, students are more likely to maintain high interest and engagement in school materials in which they are reflected, and student engagement is key to decreasing truancy (6). Finally, inclusive curricula lay the foundation for building restorative schools by fostering a strong school community, and using discipline practices that minimize out-of-school time (7).

### Resources

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*You can only  
aspire to be  
who you  
can see.*

# SPOTLIGHT SERIES

*Our Spotlight Series highlights individuals and organizations that are doing innovative and important work on the issues of community school reintegration, dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, and addressing bias in education.*

Tyler Wims is the Director of Black Male Achievement for the School District of Philadelphia (SDP). He is responsible for leading strategy development, planning, implementing, and evaluating programs and efforts that help eliminate disparities in education and social outcomes for Black males from grades K-12. In this position Tyler is the managing director of the Office of Student Engagement and Achievement, which is where the student leadership department resides and features programs such as mentoring, Peer Group Connection, Gender and Sexuality Alliance, student government, RISE Youth Summit, and Superintendent's Student Advisory Board.

Tyler has a background in psychology and is a National Certified Counselor. Prior to joining SDP, he spent over a decade working with children and families in community mental health, juvenile courts, residential treatment services, and alternative education. This school year, Tyler is most proud of the creation of Student Voice Studios, an interactive learning community for students. The first phase of programming includes a student newsletter ("Student Voice Is..."), a student podcast ("Real Talk"), and a Zoom conversation series that focuses on issues that are impacting students in our city such as COVID and gun violence. This programming was created to utilize technology to boost innovation, engagement, understanding, sense of community, and student voice.

Check out some of the work Tyler is doing to elevate student voices by listening to the March episode of the "Real Talk" podcast [HERE](#)

Or by scanning the QR code



Kristopher Brown is the Equity Officer for the Abington School District, where he has served since February 2020. Previously, he served as principal of Strath Haven High School in the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District after spending four years there as assistant principal. In 2017, he was recognized by the Pennsylvania Principals Association as the Robert E. Lavelly Assistant Principal of the Year. He began his educational career as a social studies teacher after earning his bachelor's degree at Villanova University. Dr. Brown earned a master's degree from Delaware Valley University, and a doctorate in educational leadership from Saint Joseph's University, where he also serves as an adjunct professor.

In Abington, Dr. Brown is responsible for leading the equity initiatives in the District. He is the Chair of the District Equity Advisory Committee, which is a stakeholder committee that reviews priority areas for equity. In 2021 the District adopted a Board Policy regarding Equitable Practices, that embeds equity within the entire organizational structure of the District with a guiding principle of fostering belonging through a culture of dignity. One of the top priorities for the Abington School District is to reduce disproportionality in exclusionary discipline practices. This work includes the implementation of more restorative practices in the school and other forms of conflict resolution. Additionally, the District has partnered with Montgomery County to participate in their Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in a Juvenile Justice Capstone Project. In partnership with the County Office, this Pilot Project aims to strengthen local practices that directly impact students and reduce the impact of students being referred to the juvenile justice system.



# The Road from Our Reality to Our Responsibility

Every issue of this digest addresses issues of racial disparity and other inequities in the systems of education, juvenile justice, child welfare, and behavioral health by identifying systemic barriers, introducing evidenced-based research for dismantling current practice, and creating a blueprint for structural change and empowerment.

## **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as a Tool to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline**

Beginning in the early 2010s, the practice of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP, also known as culturally responsive teaching, or CRT) began to make its way into classrooms in school districts across the United States (1). CRP refers to a teaching practice in which the instructor incorporates cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and engaging (2). While inclusive curricula and CRP are similar in some respects, inclusive curricula are focused on supporting children's ability to build empathy and develop an understanding of different perspectives (3). CRP is a specific way of teaching that encourages educators to understand themselves, their identity, and experiences that influence how they teach and their attitude around teaching (3).

In order to build an effective program that is inclusive of the principles of CRP, an educator must first engage in self-reflection and conduct a self-audit to understand their own racial and cultural limitations and uncover their ingrained implicit biases (2). Only through a self-audit can a teacher decide the best steps and strategies for implementing CRP in their classroom. Questions an educator may ask themselves as part of a self-audit can include:

- *Am I operating from a place of care in the classroom – a place that merges high expectations with empathy and compassion?*
- *Has my past interaction with a particular group of people impacted my ability to communicate with parents?*
- *Are my students, no matter their socioeconomic status or background, being held to high standards?*

At its core, CRP invites educators to build empowerment skills with their students; such skills encourage students to take ownership of not only their learning but the environment in which they learn (2).

## From Policy to Practice

Creating inclusive, welcoming, and accepting environments for students and staff is crucial for child development. Here are some tips for building an inclusive community in the school setting:

- Consider developing in-school affinity groups. Allow a space for students of similar cultural and racial backgrounds to gather and build community.
- Encourage students to make a social media campaign that champions their favorite cause, and have them bring evidence of their results to class to discuss the role social media plays in social change (2).
- Build current events into the curriculum to allow students to make real world connections to the lesson. Consider allowing students to have a more active and engaging role when designing lesson plans.
- Use current songs that students enjoy to analyze the use of literary techniques and imagery in music videos (2).

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