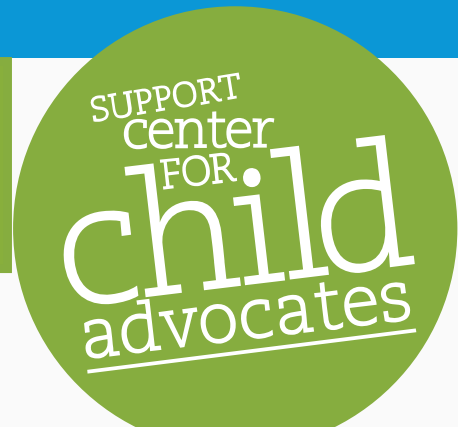


Draining the School-to-Prison Pipeline

"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.



Alternative Education and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

In Pennsylvania, student behavior that violates a school's code of conduct can result in a transfer to a disciplinary setting known as Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth, or AEDY (1). AEDY programs are intended to be a combination of academic instruction and intensive behavior modification counseling to assist students with their return back into a general education classroom (1). Placement in an AEDY program is considered an expulsion (defined as any school exclusion that lasts more than 10 consecutive days) (2). An expulsion can have a long-term impact on a student. Students who are expelled have a higher likelihood of experiencing negative life outcomes, including higher risk of engaging in criminal activity, anti-social behavior, and drug use (3).

Because AEDY programs have a strong focus on providing behavioral support, students attending them are only required to receive 20 hours of educational instruction a week (4). The presumption is that a student attending an AEDY program will be placed in that setting for no more than 45 days (4). Despite this, students are often kept at an AEDY school for a longer period (4). This can be harmful to students for many reasons but particularly because the longer students are away from their home school, the less connected they become with that community.

During the 2020/2021 school year -- an academic year that was mostly virtual/hybrid in many school districts -- there were 1086 AEDY placements in Pennsylvania; of that number, approximately 37% were of student who had a special education disability or was an English language learner (5). Based on PA data, that is almost double the representation of English language learners and special education students in the general education setting.

Youth advocates that oppose exclusionary discipline practices encourage schools to use more restorative approaches to student misconduct that keep students in their community school. Alternatives to expulsions can include: restorative justice programs, trauma-responsive school climates, and in-school counseling and behavioral health services, among others (6).

Because school is so important for young people to learn, grow, and develop into functioning and contributing members of society, every effort should be made to keep students in their community school.

Resources

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Grow your knowledge

Learn more about the impact of zero tolerance policies in Pennsylvania schools with this article by Harold Jordan titled [*Beyond Zero Tolerance: Discipline and Policing in Pennsylvania Schools*](#)



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.

Harold Jordan is Nationwide Education Equity Coordinator at the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania. He has been a strong public school advocate and activist for decades. Harold has worked tirelessly to impact federal, state, and local education policy to ensure that all children are treated fairly and are provided the resources and support they deserve. For more than a decade, he has headed the ACLU of Pennsylvania's statewide work on school discipline and policing. Recently, he took on a new role for the ACLU, coordinating its education equity work nationwide.

Harold is the author of *Beyond Zero Tolerance: Discipline and Policing in Pennsylvania Schools*, co-author of *Student Arrests in Allegheny County Schools: The Need for Transparency and Accountability*, co-author of *Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students*, and the editor of *Know Your Rights: A Handbook for Public School Students in Pennsylvania*.

Recently, Harold served on the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency's Behavioral Health and School Climate and Threat Assessment Work Groups, and on the coordinating committee of the national Dignity in Schools Campaign. He has spoken out about the dangers of misusing "threat assessment" in schools - "The Risks of Threat Assessment to Students Are Dire." Harold served on the stakeholder planning committee for the 2015 White House Rethink Discipline Summit, and chaired the board of the Philadelphia Public School Notebook, a nonprofit news service reporting on the city's public schools. For 17 years, he coordinated a national youth program at the American Friends Service Committee. He is the proud parent of two graduates of the Philadelphia Public School system.

Harold is also the recipient of the Education Law Center's Education Champion Award and, most recently, the Marcienne and Herman Mattleman Award for Excellence in Public Education. Presently, he serves on the Professional Advisory Board of the Learning Disabilities Association of America.

From Policy to Practice

Educators, and advocates can take steps to minimize the use of out-of-school discipline practices by utilizing positive reinforcements, and restorative practices as an alternative to suspensions. Here are some suggestions for incorporating those tools in practice:

- Implement school-wide restorative justice practices. Restorative Justice is a way for students to be held accountable for their actions, while also keeping the student in school and engaged in the school community.
- Integrate therapeutic and wellness opportunities for students in the school day, including access to school social workers, and behavioral health specialists.
- Create a de-escalation room where students can go when they are feeling emotionally overstimulated or overwhelmed. The room can be stocked with stress-relieving activities that allow students the opportunity to regulate themselves.
- Embed trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices into the school environment and curriculum.
- Train staff on implicit bias, cultural humility, and other DEI-focused themes.

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.

How the use of exclusionary discipline practices contributes to the cycle of the school-to-prison pipeline for youth of color.

Students of color are more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than their white peers. Data from the U.S. Department of Education found that while Black students only make up 15% of the overall student population, they make up 30% of the students that are suspended, expelled, or arrested each year (1).

For some students this can be what starts the cycle of system involvement. Zero tolerance policies have allowed schools to exercise wide discretion when it comes to excluding students from school for undesirable behaviors. Students who are suspended or expelled from school for a discretionary violation -- or a violation that includes a subjective determination, such as defiance -- are three times more likely to be involved in the Juvenile Justice system the following year (3). Black students are more likely to be disciplined for discretionary reasons than white students (4).

Contributing factors to this racial disparity gap include implicit bias on the part of educators when it comes to their interactions with Black and Brown students. For instance, Black students, and specifically Black boys are surveilled and punished for their behavior more often than their white peers, despite there being no difference in severity of behavior (2). The racial composition of teachers can also shape the way students of color are disproportionately disciplined in school (2).

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