



FOR NAUGHT:
How Zero Tolerance Policy and School Police
Practices Imperil Our Students' Future

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*“It is easier to build strong children
than repair broken men.”*

Frederick Douglass

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Preface

Public school students are kicked out of school and arrested at rates that were unimaginable a generation ago. Worse still, the children who tend to get suspended or expelled, referred to police or arrested, are those who are most vulnerable. They are the students who struggle academically or don't fit in culturally or have to overcome troubles at home. These factors impact student conduct — and they disproportionately affect students of color, students with disabilities and students from low-income households.

Exacerbating these woes is the expansion of zero tolerance policies that mandate suspension or expulsion from school for violating codes of conduct. Ill-advised policies and an increased presence of law enforcement officers in schools also add to the problems. Originally intended to keep schools free of guns, zero tolerance policies in many schools now include behavior-related offenses that are better treated through proactive or restorative disciplinary strategies that address misconduct correctively. The heightened security presence has led to greater policing of student misconduct, and arrests, for things that were once handled by teachers or school administrators.

When children are forced to stay away from school the odds of their falling behind, failing to graduate and ending up unemployed or under-employed are disturbingly high. These are the children who are funneled into the pipeline to prison. Each year, some 3.5 million students nationwide find themselves facing this possibility when they are suspended.

The ACLU of Michigan first documented this troubling phenomenon in Michigan in 2009 with the release of “Reclaiming Michigan’s Throwaway Kids: Students Trapped in the School-to-Prison Pipeline.” The state education department does not require school districts to report data on student exclusions and arrests, making it difficult to determine the scope of the problem. This report is part of the organization’s continuing effort to highlight the problem and propose recommendations for reducing student exclusions and arrests. It builds on previous research. Data gathered here was obtained through formal and informal records requests, along with a review of existing literature and presentations from subject matter experts.

The principal author of “FOR NAUGHT: How Zero Tolerance Policy and School Police Practices Imperil Our Students’ Future” is Dr. Christopher Dunbar, professor of K-12 educational administration at Michigan State University. His areas of expertise include education policy, urban education and education equity. The school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon is an area he has studied extensively. His current research examines the intersection between school choice and educational opportunities for disruptive students, zero tolerance policy and its impact on school administrators.

In addition to Dr. Dunbar’s research, the report includes some data and analysis contributed by the ACLU of Michigan and the ACLU’s national school-to-prison pipeline project.

Introduction

Ensuring that our educational system is a doorway to opportunity — and not a point of entry to our criminal justice system — is a critical, and achievable, goal. By bringing together government, law enforcement, academic and community leaders, I'm confident that we can make certain that school discipline policies are enforced fairly and do not become obstacles to future growth, progress, and achievement.

– U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder¹

Attorney General Holder's words ring true: suspensions, expulsions and school arrests have pushed far too many young people out of the classroom and onto the path to prison. As a community, we must respond swiftly and effectively to ensure that our public schools are not only safe places of learning and growth, but also places where children are treated fairly. That is not always the case when it comes to student discipline.

Discipline today is decidedly punitive rather than corrective. Misconduct that was once easily handled by teachers is now treated with school exclusion and sometimes even police involvement. Students' rights advocates use the term "school-to-prison pipeline" to refer to the policies and practices that punish students harshly, often with severe and long-lasting consequences, for breaking school rules.²

Nearly 3.5 million students were suspended and more than 130,000 expelled from public schools across the nation during the 2011-2012 school year, according to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE).³ Children have been suspended for infractions that include cursing, defiant behavior and falling asleep.

In Michigan alone, more than 9 percent of public school students were suspended out of school at least once during the 2009-10 school year and, USDOE data indicates, many were suspended more than once. Equally troubling is that black students were more than four times as likely as white students to be suspended out of school. As a result, 22 percent of all black students were suspended, compared to only 5 percent of white students.⁴

In 2013, the ACLU of Michigan was asked to intervene on behalf of a student who was expelled and arrested on assault charges after engaging

Recommendations

To effectively change school climates and keep more children in the classroom so that graduation is more of a reality than prison, Michigan educators and policy makers should consider the following recommendations:

1. Limit the list of offenses requiring mandatory expulsion to the weapons outlined in the current law and ensure that the four existing exceptions are considered consistently. This will reduce unwarranted expulsions and law enforcement interventions.
2. Reevaluate the role of law enforcement in schools so that student discipline is not policed. Rather, if resource officers must be in schools, they should be there to protect students and staff from serious violence.
3. Implement or expand the use of proven alternatives to suspension, expulsion and arrest. Such alternatives include restorative practices, positive behavior intervention and supports, peer mediation and other corrective and preventative discipline strategies.

These reforms have the potential to keep thousands of children out of Michigan's pipeline to prison and on the road to success in school and in life.

in a tug-of-war with his teacher over a note in class.⁵ In another incident, a student was suspended after failing to produce his ID card while walking through the hallway from one class to another. Ironically, after being escorted from the school building, the student was stopped by local police as he walked home and was ticketed for being truant.⁶

We must do better. According to the USDOE, “suspended students are less likely to graduate on time and more likely to be suspended again. They are also more likely to repeat a grade, drop out, and become involved in the juvenile justice system.”⁷

This report looks at problems that feed the school-to-prison pipeline in Michigan: the state’s overly broad zero tolerance law; the overuse of suspensions and school arrests to handle misbehavior; and the need for greater implementation of proven alternative behavior management strategies. It also makes recommendations for reform.

Luckily, Michigan is moving in the right direction. In 2012, the State Board of Education approved a resolution calling on school districts to reconsider their policies and practices relative to zero tolerance, and to explore greater use of alternative and preventative discipline strategies. Board members recognized the need to keep schools safe, but also expressed concern that policies that contribute to high and disproportionate exclusion rates have a substantially negative impact on student outcomes.

“The Board, along with the Superintendent of Public Instruction, remains absolutely committed to policies that preserve the safest environment possible for students, staff, and volunteers in all of the state’s schools,” reads a portion of the resolution. “There is a mounting body of evidence, however, that suggests safety can be maintained, and educational outcomes can be improved, by reducing the number of student suspensions and expulsions.”⁸

In spring 2014, the board took matters further by approving a model policy for the Michigan

Department of Education (MDE). The new policy MDE is recommending to school districts across the state emphasizes the importance of students being in school in order to learn and ultimately graduate. The board said that discipline often “sets the stage for student disenfranchisement, academic failure, dropout, and potential criminalization.”⁹ Of course, these run counter to the state’s mission of educating students and preparing them for success after graduation.

The new model policy provides schools with strategies that hold students accountable for misconduct while potentially preventing or minimizing exclusion time. The policy calls for schools to consider research-based preventative measures including positive behavioral intervention and supports, restorative practices and student intervention, and supports for academic and personal issues.

In addition to policy recommendations, MDE is working with the Department of Human Services (DHS), the state court system, law enforcement, juvenile justice advocates and interested residents collaboratively to keep students out of the pipeline to prison. The three-year initiative, called the Michigan School-Justice Partnership (MSJP), launched in September 2013 and includes action teams from most of the state’s 83 counties that were formed to tackle local issues that lead to students being suspended and having contact with the justice system.

Recognizing that the rules related to student discipline contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, the MSJP has proposed changing state laws regarding zero tolerance and truancy prevention. This is significant both because Michigan law regarding zero tolerance is worse than discipline laws in most states and because the partnership’s policy work aligns with recommendations from advocates — like the ACLU and others — to narrow the focus of zero tolerance and increase use of alternative discipline strategies. Additionally, the increased presence of police in schools has resulted in a shocking number of referrals to law enforcement and arrests.

Michigan’s School-to-Prison Pipeline

Reforming school discipline in Michigan requires that we take a hard look at the state’s zero tolerance law, which is both too broadly written and over-used. This wasn’t always the case.

In an effort to keep students safe, Congress passed the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, which requires all states receiving federal education funds to expel for at least one year any student found to have brought a firearm to school.¹⁰ Unfortunately, in implementing this mandate, some states — including Michigan — expanded this requirement and passed laws requiring expulsion for a broader range of offenses.

Currently, the laws in 38 states and the District of Columbia limit mandatory zero tolerance school discipline to weapons. These include Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana.

By contrast, Michigan is among 12 states that call for mandatory expulsion for offenses other than those related to weapons. In Michigan, schools must expel students guilty of weapons offenses, arson, assault on school personnel or criminal sexual conduct.¹¹ Texas is the only state with a more expansive list of offenses in its law [Fig.1].

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Figure 1.

States with Mandatory Expulsion for Weapons Only

Alabama*, Alaska, Arkansas, California*, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii*, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky**, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts*, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania*, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah*, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming**, Washington, D.C.**

States with Mandatory Expulsion for Weapons and Other Offenses

State	Offense
Arizona	Weapons, threats
Connecticut	Weapons, controlled substances
Florida+	Weapons, threats
Georgia*	Weapons, assault on personnel
Maine	Weapons, disobedience, violence, controlled substances
MICHIGAN	Weapons, arson, assault on personnel, criminal sexual conduct
Mississippi	Weapons, controlled substances
Nevada*	Weapons, assault on personnel, controlled substances
Rhode Island	Weapons, violence, controlled substances
Tennessee*	Weapons, assault on personnel, controlled substances
Texas	Weapons, aggravated assault, sexual assault, arson, murder, indecency with a child, aggravated robbery, manslaughter, negligent homicide, child sexual abuse
Virginia*	Weapons, controlled substances

**Policy also provides districts discretion on the length of exclusion; includes provision for alternate education services during exclusion; includes provision for alternative discipline initiatives or the use of a combination of exclusion and alternative discipline.*

***Policy also enumerates suspension offenses*

+Policy contains model school discipline content

Source: <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/school-discipline-laws-regulations-state>

Restoring Hope

Everyone from judges to student rights advocates are looking at ways to keep students away from the pipeline to prison, which has led to growing promotion of restorative practices as one way schools can reduce suspensions and expulsions while changing school climate for the better.



Restorative justice is a theory of conflict management that requires parties engaged in a dispute to recognize the harm caused and agree upon a solution to repair the relationship. Both sides get something from the exchange, and the process gives them the experience needed to help avoid (or better manage) conflict in future interactions. Restorative justice in schools is frequently carried out through peace circles and restorative practices, exercises that bring students together to address the harm caused, provide opposing parties an opportunity to share experiences, agree upon a solution and work toward restoration of the relationship.

More Metro Detroit area schools have been implementing restorative programs in recent years. For instance, Roseville Public Schools started a restorative practices pilot program in one of its middle schools four years ago and has seen considerable impact.

Between 2010-11 and 2012-13, disciplinary referrals to the middle school's administrative office dropped 32 percent, out-of-school suspensions declined 36 percent and expulsions fell 75 percent. Now that restorative

practices have become established, students are being referred less frequently. Those who are sent out of class for misconduct incidents typically return to class within an average of 8 minutes, with an agreement to correct misbehavior. Missing a few minutes of a class, rather than the bulk of it due to suspension or expulsion, can positively influence student achievement.

Administrators say that it has taken extensive coaching in restorative practices and consultation to change school culture. They say one indicator of the acceptance of restorative practices over that time is the fact that 18 families refused to participate in expulsion-prevention circles in 2011-12, but no families refused in 2012-13.

Students in Detroit may be benefiting from similar efforts underway in the city. Staff members at Detroit Public Schools and Education Achievement Authority schools have undergone training in restorative practices over the past year, and that training has included the officers with Detroit Public Schools Police Department as well. Hopefully, the results of that training will include fewer student suspensions, expulsions and arrests.

To be clear, when serious crimes occur, law enforcement should be notified, and the safety of students and staff should be a priority. But in too many instances, students who commit infractions that are not truly threats to student or staff safety get entangled in Michigan's overly broad zero tolerance law.

Educators should have the discretion to handle incidents of misconduct on a case-by-case basis and with a broad range of responses. Michigan's law allows for discretion in certain circumstances. There are, in fact, four such exceptions. Schools are not required to expel a student for possessing a weapon if he or she is able to establish in clear and convincing fashion that at least one of the following applies:¹²

- The object or instrument possessed by the pupil was not possessed by the pupil for use as a weapon, or for direct or indirect delivery to another person for use as a weapon.
- The weapon was not knowingly possessed by the pupil.
- The pupil did not know or have reason to know that the object or instrument possessed by the pupil constituted a dangerous weapon.
- The weapon was possessed by the pupil at the suggestion, request, or direction of, or with the express permission of, school or police authorities.

But these exceptions are often not considered or applied. Consequently, over the past three years, the ACLU of Michigan has been asked to intervene in multiple cases where district officials should have applied at least one of these exceptions but failed to do so.

In one case, an 11-year-old West Michigan middle school student accidentally brought a knife to school in his backpack. He had been using the knife for whittling the night before. School officials did not question that the student inadvertently brought the weapon to school, and no one alleged that he attempted to use the knife at school in any way. Nevertheless, he was expelled.

Under the exceptions to the state zero tolerance law outlined above, this student's school had discretion about whether to expel him. Although his conduct did not pose a safety threat, he was still expelled. His expulsion notice did not explain that the school could have exercised its discretion to allow him to remain in school.

Combined, zero tolerance overreach and sparse use of exceptions to mandatory expulsion are pushing far too many children in Michigan away from graduation and toward incarceration. It's time to return the focus of our state's zero tolerance policy to weapons and to begin to deal with other offenses more appropriately. Districts also need to more frequently use the discretion available to them under the current zero tolerance law and forego needless suspensions.

Excessive Use of Suspensions and School Arrests in Michigan

In addition to imposing legally mandated punishments, many states — Michigan included — have adopted a broader zero tolerance approach to discipline, relying heavily on punitive and exclusionary sanctions like suspension and expulsion even when they are not required by law.

While Michigan does not collect statewide statistics on suspensions, the USDOE does. The federal agency reports that more than 137,000 Michigan students were suspended out of school during the 2009-10 school year.¹³

Also troubling is the fact that a hugely disproportionate number of students suspended in 2009-10 were black. How out of whack are the numbers? Well according to USDOE, white students outnumbered black students about 1.1 million to 280,000 in 2009-10, yet 60,515 black students were suspended compared to 57,753 white students. Despite the fact that there are nearly four times more white students than black students in Michigan's public schools, more black students than white students are being suspended.

This is consistent with national trends, which have shown not only significant racial disparities in discipline but an increase in these disparities in higher grades, where the majority of exclusions take place. For instance, from the 1972-73 school year to the 2009-10 school year, suspension rates for black students in middle schools and high schools rose from 11.8 percent to 24.3 percent, and suspension rates for Latino students rose from 6.1 percent to 12 percent. Over the same time period, suspension rates for white secondary students rose only slightly, from 6 percent to 7.1 percent.¹⁴

No Laughing Matter

For Kyle, it was a harmless prank that, literally, got out of hand.

While Kyle was in his suburban Detroit school one day, a friend noticed a slip of paper sticking out of Kyle's backpack. When the friend tried to yank the note out of the book bag, Kyle immediately tried to snatch it back. Their tussle over the note soon caught the attention of Kyle's teacher, who demanded that Kyle turn over the paper. Kyle refused. Moments later, he and the teacher were involved in their own tug-o-war over the slip of paper. Eventually, the teacher wrested the note from Kyle and read it. And when she stormed out of the classroom moments later, Kyle, a freshman, knew his prank had just gotten far more serious than he'd ever intended.

The note he tried to conceal was actually a list he'd put together of names of some of his football teammates, a few classmates, and a teacher — the same one he had tried to keep the note away from. Worse still, Kyle had labeled the note a "hit list."

Although he had no history of discipline problems, Kyle knew that creating such a list was wrong and that there could be consequences for such a prank. But he had no idea of how severe the repercussions would get.

A police officer was called to escort Kyle from the school. The teen was arrested and charged with assaulting his teacher in the note-tugging episode. He was then suspended long term and eventually expelled from all Michigan public schools for 180 days. After two months out of school, while awaiting trial, he was placed under house arrest.

Kyle's mother spent thousands of dollars on an attorney to fight the charges against her son. While the charges were pending she



enrolled him in online courses. Kyle missed four months of classes before his mom was able to find a private school in a nearby city to accept him.

In response to the media attention the story generated, the school district released a statement pointing to the state law mandating that an assault by a student against a teacher requires a one-year expulsion from all public schools across Michigan.

District officials said that their hands were tied by the zero tolerance law because it requires them to treat all such incidents the same. Were an option of a more appropriate disciplinary action available, the district would likely have chosen it.

The publicity also created some buzz among policy makers about whether Michigan's zero tolerance policy needs to be reformed. Eventually Kyle's expulsion was changed to a long-term suspension and the assault charges against him were dismissed.

When it comes to police contact for students overall, disparities still abound. In fact, according to the USDOE, black students represent 16 percent of K-12 student enrollment nationwide but account for 27 percent of the referrals to law enforcement and 31 percent of school-related arrests. By comparison, white children, who represent 51 percent of the student population, account for 41 percent of law enforcement referrals and 39 percent of arrests.¹⁵

There is no reliable evidence to show that racial disparities in discipline can be explained by students of color misbehaving more. There *is*, however, evidence that students of color are punished more harshly than their white peers for the same offenses. There is also evidence that students of color are especially likely to be disciplined for subjective offenses like insubordination, disrespect, and defiance, which are already covered by most districts' conduct policies.¹⁶

In "Reclaiming Michigan's Throwaway Kids," the ACLU of Michigan reported that black students are suspended and expelled at higher rates than their white peers, that white students were suspended less for the same offenses and that many students who are suspended long-term or expelled drop out of school altogether.¹⁷

A closer look at Detroit schools reveals a similar over-reliance on punishment for relatively minor offenses.

Again, because collecting comprehensive data on disciplinary action in schools is not required in Michigan, obtaining a complete picture of what is going on in any school district is nearly impossible. However, data obtained from the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) and the Education Achievement Authority (EAA) by the ACLU provides an exceptional snapshot. The EAA is a separate district the state created in 2011 to turn around the lowest 5 percent performing schools in Michigan, and it started by taking over 15 schools in Detroit. The EAA's numbers reveal that the majority of suspensions and school-based arrests are not the result of incidents of serious violence, but instead are being used to punish commonplace adolescent misbehaviors that could be safely handled inside schools.

Data from 14 of the 15 EAA schools show there were 8,722 short-term suspensions (less than 10 days) recorded during the 2012-13 school year. Most students were sent home for behavior-related offenses. This includes 2,126 suspensions for

truancy, 1,694 for disorderly conduct and 1,350 for insubordination. There were also 1,617 suspensions given out for fights that did not result in any injuries. Notably, the kind of offenses for which zero tolerance was created — possession of dangerous weapons — accounted for only 10 suspensions: seven for knives and three for other weapons.

The EAA district could not provide short-term suspension data for the 2013-14 year, citing lack of coordinated collection from building to building. However, the EAA did report 57 long-term suspensions (10 days or longer) and 44 expulsions throughout its schools. This number is significantly down from 2012-13, according to the district.

In the Detroit Public Schools, there were 18,543 disciplinary incidents during the 2011-12 school year. This list of incidents includes all in-school, out-of-school, recommended and imposed suspensions and administrative transfers — minus the 15 schools now in the EAA. And while the total number of disciplinary incidents was down significantly from 21,730 two years earlier, the district also had 16,458 fewer students than it reported in 2009-10.

A breakdown of the data shows that the vast majority of out-of-school suspensions were for relatively minor offenses. Nineteen percent of suspensions in 2011-12 were given for truancy, and another 18 percent were given for fights resulting in no injury. And while fighting should not be permitted in school, particularly when it involves an injury to students or staff, it is important to note that even minor skirmishes can end in suspensions. Other common offenses that resulted in student suspension were also related to minor misbehavior, including disorderly conduct (16 percent), insubordination (14 percent), a category known as "other prohibited conduct" (6 percent) and verbal abuse (5 percent). Even offenses like leaving school without permission (which should neither be tolerated nor punished with more time away from school) and use of electronic devices resulted in hundreds of suspensions.

By contrast, there were only three student exclusions for firearm possession, 19 for knife possession and 10 for possession of other dangerous weapons. Together, these three categories of weapons offenses accounted for less

A Judgment Call

If there were any student who warranted an exemption from Michigan's zero tolerance policy, it was Atiya.

A senior honor student at a Dearborn Heights high school, Atiya found herself facing expulsion after an administrator discovered a knife in the teen's purse while conducting a search of students in the restroom during a school football game.

Months earlier, Atiya's grandfather had given her the knife for protection, as she traveled by bike through high-crime areas to her volunteer post as a lifeguard in Dearborn. She reluctantly took the knife, tucked it into her purse, and forgot about it. After the knife was discovered in her purse Atiya admitted to making an honest mistake, and was ready to accept some form of punishment. She was shocked when she found herself facing a 180-day expulsion from all Michigan public schools.

Michigan's zero tolerance policy includes four exceptions that provide school districts the



opportunity to use discretion in cases where students may have unknowingly or unintentionally violated the rules. The ACLU of Michigan represented Atiya at her discipline hearing and called on the district to use the exception

in the state's zero tolerance law that allows students to avoid expulsion when "the weapon was not knowingly possessed by the pupil."

As a result of the advocacy on behalf of Atiya, the district gave her a year-long suspension from the Dearborn Heights district — instead of expulsion from all state public schools — and granted her the option of enrolling in another school district. She was able to resume her studies at a different school and got back on track to graduate and attend college the following year.



A Hair-Raising Ordeal

His hair was less than 3/4 of an inch in length, yet 10-year-old Rodell was repeatedly sent to detention and suspended because the principal at his public charter school in Detroit felt that it was "too long."

The school had a policy that students must wear their hair "closely cropped," and although his hair was barely long enough to run a comb through, Rodell was eventually given a long-term suspension and faced expulsion for refusing to cut it shorter.

The ACLU of Michigan sued on his behalf. After a motion for injunction was filed, the district allowed Rodell to return to school and removed the disciplinary actions from his record. He later graduated from high school and went on to attend Brown University in Rhode Island.

than one quarter of one percent of all suspensions during the 2011-12 school year.

Moreover, school arrest data reveals that students are primarily arrested at school for misconduct that, while disruptive, is not always a threat to safety. Between 2010 and 2012, according to data obtained by the ACLU, the majority (64 percent) of the 1,425 arrests in Detroit Public Schools were for three offenses:

- Violation of a school ordinance (VSO)
- Disorderly conduct
- Assault and battery

VSO is a generic catchall offense that covers various non-violent rules violations, similar to disorderly conduct. Meanwhile, although assault and battery can be more serious, the charge isn't necessarily tied to severe physical encounters. In fact, from 2010 to 2012, only 7.5 percent of VSO arrests in DPS were for drugs; 3.4 percent were for weapons; and 6.3 percent were for felonious assault and aggravated assault, encounters wherein there were both intent and harm caused by a student's actions.

Most incidents in Detroit schools do not involve serious violence, weapons or drugs. Thus, when addressing the reasons for student misbehavior, greater attention should be given to corrective methods that don't unnecessarily exclude students from school when there are better options.

The Need for Reform

Michigan educators, policymakers and others with a stake in helping ensure the success of our children are realizing that our schools and communities must take a different approach to discipline and policing. Zero tolerance discipline was intended to protect students from serious harm, yet years of harsh punishments have failed to make our schools safer. In fact, research has shown just the opposite. Overly punitive practices can actually be harmful to student outcomes.

Students suspended in late elementary school, for instance, have been shown to be more likely to receive office referrals or suspensions in middle school. Schools with high suspension and expulsion rates have been shown to have lower test scores. And there is no evidence that suspending and expelling disruptive students reduce school disruption or improve climate.

The research supports the same conclusion as the anecdotal evidence we've seen from across the country: zero tolerance just doesn't work.¹⁸

University of Maryland criminologist Denise C. Gottfredson, a noted expert on school violence, explains: "There is no evidence that placing officers in the schools improves safety. And it increases the number of minor behavior problems that are referred to the police, pushing kids into the criminal system."¹⁹

Criminal justice involvement has serious and harmful consequences for our young people. A first-time arrest in high school almost doubles the odds of a student dropping out, and a court appearance nearly quadruples the odds.²⁰ A 2003 study by the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 41 percent of inmates in state and federal prisons were dropouts, while only 18 percent of the general population lacked a high school diploma.²¹

By contrast, policies that correct misconduct and help students learn productive behaviors will keep young people in school and off of the streets, where they are left to their own devices. Michigan spends about \$7,250²² to educate a student each year and \$37,500²³ to keep an inmate locked up. The disparity is mind-blowing.

Having a prominent police presence in schools — whether through a dedicated police department like the Detroit Public Schools Police Department (DPSPD) or through a school resource officer (SRO) program — increases the likelihood a student will have some contact with the justice system. That's because law enforcement professionals in schools mainly police student behavior, which leads to more arrests, rather than provide a presence that acts as a deterrent to potential safety threats.

Michigan must look deeply at policy reform. This means reexamining the presence of police in schools, returning the focus of zero tolerance back to dangerous weapons and limiting school exclusion to only the most serious offenses. School districts must have greater discretion to use more appropriate discipline as well as more resources to implement or expand proven alternative and supplemental behavior management strategies. Increasing resource application on the front end will keep more students in the classroom and out of the pipeline to prison.

Recommendations

School districts, law enforcement agencies, policymakers and communities nationwide have begun to understand the gravity of the school-to-prison pipeline crisis and to look at ways to jointly tackle the problem. It is now happening in Michigan, too. Through the work of the Michigan School-Justice Partnership, leaders from the aforementioned sectors are working together more to revamp the laws and policies that have pushed way too many children out of school.

Alternatives do exist, and Michigan needs to implement these proven strategies. To keep more of our students in school so that graduation is a more likely outcome than incarceration, Michigan must cut down on the offenses requiring mandatory expulsion, narrowing them to weapons offenses:

- Limit the list of offenses for which mandatory expulsion is required to a narrowly defined list of dangerous weapons, and ensure that the four existing exceptions are considered whenever possible. This will reduce unwarranted expulsions and law enforcement interventions.
- Reevaluate the role of law enforcement in schools so that student discipline is not policed. Rather, if resource officers must be in schools, they should be there to protect students and staff from serious violence.
- Implement or expand the use of proven alternatives to suspension, expulsion and arrest, such as restorative practices, positive behavior intervention and supports, peer mediation and other forms of corrective and preventative discipline strategies.

I believe these reforms will keep thousands of children out of Michigan's pipeline to prison and on the road to success in school and in life.

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