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# OVERCOMING THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

Revonda Slaughter  
revonda.slaughter@gmail.com

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**OVERCOMING THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE**

**Revonda Slaughter**

**Bachelor of Integrated Studies**

**Focusing on Education**

**Murray State University**

**April 16, 2019**

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

This paper will provide a clear review of the issues leading to students falling in the path of the prison pipeline. Multiple studies will be presented that have been conducted to show the reasons behind students falling in the path of the school to prison pipeline. This paper will also give an overview of what the school to prison pipeline is and what it does to students as well as which students are generally a victim of falling in that path. There will be statistics from past studies that provides evidence of disproportionality within schools and punishment focus. Lastly, programs and possible ways to end the school to prison pipeline will be discussed and provided in this paper.

According to Darensbourg, Perez, and Blake (2010), African American minorities are at a higher risk of being disciplined and excluded from school, compared to the other ethnic groups. According to Walsh (2017), it has been consistently shown that the lack of a high school diploma is a great predictor of being at risk for poverty, poor health, potential criminal behavior, and the need of social services. The connection of exclusionary discipline with incarceration rates has become known as the school to prison pipeline. In addition, there will be facts from research as well as statistics throughout this paper, which will support the over representation of African Americans being forced into the school to prison to pipeline. There will be a section providing definitions of important terminology that are necessary to help understand the school to prison pipeline as well as to help the reader understand the terms that will be used throughout the paper.

In the table below, it shows the different ways of perceiving the meaning of the school to prison pipeline. When comparing the definitions, it shows that we are all in agreement that the school to prison pipeline, wants and will, keep punishing minorities harsher than their

counterparts. With these definitions it makes it harder for individuals to believe that a change will come, and minorities will be treated equally.

*Table 1*

TABLE 1  
School-to-Prison Definitions Drawn from the Literature

|   |   |
|---|---|
| The school to prison pipeline refers to this growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions, primarily via “zero tolerance” policies, and, directly and/or indirectly, into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems.  | Heitzeg, 2009, p. 1                       |
| “School-to-Prison Pipeline”—the use of educational policies and practices that have the effect of pushing students, especially students of color and students with disabilities, out of schools and toward the juvenile and criminal justice systems.   | Advancement Project et al., 2011, p. 2    |
| The School to Prison Pipeline proposes that exclusionary discipline techniques (e.g., detention, out of school suspension, disciplinary alternative education placements) experienced by African American males alienate them from the learning process by steering them from the classroom and academic attainment and toward the criminal justice system. | Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010, p. 197 |
| The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to the policies and practices that push our nation’s schoolchildren, especially our most at-risk children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.   | ACLU, 2008                                |
| The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to policies and practices that systemically push at-risk youth out of mainstream public schools and into the juvenile or criminal justice systems.   | Kim, 2003, p. 956                         |
| These phrases refer to a journey through school that is increasingly punitive and isolating for its travelers—many of whom will be placed in restrictive special education programs, repeatedly suspended, held back in grade, and banished to alternative, “outplacements” before finally dropping or getting “pushed out” of school altogether.           | Wald & Losen, 2003, p. 3                  |
| The “School-to-Prison Pipeline” (STPP) refers to the framework of the United States school system that, by design, pushes students out of public schools through suspension or expulsion and into a juvenile detention facility or prison.  | Burris, 2012, p. 2                        |

## Statement of the Problem

This paper will explore the following question: How can teachers, schools and communities prevent a myriad of minority students from entering the school to prison pipeline? The exact essence of what the school to prison pipeline is, will also be analyzed within this paper. An exploration will be conducted as to why minorities are becoming the main target in the school system. This paper will give examples and explanations of why the school to prison pipeline should not be over looked.

### **Important Terminology:**

Terms used in connection to the school to prison pipeline will be defined and described, within this section for their use within this paper. These are terms that may not be easily understood and can be considered jargon most by those who have not studied this area. However, they are essential to understand for a clear picture of this problem.

#### *The School to Prison Pipeline*

According to Walsh (2017), the school to prison pipeline is defined as when students are directed straight to prison. Walsh also define the school to prison pipeline as a national trend of students being tunneled out of public school and driven into prison caused by the zero-tolerance policy (p.7). The way schools are handling violence and other behavioral issues are being done through implementing harsher disciplinary polices and sending students to the criminal justice system (Curtis 2014, p.1252). Rather than finishing school, students are ending up in the correctional system for various reasons. According to Darensbourg, Perez and Blake (2010) the school to prison pipeline is when African American males enter school and their educational path is altered by situational barriers. Those barriers could be things such as harsher discipline practices, being referred to special education and feeling a detachment from school and much more. The phrase “the school to prison pipeline” is used to connect the policies and practices of schools, rather than the student’s characteristics to direct them in responsibility of negative outcomes Skiba, Arredondo, and Williams (2014).

#### *Exclusionary Discipline*

Exclusionary discipline includes the practice of suspension, expulsion, and other disciplinary acts, leading to a student’s removal from a typical classroom setting Noltemeyer &

McLoughlin (2010). They also defined exclusionary discipline as being excluded from something for disciplinary purposes. A student should feel like they are wanted and included in all aspects of school. Alternative educational programs are out of school programs designed for some students, with severe offense, that result in long term suspension outside of their original educational setting Darensbourg, Perez and Blake (2010, p.198). According to Cramer, Gonzalez, and Pellegrini-Lafont (2014), students are being suspended and expelled, or even put out of class, for an array of reasons that can vary from minor to major offenses. These actions cause students to become excluded from their class or school, which also causes them to fall into the path of the school to prison pipeline.

### *Zero Tolerance Policy*

According to Darensbourg, Perez, and Blake (2010), the zero-tolerance policy are a set of policies that are used within the school system to control the violence and behavioral problems. Darensbourg, Perez and Blake (2010) also defined the zero tolerance policies as a discipline policy that already has predetermined consequences that are often severe and high in nature. Here is an example given by the authors Darensbourg, Perez, and Blake (2010, p.199) of the zero tolerance, happened when a five-year-old was suspended from school for wearing a plastic axe that was a part of his Halloween costume in November of 1998 in Pennsylvania. Schools have conjured up this policy to eliminate the different behaviors that they will not tolerate.

### *Disproportionate Representation*

In his study, Togut (2011) defines disproportionate representation as, when two factors are not equally proportionate. Disproportionate is made up of two components, one is misidentification and the other is misclassification Togut (2011, p. 4). Togut explained, that

misidentification is when a student is inappropriately identified as someone they are not and misclassification is when a student is labeled incorrectly, as something or someone they are not. Students are being labeled by their racial or ethnic groups and are placed in special education or recognized as a student with a disability because they are a minority student.

### *School Dropouts*

A school dropout is defined by Skiba, Arredondo and Williams (2014), as a long process of being disengaged with school, antisocial behavior, low academic achievements and performance that will greatly increase the risk of future negative outcome (p. 554). The authors Skiba, Arredondo, and Williams, also defined a school dropout is as when a student becomes disengaged and detached from the school environment.

### *Expulsion*

Expulsion is defined as another punishment that is considered out of school punishment. It is the removal of a student, who is supposedly misbehaving or disobeying the zero-tolerance policy Darenbourg, Perez and Blake (2010, p. 198).

### *Restorative Justice*

According to NEA Ed Justice (2016), restorative justice is an evidence-based practice that is used to help reduce the use of suspension, expulsion and disciplinary referrals in schools.

### **Summary**

The terms above are used throughout this paper to help explore the controversy concerning the school to prison pipeline. In a daily conversation with parents these terms are used to describe the children who have been forced into or at risk of entering the prison to

pipeline system. Because, parents may not understand these terms, defining these terms in this paper will help parents who have not experienced the school prison to pipeline understand the language used when describing their child's behavior, or the consequences behind certain behaviors.

## **Chapter 2: Background of the Issue**

This chapter will provide a review that will discuss and explore many different studies that have been conducted over the past years on the causes of the school to prison pipeline. There are studies that discuss the school environment, the individual students, and history of the school to prison pipeline. The studies provided in this review aim to answer the question of how teachers can prevent so many minority students from entering the path of the school to prison pipeline.

### **History of Punishment in Schools:**

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas was a law passed on May 17, 1954, to desegregate schools Mahnken (2018 p. 14). The goal of this case was to bring African Americans and Caucasian students together inside a classroom. In today's world, desegregation is continued but just overlooked Mahnken (2018, p. 14). According to Rocque and Paternoster (2011), African Americans are targeted with punishment of suspension and expulsion, which is a way of pushing them from being included in the school's environment. When African American students are being punished and removed from school, it is a way of separating them from other students including Caucasians. According to Eitle (2004, p. 270), the overrepresentation of black students in suspensions is directly connected to desegregation of American schools and represents a type of segregation in response to court orders. This researcher found that the problem with corporal punishment is that African American students, compared to the Caucasian students, are being punished more often and with harsher discipline.

According to Gershoff and Font (2016), in 1977 corporal punishment was made constitutional, allowing the state the option of whether to incorporate it in their discipline policy or not. Corporal punishment is known as allowing the teachers and administrators to use physical

force to punish the students for a variety of misbehaviors. Teachers and administrators use a wooden block or paddle to spank the students on the bottom, slapping the students, spanking and or hitting to cause physical pain. These punishments are typically varied, depending on the state and school. Students tend to end up in the juvenile systems because of the school's zero-tolerance policies of referrals, which ends their academic career earlier than intended. The authors Gershoff and Font (2016) stated, corporal punishment is legal even today in 19 states. The states that have adapted and continue to use the corporal punishment policy, are southern states which are, Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Texas, Tennessee, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Wyoming.

According to Gershoff and Font (2016), black students are more subjected to corporal punishment than whites, regardless of if the school is majority black or majority non-blacks. They state that:

Black children in Alabama and Mississippi are at least 51% more than likely to be corporally punished than white children in over half of school districts, black children are over 5 times more likely to be corporally punished. Disparities for black children are also high in several other southern states—17% in Arkansas, 20% Florida, 26% in Georgia, 28% in Louisiana, and 18% in Tennessee—meaning they were more than 3 times as likely to receive corporal punishment in schools as white children.

According to Griffin, Robinson, and Carpenter (2000), although corporal punishment is used within the school, it is not a reliable punishment that will help the students behave the correct way. Corporal punishment has been linked to mental issues, a strain in parent or family and child relationship, as well as poor grades, and bullying to other students. Given these

negative impacts of corporal punishments many states have deterred from using corporal punishment to control behavior, which has led to an increase in the use of the zero-tolerance policy since it is not as mentally abusive. The zero-tolerance policy was adopted by schools across America in substitution of corporal punishment.

**Targeted Population:**

The zero-tolerance policy is a discipline policy that many African American children commonly face, which ultimately segregates the students further Curtis (2014, p. 1253). The zero-tolerance policy is based on the assumptions that if the child is removed from school for his or her misbehaviors, then it will create peace within the schools and classrooms as well as keeping other students from engaging in the same behaviors. This policy was originally created for the use of drugs and firearms within the school. It has now increased to different disciplinary actions. For example, “By the 1996-1997 school year, zero tolerance had become widespread, 94% of public schools reported that they had zero-tolerance policies for firearms, and 91% had zero-tolerance policies for weapons other than firearms. Likewise, 88% of schools had zero-tolerance policies for drugs, 87% for alcohol, and 79% for violence” (Curtis 2014, p. 1254). The zero tolerance policies allow some schools to have metal detectors and police officers within the school to help prevent children from misbehaving. With the officers being already in the schools, it allows them to have quicker access to arrest and take them out of the school. Another way the zero-tolerance policy finds ways to keep the school safe is through installing surveillance equipment to go along with the police officers in school Walsh (2017, p.7). According to Curtis (2014), it appears that the zero-tolerance policy is now being used for other types of ways to discipline students within school systems for example:

In 2008, a thirteen-year-old boy was arrested in school for passing gas and turning off his fellow students' computer—he was charged with disruption of school function. In 2010, a twelve-year old student was arrested for writing on her desk with a marker. (p. 1259)

These students were not only punished for non-criminal behavior, but they were forced into the juvenile justice system for a non-criminal behavior.

According to Darensbourg, Perez, and Blake (2010), as the trending of the zero-tolerance policy increases in school systems, students are being negatively affected in turn by not being able to complete schooling or being forced into the criminal justice system. Students are being forced to stay away from school with punishments, such as suspension and expulsion as a means to control certain behaviors, which can be related to school dropouts. These dropouts or students are typically the minorities, who are students that can be defined by a statistic. A minority can also be looked at as a student that comes from an underprivileged background of any sort.

Whether it is financial reasons, or their parents did not have stable enough income, resources, or ethnically coming from the government assisted housing etc., all these labels are given to minority students. However, minorities are overrepresented in the school to prison pipeline.

According to Fenning and Rose (2007), over thirty years of research it has repeatedly confirmed the overrepresentation of African American youth in exclusionary discipline consequences of suspension, as well as finding other ethnic groups, such as minority Hispanics, children living in poverty or with academic issues. The students under those labels are more than likely to be pushed out of school. According to Walsh (2017) the following statistic was found in her study:

African Americans comprised 16% of the student population during the 2011-2012 school year. Those students represented 32% of students who received an in-school suspension; 33% of students who received one out-of-school suspension; 42% of students

who received more than one out-of-school suspension; and 34% of students who were expelled. Additionally, during the same time frame, African American students represented 27% of the students who were referred to law enforcement by school officials, and they represented 31% of students who were subjected to school-based arrest. (p.8)

### **Consequences of Punishments in the Schools:**

Sometimes children are singled out and ridiculed for not being able to comprehend or participate in school settings. In these circumstances, depending on the child, this behavior can be influenced in a negative way. Teachers have certain protocols to follow based on the age or grade level of the student. According to Thompson, (2016) documents like the Individualized Education Program (IEP) inform teachers on how to support a child who is faced with disabilities that might prevent him or her from being able to move along with majority of that specific grade. Some students with physical disabilities are secluded and monitored with up to three teachers at a time as a requirement. Additionally this authors also states that, there are the special education courses for students who struggle academically. In between the comprehension and honors courses are the ESL students. Many of them are stigmatized and identified as threats generally since most of the students come from another country. Above these students are the children in honors and advanced courses. These classes move at a more expeditious speed. Notably the students in these classes change the dynamic because they all come from different backgrounds and hardly have any enablement. The prison system is designed the same exact way choosing how they choose to house criminals based on the type of crime committed.

According to Togut (2011), in the 1980's black students represented only 16% of the total school population while representing 38% of children in classes for the intellectually

disabled. Almost forty years later, little to nothing has changed, black students constitute only 17% of the total school enrollment and 33% of enrollment in classes for the intellectually disabled (p. 2). Togut states, that the decision making whether a student is or is not eligible for special education is sometimes based off their poverty level as well as their socio-economic status. He also states in one finding, that black students are twice as likely as Caucasian students to be educated in a more restricted environment.

As cited in Togut (2011) research, in 2000 and 2001, the U.S. Department of Education found that at least thirteen states were labeling more than 2.74% of black students intellectually disabled. Students that are placed in a room with only disabled students are being excluded from the general learning environment. Togut (2011), also found in his study that due to the label of being intellectually disabled, these students may then feel that they are not like the other students. When these students are given a label of something they are not, they are more likely to misbehave or find ways to be recognized by the other students that are not labeled. Their actions cause the school to enforce their zero-tolerance policy. Teachers referred minority students to special education more than they referred non-minority students and suggested that minority students should be in special education classes, due to their behavioral problems rather than their academic difficulties Togut (2011).

According to one study done by Walsh (2017), black minority students are being targeted for harsher discipline within the school system. When you compare a non-African American student to an African American student during the same misbehavior, the African American student is more likely to experience a harsher discipline than the other student Walsh (2017, p. 6). Also, according to Walsh, American Indian students represent less than one percent of the student population, but account for two percent of all out of school suspension and three percent

of all expulsions. While black and Latino students account for 75% of school related arrests. As early as 1975, Fenning and Rose (2007) overall found that, African American minority students, and specifically males, are overrepresented in the most exclusionary disciplinary consequences.

Skiba, Arredondo and Williams (2014), stated that African American disproportionality have been documented for office disciplinary referrals, suspension and expulsion punishment. Black students have been documented as receiving fewer mild disciplinary sanctions and more severe disciplinary consequences for similar infractions than Caucasians. In turn, African American males are facing substantially harsher discipline compared other students. Civil rights advocates argue that the disciplinary practices that are being used are ways to push students negatively, especially students of color. Those students are pushed into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

According to Curtis (2014), Caucasian students are commonly referred to the office for behaviors such as smoking, leaving school without permission, vandalism, and obscene language, whereas African American students are sent for things such as disrespect, excessive noise, threats, and loitering. These are some examples that highlight the unfairness of responses to the different behaviors between the students.

A school dropout is defined by Skiba, Arredondo and Williams (2014) as a long ongoing process of being disengaged with school, becoming immune to antisocial behavior, becoming comfortable with low academic achievements and performance that will eventually greatly increase the risk of future negative outcome. These authors also found that students who are categorized as a school dropout were likely to be affected by the school's disciplinary systems also known as the zero-tolerance policy. Additionally Skiba, Arredondo, and Williams (2014) found that, compared to other situations that could be possible within a student's life, such as

children being sexually active before the age of fifteen, the student not living with both biological parents, or even low socioeconomic status, more students are dropping out due to the disciplinary policies that takes place within schools Walsh (2017, p. 6). Thus, zero tolerance operates on the belief that certain behaviors should be acted on immediately with punishment not considering the students point of view of the situation. Some actions that may cause a student to be suspended from school can also appear to be non-violent. These actions can be behaviors such as disobedience, disrespect, defiance, disruptions inside the classrooms, attendance issues, and failing to report to in school or out of school detention Skiba, Arredondo and Williams (2014).

According to Rocque and Paternoster (2014) there are numerous influences that can lead to school dropouts, such as overcrowded classrooms, racially and socioeconomically isolated environments, a lack of effective teachers and school leaders, and insufficient funding for “extras” such as counselors, special education services, and even the lack of textbooks add to many students disengagement and likelihood of their dropping out and later becoming involved in the courts. The authors Rocque and Paternoster (2011), also says that racial differences in school performance, and later events, such as school drop outs can begin as early the first grade.

In the article by Aaron Curtis (2014), an example of why students drop out of school is:

A twenty-one-year black inmate explained that he was kicked out of school for selling marijuana. He was then relocated to a school that ‘wasn’t as good’ and began ‘catching little stupid misdemeanors here and little stupid case there.’ But when the young man was wrongly accused of crime he did not commit and removed from school in handcuffs, he decided to drop out.

According to Stoebig, Marcelina, and, Vega (2016), as sad as it is to say, some schools may encourage dropouts in response to the pressures of maintaining high rates on standardized tests. With these influential pressures from test-driven schools, there is an enticement to push out academically low performing students to help aid in the boost of overall test scores. However, the students who are affected by these specific actions are the ones who desperately need support such as the low-income students, students of color, homeless youth, English language learners, students with disabilities, and other students that fall into various categories.

**Summary:**

In the above chapter, the history of the school to prison pipeline and those who are targets to the school to prison pipeline are discussed. It also examines the consequences given to those who are subject to the harsher punishment. In the past, schools used corporal punishment to discipline their students. Once the schools stopped using corporal punishment for discipline, they implemented the zero-tolerance policy. The zero-tolerance policy has prevented students, especially minorities, from succeeding in schools. The history of school discipline went from physical discipline towards the student to sending them to jail. According to Gershoff and Font (2016), there is no connection between the two, but the physical discipline was a more efficient discipline method for the child because it allowed them to remain in school and learn a lesson. It also did not take away their childhood, which is what placing minors in the juvenile and adult prison system does. This method also helped children remain successful and it did not lower their self-esteem. As the researcher shows the school to prison pipeline is teaching our youth, especially African American males, jail is the best way to punish them and it allows our justice system to keep African American males in slavery. America cannot physically enslave people but this way it secretly does through systematic abuse. This method ultimately dehumanizes

African American people. With this policy in place, it will continue to criminalize those who fit in the description of a white supremacy society.

### **Chapter 3: Daily Life of Students**

This chapter will explore and discuss the daily life of minority students. This section will further examine how minority children are affected by the zero-tolerance policy. It will tie in the home life and school environment of the child and reveal how that affects the child. This chapter will also discuss the similarities of both the jail and school facilities. Lastly, it will conclude how if one part of the system is broken it affects the other part of the system.

#### **School environment:**

The school environment is the way that the students, staff, and community view the school, as far as how welcoming and safe it is among other considerations. Teachers perceptions and expectations concerning race, whether it is unconscious or conscious, plays a role in maintaining and creating the black-Caucasian achievement gap according to Togut (2011). The school itself, the staff, and other officials are also a part of the problem in the school to prison pipeline. Schools' policies are so biased that the problem of pushing students out typically goes unseen. School systems are allowing racial and discrimination within the decisions of disciplinary punishments. When a child is removed from school, it causes a negative effect on the view of the school, as well as the educational view on the student. According to Walsh (2017), underperforming, or what they call "problematic students", are being pushed out of school in order to meet federal and state liability standards that are meant to improve school performance, such as standardized testing and making certain grades.

Schools that are low rated by students, in the categories of how supportive and low academic expectations are associated with high rates in suspension and the black-Caucasian gap (Skiba, Arrendondo, and Williams, 2014).

Students are being pushed away and their education is being negatively impacted through schools focusing on maintaining a high educational rating, which ultimately penalizes the students for the low performance on their work. According to Togut (2011), minority students attend low performing or racially-isolated elementary schools. Those students also enroll in a lower track course, within a lower performing academic standard school. Togut (2011) also states, that black students are more than likely to be placed in a more restricted school environment, than their Caucasian peers. Curtis (2014) gives multiple examples of the way students are referred to the police for non-criminal, behaviors one of those examples was in February of 2013, when an African American ten-year-old student was arrested for bringing a toy gun to school. The zero-tolerance policy has allowed schools to have in school officers, who are there to protect the school and students. While having officers within the school increases safety, it is also a more efficient way to send minority students to the juvenile system.

According to a study done by Skiba, Arredondo, and Williams (2014) the school system is now designed with the prison system in mind. Major American cities are affected by this system that has created a segregation between students of a minority and the majority. From the time students leave their neighborhoods and arrive at school, they have already been subject to different racially charged categories. Because of cultural characteristics, the minorities are singled out based on disabilities, ethnicity, parent income, and a list of other characteristics to categorize students. The similarities connecting the school and prison systems correlate all the way from bussing students from selected neighborhoods, to having overpaid principals or wardens and lack social justice. Similarities between the school and prison systems are vast, for example, students are becoming more like prisoners through the rules, punishments, and the overall treatments they face in schools. To reflect the prison atmosphere, teachers can be seen as

the guards, and if the school has actual guards that's even more reflective of a prison. The cafeterias are federally funded and are set up like prisons, in that students also have a limited time to eat their food.

Teachers can play a role as to why some students become cut off and disconnected from the school's environment. Rocque and Paternoster (2011) state that school disengagement and the academic troubles of young black students are possibly due to the feeling of racialism or segregated treatment by teachers, as well as the disciplinary treatment. These actions by the teacher cause the student to become disengaged in school and find crime more attractive. If a student feels like there is some type of racial hostility or discriminatory hostility, they are more than likely to become disengaged or detached from school. Rocque and Paternoster (2011) also state, that school labeling and the practices of school rules are targeted to marginalize young black males in disciplinary actions, leading them to be labeled as criminally inclined. These types of labels are projected to be outcomes of the student having low self-esteem as well as low self-confidence, which, furthermore, can affect their academic life. Research by Osterholm, Nash, Kritsonis, 2017 p. 2, support this idea in their labeling theory as:

The labeling theory, a sociological model, proposes that labeling of individuals as "different" in the negative connotation of the word creates a potentially distorted reality for those who bear the label, as well as for their teachers, parents, and peers. The labeling theory further predicts that once an individual is labeled, "the social group seems to assign that person a new identity and a new role, a new set of expectations.

Despite much research in this section the overrepresentation of African American students within special education classes are continuing to increase in numbers. According to Togut (2011) his research reveals that black students are twice as likely as Caucasians to be

educated in a more restricted environment. According to Togut (2011), he found that in 2000 and 2001, the department of education found at least thirteen states were labeling more than 2.74% of black students as intellectually disabled. When these students are given a label of something they are not, they have an increased risk of dropping out or becoming detached from school.

### **Families and Home Environment:**

According to Minujin, Delamonica, Davidzuik, and Gonzalez (2006), a study funded by UNICEF found:

Children experience poverty as an environment that is damaging to their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development. Therefore, expanding the definition of child poverty beyond traditional conceptualizations, such as low household income or low levels of consumption, is particularly important. And yet, child poverty is rarely differentiated from poverty in general and its special dimensions are seldom recognized.

According to a study by Jacob and Ryan (2018) these authors provide proof that children living in poverty are affected mentally while attending school. They found that children typically underperform in school when they have other stressors, such as their home life, and their social life inside and outside of school. These students are not typically supported by family or friends, which leads to disengagement in school. The disengagement in school causes students' attitudes towards attending school to change as well as failure to finish school. Additionally they found that students come from low income families struggle in school because of the stressor of not having enough money. Those students typically find ways to bring money into their home, which means they can participate in illegal activities like selling drugs, or stealing items and reselling them, and even robbing. These authors also found that if students chose not to engage in the illegal activity, they could earn money by getting a job. The students that find actual jobs then

become stressed with school, work, and even homework. Another stressor that could occur, is the parents working multiple jobs, which prevents them from spending time with their children or being involved with school functions. If these parent(s) did not have to work multiple jobs, they could become more involved in their children's school affairs, which could prevent school drops or their placement in special education classes. Through the parents being more present it could also help them become more aware of who or what influences their child's poor decisions or their misbehavior.

According to Minujin, Delamonica, Davidzuik, and Gonzalez (2006), students are placed under a social label, such as a "minority" based upon where they live and the income of their parent(s). Students who are placed in the category as a minority may not have the best living arrangements outside of school. These students can live in homes that are possibly a single-parent household, homes with multiple siblings, homes in poverty, and many other situations that can negatively affect their performance in school.

**Summary:**

The above chapter describes the life of a minority student. It explores the home life and how vital it is in a person's life. Realistically, both the home and school life play a major role, which together prepares the child for life in general and furthering their education. However, with the zero-tolerance policy it prevents the school system and community from preparing that child for life after adolescence. The zero-tolerance policy tells the child the jail system is the best way to go. That is not an example that the child needs, especially at a young age. Also, labeling a child at an early age can put the child at a disadvantage because children believe titles and start acting accordingly.

## **Chapter 4: Statistics**

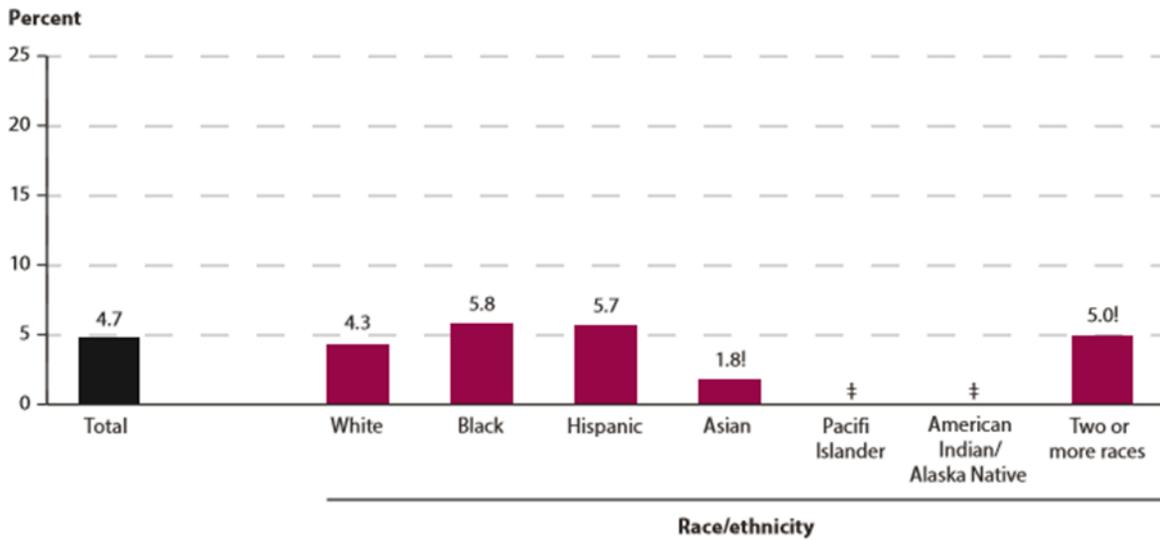
This section of the paper will give past and current statistics of the different problems behind school discipline policies. There will be tables to show proof of the disproportionality within the schools. These tables below not only show how disproportionately the school system is but it shows how disproportionate African American students are. It shows the significant increase of dropout rates across different cultures. This chapter will describe the different violent crimes that occur at schools and which race/ethnicity displays these behaviors the most frequently. Lastly, this chapter discusses the incarceration rates which have increased and decreased over the past few years.

### **School-Dropout Statistics:**

The table below are statistics showing the dropout rate in the United States in October of 2013. These are students who did not finish high school and did not get any other alternative credentials to substitute for the high school diploma. According to McFarland, Stark, and Cui (2016, P.10), on the table, the highest percentage of dropouts are the black students. Each percentage is out of 508,000 students, with an age range of 15 to 24-year old enrolled in grades 10 through 12. These only account for what are called the event dropouts.

Table 2

**Figure 1.1. Percentage of grade 10–12 dropouts among persons 15 through 24 years old (event dropout rate), by selected characteristics: October 2013**

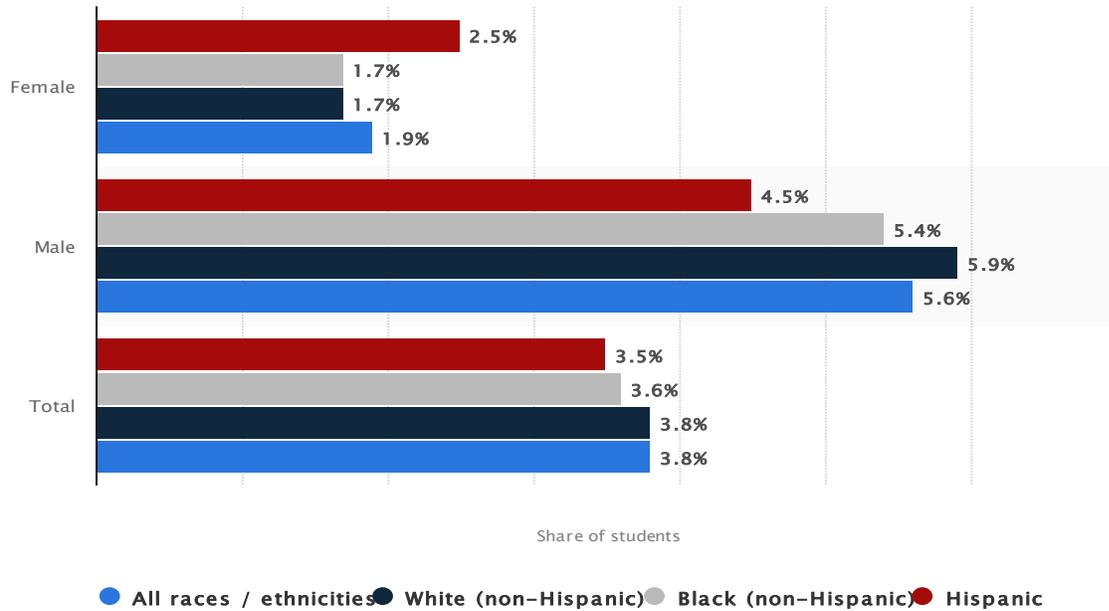


**Weapon Use in Correlation with Zero Tolerance Policy:**

According to CDC (2019, p.10), the table below exhibits statistics on students from grades 9-12 in America that have admitted to carrying a weapon to school. This research was done during September 2016 through December 2017. The table below shows that Caucasians are more likely than African Americans to have weapons on school grounds. However, statistics reveal that more African Americans are being punished much harsher than their counter parts. When an African American carries a weapon on school grounds, they are more than likely to be arrested, unlike Caucasians. In turn, Caucasian students, who bring weapons on school campus will be sent to the principal office for their punishment. Those individuals will receive suspensions from the board of education, but that consequence is not offered to African Americans. Furthermore, statistics show Caucasians are more likely to have access to guns and bring them to school. Yet, the school will only release information on the African Americans

who do not follow the gun policy. This fits in with American stereotype that all African Americans are criminals and do not want anything in life.

Table 3



**Incarceration Rates:**

The table below, shows the incarceration rate from the end of the year 2016. According to the U.S. Department of Justice Zeng (2018), found that there were 217 inmates per 100,000 people who reside in the United States. This rate wasn't too far from the year before. In 2015 the incarceration rate was 215 per 100,000 people that reside in the United States. At the end of the year 2016, blacks had the highest incarceration rates of 599 per 100,000 who reside in the United States. These statistics do not show what the crime performed by the prisoners; however, it does show that African Americans are the majority in the prison system.

Table 4

**TABLE 2**  
**Jail incarceration rates, by sex and race/Hispanic origin, 2000, 2005, and 2010–2016**

| Demographic characteristic                           | Midyear <sup>a</sup> |       |       |       |       |       |       | Year-end <sup>b</sup> |                   |
|--|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------------------|-------------------|
|  | 2000                 | 2005  | 2010  | 2011  | 2012  | 2013  | 2014  | 2015                  | 2016 <sup>c</sup> |
| Total <sup>f</sup>                                   | 220                  | 253** | 242** | 236** | 237** | 231** | 234** | 215                   | 217               |
| Adults only <sup>d</sup>                             | 292**                | 334** | 315** | 307** | 308** | 299** | 302** | 277                   | 280               |
| Sex <sup>e,d</sup>                                   |                      |       |       |       |       |       |       |                       |                   |
| Male   | 397**                | 449** | 432** | 419** | 418** | 404** | 405** | 375                   | 377               |
| Female   | 49**                 | 63    | 59**  | 59**  | 62    | 64    | 67**  | 60                    | 62                |
| Race/Hispanic origin <sup>e,g</sup>                  |                      |       |       |       |       |       |       |                       |                   |
| White  | 133**                | 167   | 168   | 167   | 173   | 174   | 178** | 169                   | 171               |
| Black/African American                               | 745**                | 804** | 745** | 720** | 708** | 668** | 668** | 607                   | 599               |
| Hispanic/Latino                                      | 264**                | 263** | 233** | 219** | 213** | 200** | 200** | 174                   | 185               |
| American Indian or Alaska Native                     | 261**                | 339   | 436   | 411   | 402   | 438   | 442   | 357                   | 359               |
| Asian, Native Hawaiian, or<br>Other Pacific Islander | 43**                 | 43**  | 33**  | 34**  | 33    | 31    | 35**  | 32                    | 30                |
| Two or more races                                    | ...                  | 25    | 14**  | 21    | 25    | 26    | 16**  | 24                    | 31                |

Note: Number of confined inmates in local jails per 100,000 U.S. residents at midyear or year-end. Results may differ from previous reports in the series due to data updates received from jails. See appendix table 4 for standard errors.

<sup>a</sup>Comparison year.

<sup>b</sup>Difference with comparison year is significant at the 95% confidence level.

<sup>c</sup>Not collected.

<sup>d</sup>Based on the inmate population confined on the last weekday in June.

<sup>e</sup>Based on the inmate population confined on December 31. In 2015 and 2016, the Annual Survey of Jails collected demographic data on inmate population at year-end instead of midyear.

<sup>f</sup>Includes both adults and juveniles.

<sup>g</sup>Excludes persons age 17 or younger.

<sup>h</sup>Excludes persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, unless specified.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Annual Survey of Jails, 2000 and 2010–2016; and Census of Jail Inmates, midyear 2005.

The table below, represents the statistics of inmates between the years 2000 and 2016, that are 17 years and younger in state prisons in the United States. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Carson, 2017, found that, the study also reveals that 1,073 of the inmates in 2016 that were 17 years or younger were males. The large number of youths in jail is an issue in itself, but it also accentuates that teachers and other school officials are pushing the school to prison pipeline. It also emphasizes that no one is willing to work towards solving the issue that a large number of children are incarcerated every year. Another issue that this table shows, is that a large number of African Americans are incarcerated for unknown reasons. Throughout the years, the number of African Americans slowly increased but not as significant as the American Indian or Alaska Native. This table shows that other ethnic groups are more important to the law makers and their counter parts than those in the African American culture.

Both tables convey that African Americans are the majority within the United States prison system. These results are very discouraging as it proves that the school to prison pipeline system in fact discriminates to those of color. Once entered into the system at a young age, they continue going around or through the system like a revolving door. The prison system is a system that is easy to enter but very difficult to exit. These individuals are labeled by society as criminals and once they are labeled, they will act that way, leading them into the hopeless system. If these children cannot find hope in their homelife, potentially they could find it within the school system, yet that does not appear to be the case. If their life fails them and the school life fails them and then who can these individuals trust to help them gain their hope and prevent them from reentering in prison system.

*Table 5*

| Bureau of Justice Statistics   |           |              |         |         |          |           |                |         |         |          |           |
|--|-----------|--------------|---------|---------|----------|-----------|----------------|---------|---------|----------|-----------|
| Sentenced prisoners under state and federal jurisdiction, by sex, race, Hispanic origin, and age, December 31, 2016  |           |              |         |         |          |           |                |         |         |          |           |
| Author(s): E. Ann Carson   |           |              |         |         |          |           |                |         |         |          |           |
| Data source(s): National Prisoner Statistics Program, Federal Justice Statistics Program, National Corrections Reporting Program, Survey of Prison Inmates |           |              |         |         |          |           |                |         |         |          |           |
| Refer questions to: askbjs@usdoj.gov or 202-307-0765   |           |              |         |         |          |           |                |         |         |          |           |
| Date of version: 10/19/2017  |           |              |         |         |          |           |                |         |         |          |           |
| <b>Sentenced prisoners under state and federal jurisdiction, by sex, race, Hispanic origin, and age, December 31, 2016</b>                                 |           |              |         |         |          |           |                |         |         |          |           |
|  |           | Male         |         |         |          |           | Female         |         |         |          |           |
| Age group  | Total/a   | All male/a,b | White/b | Black/b | Hispanic | Other/a,b | All female/a,b | White/b | Black/b | Hispanic | Other/a,b |
| Number of sentenced prisoners/c,d  | 1,458,173 | 1,352,684    | 390,900 | 466,600 | 320,000  | 175,200   | 105,489        | 48,900  | 20,300  | 19,300   | 17,000    |
| 18–19  | 11,000    | 10,600       | 1,700   | 5,200   | 2,900    | 1,400     | 500            | 200     | 100     | 100      | 100       |
| 20–24  | 145,100   | 135,900      | 28,000  | 55,600  | 35,200   | 19,800    | 9,200          | 3,600   | 2,200   | 2,000    | 1,800     |
| 25–29  | 230,600   | 211,700      | 52,300  | 78,300  | 54,900   | 28,100    | 19,000         | 8,600   | 3,600   | 3,800    | 3,200     |
| 30–34  | 238,200   | 218,100      | 60,100  | 72,800  | 57,300   | 31,200    | 20,200         | 9,500   | 3,400   | 4,100    | 3,500     |
| 35–39  | 221,000   | 203,800      | 56,300  | 69,600  | 52,800   | 26,300    | 17,200         | 8,000   | 3,000   | 3,400    | 2,800     |
| 40–44  | 173,700   | 160,900      | 46,300  | 54,100  | 40,000   | 21,500    | 12,800         | 6,000   | 2,400   | 2,200    | 2,100     |
| 45–49  | 148,900   | 138,300      | 44,700  | 46,100  | 29,500   | 17,400    | 10,600         | 5,100   | 2,200   | 1,600    | 1,400     |
| 50–54  | 124,200   | 116,000      | 40,200  | 38,500  | 21,500   | 13,100    | 8,200          | 4,000   | 1,800   | 1,100    | 1,100     |
| 55–59  | 82,900    | 78,300       | 28,400  | 25,700  | 12,900   | 8,200     | 4,500          | 2,200   | 1,000   | 500      | 600       |
| 60–64  | 43,500    | 41,500       | 15,900  | 12,200  | 7,000    | 4,000     | 2,000          | 1,000   | 400     | 200      | 200       |
| 65 or older  | 38,000    | 36,600       | 16,800  | 7,800   | 5,600    | 4,000     | 1,400          | 800     | 200     | 200      | 200       |

A/Includes American Indians and Alaska Natives; Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Other Pacific Islanders; and persons of two or more races.

B/Excludes persons of Hispanic or Latino origin.

C/Includes persons age 17 or younger.

D/Race and Hispanic origin totals are rounded to the nearest 100 to accommodate differences in data collection techniques between jurisdictions.

Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoner Statistics Program, 2016; Federal Justice Statistics Program, 2016; National Corrections Reporting Program, 2015; Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016 (preliminary).

**Summary:**

Although statistics show that minorities have a high rate with incarceration rates and school dropouts, it does not show that there are high rates in violent crimes. An example from the table shows that Caucasians have a higher rate of weapons on school grounds, but the incarceration rate does not reflect that. The media has shown us that most mass shootings have been enacted by young Caucasian males, however, they are given less time in jail than their African American counter-parts who committed a lesser crime. Caucasians are given sympathetic stories about their life, such as bullying, and their mental health not being addressed. Furthermore, when the tables are turned, African Americans are portrayed as being thugs, as having a broken home life, and as having misbehaved in school. African Americans are given harsher sentences for crimes that should be given as misdemeanors. Society does not give African American children a chance when it comes to the juvenile system as well as the school system.

## **Chapter 5: Promising Programs**

In this section of the paper, it will provide possible ways to end the school to prison pipeline through promising programs, organizations, and ideas. This section explores the various ways that schools, teachers, and communities can use research to end the school to prison pipeline. There are 6 promising programs presented in this section that have been shown to reduce the problem. As the school to prison pipeline has been a problem for many years now, many studies are being conducted to decrease this problem. One idea that has been presented is incorporating the use of restorative justice within the schools. Another way of helping reduce the problem is keeping students more actively engaged. To keep students involved, communities, school staff, parents, and guardians all need to come together and educate one another on the problem to prevent students from falling into the path of the school to prison pipeline. Another way to reduce the multitude of students from entering the school to prison pipeline is by minimizing the overrepresentation of the majority students. According to Gonsoulin, Zablocki, and Leone (2012), if schools require their teachers and staff to learn about the communities that the schools are in, then there will be a greater possibility that the school dropout rates and absenteeism will decrease as the academic achievement rates increase.

### **Restorative Justice**

According to The NEA Ed Justice (2014), restorative practices are to help foster healthy relationships and promote positive discipline in schools. Restorative practices also address and discuss the needs of the school's community, build healthy relationships between educators and students, resolve conflict, hold individuals accountable, repair harm and restore positive relationships, and reduce, prevent, and improve harmful behavior. A link to the entire explanation of what the restorative practice is can be found in appendix A.

Another promising program is, according to Anyon (2016), the Denver Practice Plan is created by schools and districts in Denver to implement and enforce restorative practices in the schools. According to Gonsoulin, Zablocki, and Leone (2012), the Denver Plan is a program that was created to allow the students to take on the responsibilities of their actions and work on restoring the relationships their behavior has affected. The Denver plan helps keep students from being expelled and suspended. Students will more than likely not experience exclusion if schools incorporate the Denver plan in their programs. Schools should involve the parents, community members, and families of those students that are creating problems and misbehaving in schools. Involving parents and communities in the students' education allows them to put a plan together for a positive outcome on the students' success.

Green et al. (2015) found that multiple districts have employed restorative practices in their schools' policy. One school district that uses restorative practices is Minneapolis public schools in Minnesota. "Since 2008, Minneapolis Public Schools has offered restorative practices as a service for students recommended for expulsion, in partnership with community organizations such the Legal Rights Center of Minneapolis" (Green et al., 2015, p. 10).

According to Green et al. (2015), there are seven key elements of equity policies. Those seven elements are specific commitment to equity; family partnership in policy development; focus on implementing positive, proactive behavior support practices; clear, objective discipline procedures; removal or reduction of exclusionary practices; graduated discipline systems with instructional alternatives to exclusion; and procedures with accountability for equitable student outcomes. A link to the entire full explanation of what each key element is can be found in appendix B.

## **Community Involvement**

Additionally, if teachers learn what the community is like outside the school walls, it will give them knowledge and background information about their student's possible living situations. In the research by Gonsoulin, Zablocki, and Leone (2012), a three-tiered approach to the staff development is presented. The three tiers of this approach convey different ideas on how to further connect the schools with the community. In tier 1, the school staff should create a safe and structured environment for students to study, learn, and socialize, as well as use common vocabulary for behaviors and expectations. In tier 2, the teachers, school staff, and those others that are engaged in the students' life on a day-to-day basis should provide support for the youth to stay within perimeters of the school's behavioral plan. This is completed by removing barriers that could prevent success, such as youth who live in poverty or belong to special populations, such as youth who are LGBT. Lastly, in tier 3, everyone that is engaged in the student's life should focus on defining the roles of each person concerning discipline and behavior management as well as using understandable language and setting role guidelines that distinguish between disciplinary conduct and criminal offenses. These are approaches that schools could use to help with decreasing the number of students that enter the juvenile system and having better educators. Teachers that have knowledge on general skills, such as a child's cognitive, physical, and social development, is effective to their classroom academic outcome.

## **Culturally Focused**

Schools should include programs that are the best fit for the variety of students within a classroom. To achieve this goal, schools should provide programs or trainings that are strictly for teachers to help the teachers gain knowledge on the skills, values, attitudes, beliefs, etc., for use inside the classroom. According to Osher et al. (2012),

To work effectively with children who are at risk, teachers and others need to be culturally and linguistically competent, they need to be able to use positive behavioral approaches, they need to be able to apply their understanding of learning and emotional/behavioral disorders and as well as to identify students strengths as opposed to employing a deficit approach. (p. 289)

Incorporating culture within the classrooms is important, as it allows the students and teachers to learn from cultures different from theirs, both inside and outside the classroom. Cramer, Gonzalez, and Pellegrini-Lafont (2014), encourage teachers to include multicultural information, resources, and materials in all skills and across all subjects. When teachers incorporate different cultures, it allows the students to use their cultural backgrounds within the classroom. The students are then able to communicate and express themselves in ways that are best for them.

### **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is another method that has shown success in schools where it has been implemented. Curtis (2014) found “After a school district in South Los Angeles instituted Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, the district experienced a 13.3% decrease in suspensions, a 55.6% decrease in expulsions, and 31.7% decrease in opportunity transfers.”

Moreover, according to Green et al. (2015), PBIS is an approach that is used to help build positive behaviors within the students. It is also used to help provide resources for schools and school districts to reduce the racial and ethnic disproportionality in school discipline policies. In this approach, the teachers, administrators, school staff, and parents reward and make note of the positive behaviors instead of acknowledging and disciplining all the misbehaviors the student has

done. PBIS explains that when schools decide to use any type of discipline policy, they need to make sure that they are effective.

As Togut (2011) explores, schools should have classrooms with teachers who are well trained in classroom management. Classroom management plays a huge role in a student's success, as it influences communication between the teacher and students, as well as creating a more supportive and welcoming classroom environment. Communication between teacher and student is important, as it allows them to establish a relationship and connection. When students are able to communicate with their teachers, it reduces the issue behind student misbehavior.

### **Highly Qualified Teachers**

According to Woodruff, Francois, and Osher (2012), it is important to have a diverse workforce of teachers so that the students and teachers face less challenges in creating a positive and supportive relationship. These authors also state that, in order for a teacher to work effectively with children that are at risk, they need to have four different qualifications. These four qualifications are being culturally and linguistic competent, using positive behavior approaches, using their understanding of behavioral disorders, and identifying the student's strengths instead of employing a deficit approach. Having qualified teachers as well as teachers that are the same race, gender, and ethnic groups as the students will allow schools to have better teacher and student connections. Teachers should encourage their students to collaborate and inspire each other to find success in their future plans.

According to the Kentucky Department of Education (2019), The Kentucky for Equity in Teaching is designed to prepare and transition those who would like to become teachers by using teachers that are already certified to be their mentors and supporters while they complete the program. This is a program that allows the students to have access to teachers that are effective,

experienced, and diverse. The Kentucky of Equity Teaching provides another way of having a variety of different cultured and ethnic teachers within the school setting. It makes a difference when a student is able to talk to a teacher that is of the same race, ethnic group, or culture as him or her.

### **Reducing Disproportionality of African American Students**

As discussed by Shippen, Patterson, Green, and Smitherman (2012), schools can prevent the issue of students entering the school to prison pipeline by working on reducing the disproportionality of African American youth in special education, eliminating the high testing, and getting the parents involved in the schools. Shippen et al. (2012) states that the No Child Left behind Act is a program that provides parent education about child development and their learning process. This is another program within the schools that enables the parents and the schools to have a connected relationship, which also allows them to devise a successful plan for the student. In the article by Darensbourg, Blake, and Perez (2010), schools should keep a private reflection journal for teachers to express their thoughts that allows the other teachers to reflect on regularly; highlight the success of African American students, community leaders, professionals, and teachers to their students; and invite successful African American staff to describe their interpersonal relationship styles with students and its effectiveness.

According to Stoebig, Marcelina, and Vega (2016), there are five different ways of eliminating to the school to prison pipeline. These five ways include putting an end to the police being the first response, improving the ratio between having more staff to support the number of students, making standardized testing scores of less importance and focusing on making sure that the students are prepared to take the test, making sure that there are resources to help with college and career prepping, and incorporating a variety of alternative discipline practices.

According to the researchers, when making the police the last resort when it is time to deal with misbehavior, schools think it is better to sit down with the students and communicate to figure out the root of the problem and find ways to put an end to the problem.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper provides an overview of how the school to prison pipeline has become a major issue in America. The school to prison pipeline came about many years after the Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas in 1954, a law that was passed to desegregate schools between the whites and blacks. Years later in 1977, the use of corporal punishment within schools came about. Corporal punishment is the use of physical punishment from teachers and administrators against the students. During the 1990's the zero-tolerance policy was then put in place after schools began to stop using corporal punishment. The zero-tolerance policy are policies that were created to handle students with behavioral issues in school. Schools have used these policies to enforce students to obey by the rules and regulations.

The issues behind the school to prison pipeline is that all the past punishments were focused on targeting African Americans in general, African American males, and those that are considered a minority student. Schools use suspension and expulsion to push students out of school. To add to the problems behind the school to prison pipeline, students are being placed under labels that are not always accurate which causes the student to become more immune to the label.

To help create a solution for this issue, schools needs to change their focus on the schools' policy programs to focus on the students' success more than the perspective of the school. Schools should offer programs that help students with issues both inside the school and out. Schools should also be more cautious and understanding of the individuals' lifestyles outside of the schools.

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**Appendix A**

<https://neadjustice.org/ending-the-school-to-prison-pipeline/>

**Appendix B**

<https://www.pbis.org/Common/Cms/files/pbisresources/PBIS%20Disproportionality%20Policy%20Guidebook%202016-7-24.pdf>