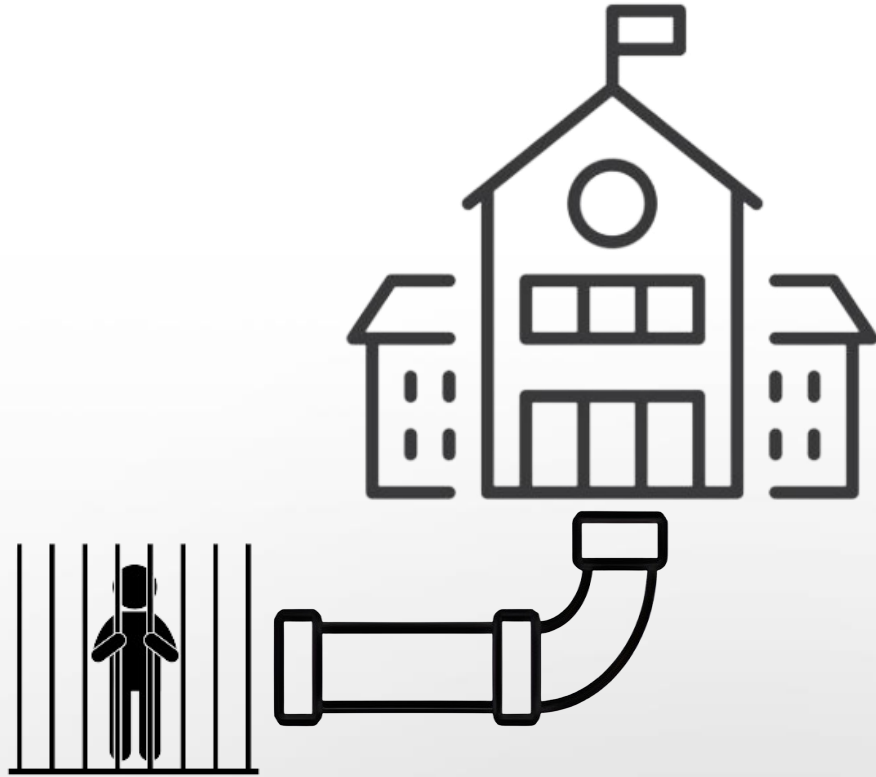# Diversity and Inclusion:
Policies, Practices, and Prison Pipelines

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The Establishment of
Palmetto Unified School District (PUSD)

In 1981, the South Carolina General Assembly established the Palmetto Unified School District #1 (PUSD), pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 24-25-10, to provide educational services to inmates through a statewide school district serving both the EFA students (17 – 21 years old) and the adult population (22 and beyond).

The legislation declared:

"The purpose of the district is to enhance the quality and scope of education for inmates within the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) so that they will be better motivated and better equipped to restore themselves in the community. The establishment of this district shall ensure that education programs are available to all inmates with less than a high school diploma or its equivalent and that various vocational training programs are made available to selected inmates with the necessary aptitude and desire."

Presenters

Dr. Cynthia Cash-Greene
Superintendent
38 Years Public Education
 5 Years Correctional Experience

Mr. Rodney Zimmerman
Director of Curriculum
40 Years Public Education
 5 Months Correctional Experience

Dr. Beverly Holiday
Director of Adult Education
23 Years Public Education
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Statement of Purpose

This presentation is **not to defend** anyone who becomes incarcerated because of a crime, but to **bring about awareness** of policies and practices and its impact on the school-to-prison pipeline.

We would like you to consider the information in this presentation as you continue to make decisions regarding how policies are established and used to guide the operations of schools across this state and country.

Objectives

- Understand the school-to-prison pipeline

- Review factors supporting zero-tolerance policies

- Understand the impact of district policies as they relate to students

- Understand the impact of isolation (removal from families and communities)

- Understand the educational environment for the incarcerated

- Discuss how community resources collaborate to decrease the school-to-prison pipeline

- Discuss measures to avoid the school-to-prison pipeline

What is the School-to-Prison Pipeline?

According to Anti-Defamation League 2015, the prison pipeline refers to education and public safety policies and practices that drives many of our nation school children, especially minorities, into the pathway that begins in school and ends in the juvenile and criminal justice system.

Many of these students have learning disabilities or have difficult home lives because of poverty, abuse, or neglect and would benefit from additional educational and counseling services. Instead, they are sometimes isolated, punished, and pushed out of the school system. (1)

Who is Being Channeled into the Pipeline?

- Black, Hispanic, Latino, Asian, and Bi-racial students;

- English language learners;

- Physically or developmentally disabled;

- LGBTQ;

- Undocumented youth;

- Homeless and/or foster care children

Why Are Some Students Channeled into a Prison Pipeline?

- Zero-tolerance policies

- Suspensions rates

- Police involvement in minor student misbehavior

- Discouragement

- Family Trends

- Low Expectations

What are Zero-Tolerance Policies?

Zero-tolerance policies are **school disciplinary policies that set predetermined consequences** or **punishments for specific offenses.** By nature, zero-tolerance policies, as any policies that is "unreasonable rule or policy that is the same for everyone but has an **unfair effect** on people who share a particular attribute," often becomes discriminatory. (2)

Zero-tolerance policies originated from the United States Customs Agency's effort to combat drug trafficking in the early 1980's (Losinski, Katsiyanni, Ryan, & Baughan, 2014). State and Federal Judicial systems have chosen to steer away from zero-tolerance policies, while school districts have chosen to continue implementing such policies. (3)

Factors That Contribute to the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Suspensions and Expulsions

- The disparity begins in elementary school. Black boys are three times more likely to be suspended that white boys. Black students are two times more likely to be expelled than white students. Suspended and expelled children are often left unsupervised, without constructive activities, and fall further behind in their schoolwork, leading to a greater likelihood of disengagement and drop-out. (4)

- Poor performing students receiving longer suspensions or more expulsions than better performing students. (5)

- The punishment gap grows significantly during high stakes testing periods, suggesting that schools sometimes resort to selective discipline to exclude poor performing students for the testing pool. (6)

The Impact of Suspensions and Expulsions

REALITY

- Removes students from the structure and the supervision provided through the school system.

- Increases the likelihood of youth to engage in criminal activity while not in a school environment.

REALITY

- Increases the exposure to peers demonstrating anti-social behavior.

- Alienates students from school settings that can lead them to feel discouraged and rejected.

Factors that Contribute to the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Student Misconduct

The rise in school-based arrests is the quickest route from the classroom to the jailhouse and is the most direct example of the criminalization of school children.

- School-based arrests **double** the odds that students will drop out of school. When coupled with a court appearance, the odds of dropping out **quadruple**.

- School-based arrests **lower** job prospects and **increase** the likelihood of future contacts with the criminal justice system. (7)

School District Policies
As They Relate to Students

School policies **aim to promote students' successful learning** and **well-being** by addressing the causes of misbehavior while **maintaining a conducive learning environment.**

Challenges: Inconsistent use of policies and punitive approaches often leads to negative consequences, disproportionately affecting minorities, students with disabilities, and students identified as LGBTQ.

Impact: The use of harsh discipline method suppresses behavior temporarily but could harm overall school climate and perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline.

The Impact of District Policies As They Relate to Students

Policy JB Equal Educational Opportunity/Nondiscrimination: The board affirms the right of all individuals to be treated with respect and to be protected from intimidation, discrimination, physical harm and/or harassment. Respect for each individual will be a consideration in the establishment of all policies by the board and in the administration of those policies by district staff.

The Impact of District Policies As They Relate to Students

Policy IKE Promotion and Retention of Students: The board recognizes that each student has unique cognitive, social, emotional, physical and developmental needs. To meet those needs, the board's goal is to provide programs that **promote a positive, structured learning environment** which **encourages self-direction, responsibility, communication and preparation for future learning.**

The Impact of District Policies As They Relate to Students

Policy LKD Suspension of Students: A student who is determined to have engaged in a major misbehavior as provided in the Student Code of Conduct handbook may be suspended for up to ten (10) days for any offense or no more than thirty (30) days cumulative in a school year.

Suspension means the student cannot attend school, nor be on the school grounds, cannot attend any program at the school in the daytime or night, and cannot ride a school bus.

The Impact of District Policies As They Relate to Students

Policy JKE Expulsion of Students: Expulsion is the removal of a student from a school for more than ten (10) school days or until re-admitted by the hearing officer. The authority to expel students from school rests solely with the board of school commissioners. However, the board may appoint a district hearing officer to preside over all expulsion hearings.

Exclusionary Disciplinary Policies

- Specifically, zero-tolerance policies that remove students from the school environment increase the probability of a youth being pushed into the pipeline pathway.

- Such policies have led to the mistreatment of students' situations and the strict disciplinary action which greatly impact the students' future causing them to go to juvenile detention facilities or prison system.

- The placement of students into the juvenile system and the removal of students from their homes, community, and familiar surroundings create exclusions and isolation.

The Impact of Isolation

REALITY

- Removes youth from the community they know

- Increases the probability of suicide

- Subject young minds to a life of crime by association

- Creates a financial strain for families and the incarcerated

- Destroys character when returning to community/society

The Environment of the Incarcerated

Understanding the Educational Environment for the Incarcerated

REALITY

- Acclimation to the prison environment

- Staff shortages

- Lock-downs

- Lack of privacy

- Lack of technology

REALITY

- Lack of adequate funding for educational programs

- Competition between operation and education time (i.e.: shower-time, recreation-time, meal-time, count-time, commissary-time, etc.)

- Access to educational services in the prison setting

Understanding How Community Resources Collaborate to Decrease the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Collaborations between schools and community stakeholders are helping to ensure that schools are a safer place for students to learn without becoming a pathway to prison.

- Faith-based engagements

- Local law enforcement agencies

- School Resource Officers (SROs)

- Staff training

- School and community collaboration

- Community organizations work to limit the role of police in schools, reduce the reliance on invasive technologies like metal detectors and biometric surveillance systems that treat students with suspicion.

Understanding How Community Resources Collaborate to Decrease the School-to-Prison Pipeline

- Increase the use of positive behavior intervention and supports

- Create agreements with local law enforcement agencies to limit arrest at schools and the use of restraints

- Provide explanations of infractions and prescribed responses in the student code of conduct to ensure fairness

- Train teachers on the use of positive behavior supports for at-risk students

- Compile reports and review data on the total number of disciplinary actions

Reimaging the Possibilities

- The opposite of the school to prison pipeline involves creating alternative systems that prevent the harmful cycle of pushing students from schools into the criminal justice systems.

- Instead of punitive measures, we can focus on restorative justice and supportive interventions to address student behavior and keep them engaged in education.

- Restorative justice, community and peer support, clear disciplinary policies and limiting police referrals. (8)

Solutions Not Suspension Act

One critical way to put an end to the school-to-prison pipeline in New York is to push the Solutions Not Suspension Act. The goal of this ACT is to end the reliance on suspensions as the default way to discipline students and establish a framework that utilizes proven **restorative approaches** for inappropriate behavior and discipline. (9)

What is a Restorative Approach?

At its core, the restorative approach is a philosophical shift away from the traditional, punitive approach to wrongdoing. The restorative perspective views misbehavior as an offense against relationships.

This approach maintains a focus on accountability of actions with a specific emphasis on empathy and repairing of harm. To that end, restorative approach seek to address underlying issues of misbehavior and reintegrate wrongdoers back into the school and classroom community. (10)

Restorative Approaches

School-wide Intervention Practices

- Peer mediations

- Restorative / family conferences

- Restitution planning / restorative agreements

- Reintegration following exclusions (11)

Dismantling the Pipeline

- **Awareness:** Educate ourselves and others about the pipeline's existence and impact.

- **Policy Changes:** Advocate for alternatives to **"Zero Tolerance *Discipline*"** and changes in local policies.

- **Supportive Environments:** Create safe and supportive environments that prioritize education over punishment.

Endnotes

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Thank You