

School-to-Prison Pipeline

National PTA recognizes that there are systemic policies and practices in our nation that directly and indirectly drive children and adolescents out of their school and on a pathway to incarceration, oftentimes called the “school-to-prison pipeline.” These policies and practices include, but are not limited to:

- Zero tolerance policies¹ and automatic suspension and/or expulsion;
- Overly punitive discipline policies for minor violations of the school code of conduct or behavioral disruptions;
- Systems of school-based policing and physical infrastructure;
- Surveillance that can lead to unnecessary referrals to law enforcement and school-based arrests, cause psychological harm, and undermine the school climate and the learning environment for all students; and
- Other forms of structural inequity, including systemic racism and ableism, built into the juvenile justice system and other institutions.

Studies have shown that children and youth who have been pulled into the juvenile or adult justice system because of these policies are more likely to face disruptions to their learning and significant barriers to their academic success. As a result, they face higher drop-out rates, increased justice system involvement, and negative and lasting impacts on their mental health and well-being. Predominantly, these students are children of color, children with disabilities, other children from marginalized communities, and children impacted by mental health challenges, trauma, and/or adverse childhood experiences. While the policies and practices that shape the school-to-prison pipeline undermine the academic success and well-being of these students in particular, they also contribute to a school climate that fails to meet the needs of all students.

Our association believes that all children deserve the chance to reach their potential and thrive, and that it is the responsibility of decision makers at the local, state, and national levels to actively work to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline through:

¹ According to the American Bar Association, "Zero tolerance in the school context had originally been focused on guns and drugs before being extended to include a wide variety of low-level misconduct." Hon. Jay Blitzman (Ret.). Shutting Down the School-to-Prison Pipeline. American Bar Association. October 12, 2021. www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/empowering-youth-at-risk/shutting-down-the-school-to-prison-pipeline/.

- Adopting restorative justice practices, along with positive school discipline and alternative dispute resolution techniques over the detention, exclusion or incarceration of youth;
- Mandating training for educators and school personnel on safe de-escalation techniques, trauma-informed care and positive behavioral interventions and supports;
- Collecting data related to school discipline that enables communities to identify existing disparities and intentionally reassessing and updating policies to eliminate any discipline practices that contribute to a school-to-prison pipeline;
- Fostering the development of trauma-informed schools and full-service community schools, strengthening community partnerships and encouraging the adoption of a whole-child approach that responds to the mental, physical, behavioral, developmental and academic needs of all students;
- Supporting every student's mental health by increasing the availability of mental health professionals in schools, teaching essential life skills and providing and connecting students with necessary behavioral and mental health resources at school and in their community;
- Reducing classroom size and implementing other structural improvements that would enable schools and educators to have the time, training, and capacity to address behavioral issues before they escalate;
- Prohibit law enforcement from becoming involved in school discipline situations that are the responsibility of school administrators;
- Fully funding investments in under-resourced communities and public schools, including adequate funding for programs that provide targeted support to families and funding to help schools create a welcoming, supportive, and inclusive learning environment for all students; and
- Eliminating racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequities in the juvenile justice system.

PTA also supports efforts to strengthen family-school partnerships and encourages schools to communicate and meaningfully partner with families of children subject to disciplinary action, including providing explanations of disciplinary options and eliciting

the family's input and partnership on ways to support their child and ensure every child can reach their potential.

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