



EVERY STUDENT EVERY DAY

Ending DC's School-to-Prison Pipeline

“When children attend schools that place a greater value on discipline and security than on knowledge and intellectual development, they are attending prep schools for prison.”

- Angela Davis

FACT: Black children in DC are **7.7 times** more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their White peers.¹ Because of the direct link between suspension rates and school failure,² meaningful, evidence-based interventions are needed to ensure all of our children can access the education they need to become confident, contributing members of our community.

SY16-17 Quick Facts³

- Black students accounted for 95.3% of all students expelled.
- Black students represented 92.4% of students who received an out-of-school suspension, but only 67.6% of all students.
- Black students were 7.7 times more likely to be suspended than their White peers.
- Black students were 3.4 times more likely to be suspended multiple time, compared to White students.
- 91% of schools with an out-of-school suspension rate of 20% or higher were in Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8. These schools tend to be at least 89% Black/African American.

Implicit Racial Bias in School Discipline

Our schools' discipline policies must be updated to take into account what scientists have told us: **implicit racial bias affects people's interpretations of events and actions.** Implicit bias refers to the attitudes and stereotypes that impact our understanding, actions and decisions—all in an unconscious manner.⁴ Extensive research has documented the negative effects of implicit racial biases in various realms, including the classroom. For example:

- A Stanford study found that when Black students misbehaved more than once, teachers were more likely to stereotype the students as troublemakers and recommend harsher discipline.⁵
- A Yale study found that school staff members of all races expect challenging behavior more from Black children than from their White counterparts and, therefore, examine Black children's behavior more critically.⁶

Disproportionate Discipline Reinforces Racial Stereotypes

Research, like the Clark’s “Doll test,”⁷ shows that most children, regardless of race, make negative racial associations—equating black and brown skin with being “bad.” Disproportionate discipline (when Students of Color are disciplined for things their White peers are not disciplined for or when Students of Color are disciplined more harshly than their White peers) reinforces the myth that Students of Color are bad children. This lie can distort all children’s view of Students of Color and prompt poor self-concept in suspended Students of Color.⁸ Students need to unlearn negative stereotypes about Students of Color and DC schools can/need to be their teacher by implementing policies that limit racial bias from influencing suspension decisions.

Suspensions = Keys to Academic Failure

Suspensions are not “just days out of school.” They lead to school disengagement and therefore, become indicators of a student’s future success. This means the disproportionate suspensions of Black students **set these children up for failure** each time they are sent home.

- Suspended and expelled students are more likely to perform poorly academically, fail classes, and drop out of school.⁹
- Students who are suspended or expelled, especially those who experience them repeatedly, are more likely to be held back a grade or drop out of school.¹⁰
- In DC specifically, Graduation Pathways work illustrated that suspensions in middle school are a strong predictor that students won’t graduate from high school.¹¹
- Students who have been suspended or expelled are almost three times as likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system the following year.¹²

Disproportionate Discipline Strains the Resources of Families of Color

When students are suspended, their parents and caregivers must then decide whether to jeopardize their job by staying home with their children, or leave their children unsupervised. Parents have lost jobs because of repeated suspensions. Disparate suspensions mean disparate economic impact for Parents of Color. The economic impact for these families is magnified by living in a city with huge employment, wage, and wealth gaps between White, Black and Hispanic DC residents.¹³

How Will the Student Fair Access to School Act (SFASA) Help?

This bill establishes rights and supports that directly address causes of and effects from the overuse of suspensions and expulsions for Children of Color, including requiring the Office of the State Superintendent of Education to provide professional development support to schools on implicit bias and culturally responsive corrective action techniques.

Current Law	SFASA
No protections for students from subjective disciplinary actions, which may be driven by implicit racial bias.	Limits exclusionary discipline practices to cases of threatened or actual bodily injury or emotional distress.
Schools are not required to educate all suspended students, leading to loss of valuable educational hours for the student.	Schools must continue education for students while they are suspended and have a reengagement plan in place for suspended students to return to school.
No legal parameters for how long students can be suspended from school, often leading to weeks or months out of the classroom and missed instructional time.	Out-of-school suspensions are limited to 5 consecutive days for grades K-8, 10 consecutive days for grades 9-12, or 20 cumulative days for any grade level (unless written reasoning from head of LEA is provided).

Footnotes

¹ OSSE (2017). *State of Discipline: 2016-17 School Year*, p. 29.

² Robert Balfanz, et al, *Sent Home and Put Off-Track: The Antecedents, Disproportionalities, and Consequences of Being Suspended in the Ninth Grade*. Retrieved from <https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/state-reports/>

³ OSSE (2017). *State of Discipline: 2016-17 School Year*. Retrieved from https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/2016-17%20School%20Year%20Discipline%20Report.pdf

⁴ Staats, C. (2014, May). *Implicit Racial Bias and School Discipline Disparities: Exploring the Connection*. Retrieved from Ohio State University, Kirwan Institute website: <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ki-ib-argument-piece03.pdf>

⁵ Okonofua, J. A. & Eberhardt, J. L. (2015). Two Strikes: Race and the Disciplining of Young Students. *Psychological Science*, 26(5), 617-624. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615570365>

⁶ Gilliam, W. S., Maupin, A. N., Reyes, C. R., Accavitti, M., and Shic, F. (2016). *Do Early Educators' Implicit Biases Regarding Sex and Race Relate to Behavior and Recommendations of Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions?* Retrieved from Yale University, Edward Zigler Center in Child Development & Social Policy website: http://ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/Preschool%20Implicit%20Bias%20Policy%20Brief_final_9_26_276766_5379_v1.pdf

⁷ Clark, K. B. & Clark, M. P. (1947). Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children. In T. M. Newcomb & E. L. Hartley, et al (Eds.), *Readings in Social Psychology* (pp. 169-178). New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

⁸ Manning, M. A. (2007). *Self-Concept and Self-Esteem in Adolescents*. National Association of School Psychologists. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5367/523293360cf1fd39a4da7a7f4e7e27bfcbaa.pdf>

⁹ Russell Skiba et al., American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008). Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools? An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations, *American Psychologist*, 63(9), 852.

¹⁰ Fabelo, T., Thompson, M. D., & Plotkin, M. (2011). *Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement*, p. 54. Retrieved from The Council of State Governments website: http://knowledgecenter.csg.org/kc/system/files/Breaking_School_Rules.pdf

¹¹ Raise DC (2014). *District of Columbia Graduation Pathways Project Summary*. Retrieved from: https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/publication/attachments/DME_GradPathways_FinalReport_20140924_vF.pdf

¹² *Supra* note 10 at p. 70.

¹³ Hende, L. & Diby, S. & Woluchem, M. (2016). A Vision for an Equitable DC. Retrieved from Urban Institute website: <https://www.urban.org/features/vision-equitable-dc>