



Not in Class, Comes in Last:
Examining stringent zero-tolerance
discipline policies and the school-to-
prison pipeline

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I. Introduction

The United States education system ostensibly promises equal access and opportunities for students from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. However, the principle of this promise is not being implemented fairly throughout the public education system, as demonstrated through the vast achievement and disciplinary discrepancies between students of color and white students from high and low-income schools. Particularly, schools in poverty-afflicted school districts that serve communities of color are immensely under-resourced yielding the deficient educational and behavioral outcomes of these students. In recent years, the intention of schools being constructive learning environments for all students has shifted, now focusing on intensifying disciplinary practices to keep “disruptive” students out of classrooms. The embracing of zero-tolerance discipline policies directly imposes out-of-school suspensions and expulsions on students, often for minor infractions that once resulted in a trip to the principal’s office or detention. Rather than promoting a safe and secure educational atmosphere, harsh zero-tolerance disciplinary policies create a culture of fear in which students are in constant worry of being suspended, expelled, or even arrested (Castillo 2014). Suspended and expelled children are often left unsupervised and without constructive activities; they also can easily fall behind in their coursework, leading to a greater likelihood of disengagement and dropping out (Skiba 2000b).

The school-to-prison pipeline is a trending educational disparity that is being fueled by overly stringent zero-tolerance policies, causally linking educational exclusion and the criminalization of youth. A suspension or expulsion

from an elementary, middle, or high school can greatly increase the likelihood of a student following down the pipeline and into the criminal justice system. Additionally, the requirements of police presence to further reinforce disciplinary guidelines is not only threatening for students but can cause the escalation of minor, non-violent occurrences such as alcohol possession or “disruptive behavior” into criminal activity (Wilson 2014).

Significance

Dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline is vital for the overall improvement and restoring of the United States public education system. This country has begun to value incarceration over education, as demonstrated through the prioritization of funding. According to the California County Superintendent’s Educational Services Association, California spends \$62,300 annually to keep one inmate imprisoned in contrast to the \$9,100 spent per student in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The significant amount of money being invested in the criminal justice system should be redirected into the public education system to promote constructive learning environments and the retaining of students. In addition, increased school funding can result in higher salaries for deserving teachers, class-size reduction for more individual student attention, and after-school programs for students to participate in. Current imprisonment tactics that direct disadvantaged students out of classrooms and into correctional facilities not only affect the youths but their families and communities as well.

The implications of school disciplinary actions can extend well beyond the classroom context and affect students’ larger life trajectory. Out-of-school suspensions and

expulsions are strongly associated with subsequent involvement in the juvenile justice system (Kang-Brown, Trone, Fratello, & Daftary-Kapur 2013). Students pushed along the pipeline typically find themselves in juvenile detention facilities, many of which provide few, if any, educational services. Though many students propel down the school-to-prison pipeline, it is extremely difficult for them to make the journey in reverse (Skiba 2000). Furthermore, students who enter the juvenile justice system during adolescence face many barriers when attempting to re-enter into traditional schools. The vast majority of these students will not realistically be able to graduate from high school traditionally, nor pursue higher education.

II. Question & Hypothesis

Through my research, I worked towards answering the following questions: What are the incentives for schools in low-income districts to expel and suspend students at alarming rates through stringent zero-tolerance policies? Why are these schools not focusing on practicing solutions to retain them in the school system? I have hypothesized that zero-tolerance policies are creating even more challenges for schools. The central problem is particularly significant in urban schools, where ethnic minority and low-income students are being expelled and suspended at much greater rates than students from non-urban schools. Additionally, due to the overall lack of resources in schools in low-income districts that serve ethnic minority students, and a greater national demand for school accountability, schools are incentivized to push out low performing students. Retention solutions for misbehavior are not widely being used in schools because it is rather effortless to dismiss disruptive

students altogether, than to take the time to focus on the underlying issues that these students are facing.

III. Methodology

To answer the central question, this research was generated using a combined quantitative and qualitative approach. First, I began with a literature review of different perspectives on school discipline from scholars and institutions in the education field. This literature review will provide different scholarly approaches to the issue and classify the varying arguments. The literature review examines racial disproportionality in school discipline, which cannot solely be explained by quantitative data, therefore, a qualitative approach was also necessary. Further, I provided an in-depth qualitative historical analysis of school discipline to better understand how zero-tolerance started being implemented in schools. I was able to utilize the available resources at the Library of Congress and the National Library of Education for concrete background on my research question and supporting evidence.

To narrow my research scope, I conducted a case study of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). I chose to focus this case study on LAUSD in particular since it has become notorious for criminalizing students with overly stringent zero-tolerance policies and heavy police presence on school grounds. In 2013, the Los Angeles City Board of Education implemented the School Climate Bill of Rights, a transformational new discipline policy. LAUSD was also the first school district in the country to ban suspension on the basis of “willful defiance.” The hope of this new policy is to work towards reversing zero-toler-

ance discipline tactics that have disproportionately harmed Black and Latino youths of LAUSD (Community Rights Campaign 2013). Although this reform is an encouraging first step, I primarily examine and compare data from the 2011-2012 school year that reflect how LAUSD got to this point of necessary discipline reform. I provided data regarding suspension and expulsion rates as well as the numbers of arrests and tickets administered to LAUSD students. There is a specific focus on ethnic minority students' and discipline discrepancies.

IV. Literature Review

Implicit bias in school discipline

According to the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at the Ohio State University, implicit bias is heavily implicated as a contributing factor to the causes of racial disproportionality in school discipline (Kirwan Institute 2014). In this context, implicit bias is defined as the mental process that causes individuals to have negative feelings and attitudes about people based on characteristics like race, ethnicity, age and appearance (Kirwan Institute 2014). The mindset of implicit bias is fueled by “cultural deficit thinking” which prevails in stereotypes of certain groups. Regarding educators, cultural deficit thinking can foster negative assumptions about the ability and work ethic of low-income, ethnic minority students. Looking across the nation at students' suspended at least once during the 2009–2010 school year, an uneven landscape emerges. Scholars of the Kirwan Institute note that nearly 1 out of every 6 African-American students enrolled was suspended. This high proportion is followed by Native American students (1 in 13) and Latino

students (1 in 14). In contrast, among White students only 1 in 20 were suspended, and a mere 1 in 50 Asian-American students were suspended, though this is varied by subgroup (Staats 2014).

This process creates the perception that poor African-American and other marginalized students and their parents are disconnected from the education process. Consequently, teachers and other school personnel may harbor negative assumptions about the ability, aspirations and work ethic of these students—especially poor students of color—based on the assumption that they and their families do not value education in the same way it is valued by middle- and upper-income white students (Staats 2014).

Research has demonstrated that there is no substantial evidence that African-American students are misbehaving any more than white students are, yet they are being disciplined more frequently (Kirwan Institute 2014). For example, a study conducted by the Indiana Education Policy Center concluded that:

Although discriminant analysis suggests that disproportionate rates of office referral and suspension for boys are due to increased rates of misbehavior, no support was found for the hypothesis that African-American students act out more than other students. Rather, African-American students appear to be re-

ferred to the office for less serious and more subjective reasons. Coupled with extensive and highly consistent prior data, these results argue that disproportionate representation of African-Americans in office referrals, suspension and expulsion is evidence of a pervasive and systematic bias that may well be inherent in the use of exclusionary discipline (Skiba 2000).

Another way in which implicit racial biases can have detrimental consequences for students of color is in regards to teachers' culturally influenced perceptions of student behavior. Notably, research has indicated that teachers' race matters with respect to perceptions of students' behavior (Staats 2014). It is necessary to realize that the current teaching workforce is largely comprised of white females; A cultural mismatch often emerges between teachers and their increasingly diverse student bodies. A national survey of more than 1,000 public school teachers found that the teaching population in 2011 was both 84% White and 84% female (Feistritzer 2011). In contrast, data from the 2011-12 academic year indicated that students of color comprise over half of public primary school students in many schools nationwide (Cárdenas 2012). This is especially significant when looking at major metropolitan school districts, such as LAUSD, where over 80% of public school students are non-white. This cultural mismatch between teachers and students can activate teachers' implicit racial biases in ways that contribute to discipline disparities (Staats 2014). Culture-based misunderstandings between students and teachers can lead to students being disciplined unnecessarily for perceived unruliness when their actions were not intended to be inappro-

priate. To work towards addressing implicit bias, increasing teachers' and administrators' cultural understandings and making them more culturally responsive to their student populations is an approach that can help counter discipline disparities while addressing implicit bias (Staats 2014). By better understanding and responding to students' cultures, teachers are in better positions to interpret potential disciplinary situations in light of students' cultural orientations, as opposed to relying on implicit biases, which are extremely difficult to overlook.

V. Historical Analysis of School Discipline

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan boldly produced a report entitled *A Nation at Risk*. The report announced the need for immediate and drastic education reform across the United States, which led to a push for greater school accountability. According to the report, the American public education system was failing; test scores were rapidly declining, millions of Americans were illiterate, and low teaching salaries and poor teacher training programs were leading to a high turnover rate among educators (Graham 2013). However, there was an added emphasis on improving students' test scores, which often reflect the quality of schools. High-stakes testing refers to tests, typically standardized, that are administered to students to make important decisions commonly for the purpose of accountability. As a school-reform mechanism, the use of high-stakes testing is generally motivated by the belief that the promise of rewards (such as salary increases for teachers and administrators) or the threat of punishment (such as sanctions or funding reductions) will motivate and incentivize educators to improve school performance, teaching effectiveness, and

student achievement (Glossary of Education Reform 2014). Overall, high-stakes testing is a strategy that is motivated by an attempt at closing the achievement and opportunity gaps, while working towards ensuring that teachers are effective, and all students are learning equally. High-stakes tests can become detrimental to low-scoring students, providing limited opportunities for them. The way in which teachers respond to assist high-need students is also vital in determining the educational outcomes of these students. For example, high-stakes standardized tests are often used for schools that abide by the tracking system—placing students in “tracks” based on their portrayed educational ability. So, the score that a student receives on a standardized test could potentially be the determinant of whether a student places in a “college bound” track or an “at risk” track. These tests can also be administered to determine whether or not a student can advance to the next grade level or receive a high school diploma, as 23 states currently require public school seniors to take high school exit examinations.

The implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 required that all elementary and secondary public schools receiving federal funding administered annual standardized tests to all students, assuring that all students are meeting the same academic standards in reading and mathematics (Owens & Sunderman 2006). NCLB was another way of attempting to enforce greater school accountability nationally, to ultimately ensure that students are meeting state’s proficiency requirements. However, states may report that more students are reaching proficiency on state assessments, but this does not necessarily equate to students improving academically.

Since there is a significant impact on the outcomes of standardized tests, the method of teaching in classrooms has

shifted from teaching developmental skills such as critical thinking to memorization tactics to prepare students for the tests. In fact, teachers have reported that at least a quarter or even half of their time in the classroom with students was spent preparing for and administering standardized tests (Advancement Project 2010). The preparation for high-stakes tests also significantly reduces the opportunities for teachers to offer in-depth instruction and meet the needs of students, particularly those who are in the greatest need. As the accountability of schools increasingly relies on the test performances of students, school becomes less engaging for students, thus making it difficult to retain them (Advancement Project 2010). It is challenging to comprehend if the implementation of No Child Left Behind improves the academic performance of students, but what we do know is that standardized, high-stakes tests do not provide a complete picture of what students know (Owens & Sunderman 2006). High-stakes testing have not been proven effective at improving overall student achievement or closing the achievement gap between White students and students of color (Advancement Project 2010).

Zero-tolerance policies and high-stakes testing have joined together to change the incentive structure for educators, putting many teachers and administrators in the unenviable position of having to choose between their students' interests and their self-interest. Due to the focus on test scores and the severe consequences attached to them, if a student misbehaves in class, it is no longer in educators' self-interest to address it by assessing the student's unmet needs or treating the incident as a "teachable moment." It is much easier and more "efficient" to simply remove the child from class through punitive disciplinary measures and focus on the remaining students (Advancement Project 2010).

As a result, the practice of pushing struggling students out of school to boost test scores has become common practice. There are a number of widely used strategies for manipulating test scores, such as withdrawing students from attendance rolls, assigning students to alternative schools, coercing or encouraging students to drop out or enroll in General Educational Development (GED) programs, along with using suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to alternative schools (Advancement Project 2010). The combined effects of test score manipulation and the criminalization of students' behaviors are contributing to countless students entering the school-to-prison pipeline. In fact, high school dropouts are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than high school graduates, and as of 2012, approximately 70% of inmates did not have a high school diploma (Anand 2012). In addition, extensive publicity surrounding isolated incidents of horrific school violence, such as the Columbine High School shootings in 1999, succeeded in intensifying fears that our nation's youths were becoming violent, which caused people to worry that the next devastating school shooting could potentially happen at any time, in any city (Kang-Brown, Trone, Fratello, Daftary-Kapur, 2013).

VI. Findings

The culture of discipline in educational settings has changed profoundly over the past 25 years, becoming much more formal and in many cases, more rigid. The severity of punishments through school discipline has vastly increased and is being applied more broadly. With this, zero-tolerance policies have been widely applied in schools throughout the United States, even though they have continuously been discredited by research. Schools across the country have histor-

ically been safe learning environments for teachers to teach and students to learn, even before it became common practice to assign police officers to patrol public schools. Despite an overall decline in violent incidents in schools since 1999, currently more than 90% of U.S. public schools have implemented some type of zero-tolerance policies (Drakeford 2004). The idea that young people should be feared due to their potential for being violent is the climate in which zero-tolerance policies proliferated and also expanded to encompass a wide range of misconduct much less harmful than bringing a weapon to school (Kang-Brown, Trone, Fratello, Daftary-Kapur, 2013).

There has been mounting evidence that zero-tolerance policies are neither effective nor implemented in a manner that is child-centered or equitable (Skiba & Peterson 2000). Such policies are meant to punish and not to educate children. The school-to-prison pipeline is fueled by zero-tolerance policies, but made even worse by school funding cuts that overburden counselors and high-stakes testing that add stress onto teachers. These excessive practices have only resulted in the suspensions, expulsions, and arrests of tens of millions of public school students, especially among students of color (Flannery 2015).

For those students, it isn't just an interruption in learning, although it's definitely that, too—if they aren't in school, they aren't learning. A suspension can be life altering. It is the number-one predictor—more than poverty—of whether children will drop out of school, and walk down a road that includes a greater likelihood of unemployment, reliance on social-welfare programs, and imprisonment.

(Flannery 2015).

For many students of color, suspensions and expulsions are the first step towards juvenile justice involvement (Wilf 2012). With teachers being quick to refer disruptive students to the principal's office to entrust disciplinary sanctions, they are momentarily diffusing the problem in the classroom, but only increasing the external problems outside of the classroom that the student will have to face. One would expect that suspensions and expulsions are reserved for severe infractions, yet under zero-tolerance, a trip to the principal's office almost always will equate to at least a suspension as a quick way of disciplining the student, regardless of the seriousness of the issue (Skiba 2000).

With school administration having increasingly less tolerance for student misbehaviors, it begs the question, what will a "disruptive" student that has been suspended or expelled be doing while they are being excluded from school? Ultimately, resorting to suspending or expelling a student will disrupt their educational pursuits. Table 1 demonstrates the total numbers of LAUSD instructional days that were lost from the 2007-08 to 2011-12 school years. Although it is encouraging that there has been a district-wide decrease in lost instructional days over the years across all ethnicities, students are still spending far too many days outside of classrooms, especially African-American and Latino students, as demonstrated in Table 1. If these students come from working-class families, they will most likely be left at home unsupervised during their suspensions, and although nobody will know what they are doing, it's safe to say that they will probably not be learning. When a student is away from school, it is implied that they are most likely subject to negative influences in their neighborhoods, which could

eventually lead to a path down the school-to-prison pipeline (Nelson 2008). When the time comes for the student to return to school, they will be behind in their classes, leading to even greater disengagement and added stress upon teachers.

It is particularly surprising that in The United States barely half of all Black, Latino, and Native American students graduate from high school. The reality is that low graduation rates among ethnic minority students only emphasize the real problem that our public education system is not currently designed for every student to succeed. Instead, the educational opportunities of millions of young people are continuously put at risk by policies that set certain students up for failure (Advancement Project 2010). While necessary attention was brought to the “dropout crisis”, there needs to be an even greater focus on the policies in place contributing to it. In 2010, President Obama addressed Congress naming the dropout crisis as one of the most pressing issues our country is facing, stating that it will require a national effort to turn around America’s persistently low-performing schools, but there also needs to be a national focal shift on the issues that are contributing to the crisis. Many students are not provided with any other option besides dropping out of school, so they are actually being pushed out. The Advancement Project defines a push-out as a student who feels forced out of school largely due to harsh discipline, but also because of unsupportive teachers and staff, rigid test-driven curriculum, inadequate resources, and lack of student support services (Advancement Project 2010). Since urban schools are primarily serving the highest concentrations of low-income students, there has been a shift of national concern about how these schools are serving these high-need students. Previous research has suggested that students from urban schools would be expected to have less successful edu-

cational outcomes, less supportive home environments, and less positive school experiences than students from other schools (Nelson 2008).

The reasoning behind zero-tolerance assumes that by removing a student that is engaging in disruptive behavior, it will create an improved educational environment for the remaining students (American Psychological Association 2008). General findings have proven that suspension is indeed effective in removing a problematic student from school, however this only provides temporary relief to school personnel. Enacted discipline policies ultimately should be working towards meeting the educational goals of students, but if they are failing to do so by disproportionately affecting one group over another, then reform is necessary to ensure that all students can stay in classrooms and learn effectively.

VII. Case Study

We live in a state that invests significantly more in prisons than higher education. To be exact, California leads the country for prison spending per person, yet is almost last at #49 in education spending per person (Anand 2012). The state of California has continuously cut education funding, therefore reducing the number of teachers, counselors, and important programs in our schools (Community Rights Campaign 2013). The corrections budget in California has grown from \$622 million in 1980 to \$9.2 billion in 2011, an increase of more 1300% (Anand 2012). On the contrary, in the same year, California Governor Jerry Brown cut \$328 million from K-12 education, which was largely deducted from public transportation funding among other student resources (Baron 2011). Also, many schools in California

now have more police and security on campuses than guidance counselors for students (Community Rights Campaign 2013). With such policies in place, it seems as if our schools are more equipped to send youths to prison, not college or a career path. This leaves the role of enforcing school discipline in the hands of law enforcement as opposed to school personnel, which can easily escalate minor infractions into criminal activity. Of the 710,000 suspensions issued during the 2011-2012 school year in California, 48% of them were for “willful defiance” (Kirwan Institute 2014). With its broad terminology, “willful defiance” can be translated to just about anything, additionally leaving the interpretation in the hands of the enforcer. It can include behaviors such as refusing to take off a hat, using a cell phone, altering a school uniform, or talking back to a teacher. According to former LAUSD Superintendent John Deasy, “willful defiance has become a vehicle for getting rid of kids who are not achieving” (Watanabe 2013).

With California cities and neighborhoods becoming more racially and ethnically integrated over the last generation, schools have still retained high levels of inequality. LAUSD is the second-largest district in the United States. LAUSD is comprised of approximately 662,000 students; 88% of them being students of color, 80% qualifying for free or reduced-cost lunch, and barely over half of the District’s students graduate from high school (Community Rights Campaign 2013). During the 2012-13 school year, LAUSD recorded a 68% high school graduation rate, an increase of 1 percentage point over the previous year, according to data provided by the California Department of Education. The dropout rate of LAUSD during the 2012-13 school year was 17.3%. LAUSD also happens to be home to the LA School Police Department (LASPD), the largest school police force

in the country. A Los Angeles community leader stated, “It would be difficult to find any group of non-incarcerated people in the U.S. who have had more contact with law enforcement on a daily basis than Los Angeles public school students” (Community Rights Campaign 2013). During the 2011-2012 school year, there was a total of 8,993 arrests and tickets of students in LAUSD given by LASPD, which is more than any other district in the country has reported. Furthermore, the over-policing of LAUSD schools overwhelmingly impacts Black and Latino youths. Of those 8,993 arrests and tickets that were made during the 2011-2012 school year, over 90% of them went to Black and Latino students (Community Rights Campaign 2013). This proves that drastic inequality persists in current discipline systems, and that students are facing discriminatory practices at school.

From a legal perspective, Titles IV and VI protect students from discrimination based on race in connection with all academic, educational, extracurricular, athletic, and other programs and activities of a school, including programs and activities a school administers to ensure and maintain school safety and student discipline. When schools respond to student misconduct, Titles IV and VI require that the school’s response be undertaken in a racially nondiscriminatory manner (U.S. Department of Education 2014). The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights shows that African-Americans are approximately 3.5 times more likely to be suspended or expelled, in addition to being over-policed (U.S. Department of Education 2014). Although it is difficult to prove intentional discrimination, the over-application of discipline rules by school officials results in adverse effects on ethnic minority students as compared with students of other races. According to the

American Psychological Association, discipline disparities cannot solely be attributed to differences in socioeconomic status or racial/ethnic differences of misbehavior. Rather, the differences in discipline levels between students of color and white students can be attributed to how authorities perceive and respond to the misconduct of these students.

What makes the civil rights issues of zero-tolerance and over-policing even more destructive is the young age at which these policies begin. Among the thousands of students that entered the juvenile justice system during the 2011-2012 school year, some were as young as seven years old. Overall, out of all the arrests and tickets that were issued, nearly half—4,115—were issued to youths 14 and under (Community Rights Campaign 2013). Given how vulnerable and formative these early teenage years, especially considering the transition from elementary to middle school, school climates should be fostering and addressing the genuine needs of these students instead of an atmosphere of fear and intimidation by school police. The criminal justice system has also traditionally been focused on males, and LASPD tickets and arrests continue in that pattern with over 70% of tickets and arrests going to males (Community Rights Campaign 2013). In LAUSD, students are exposed to the school-to-prison-pipeline through no fault of their own but simply as an extension of attending their neighborhood school where police presence and searches are commonplace. The sheer reliance on a public educational system that has adopted such a policing model increases the likelihood that all students, may be stopped and searched during their school experience, or even ticketed when they arrive late to school (Community Rights Campaign 2013).

LAUSD Begins Drastic Discipline Reform

LAUSD started to make strides in the right direction in 2013 when they became the first school district in the United States to ban suspending and expelling students for willful defiance—the subjective category that accounts for 54% of suspensions across the country (Frey, 2013). The purpose of this action was to increase student attendance, facilitate academic achievement, and decrease racial disparities in discipline (Losen 2015). The district adopted a restorative justice model to combat students being excluded from class by focusing on counseling students instead of suspending them. Under the School Climate Bill of Rights, the district will provide restorative justice training for civil rights violations at school-sites where 10% of a particular subgroup or 10% of overall students were arrested or given citations (Community Rights Campaign 2013). Two other large school districts in California subsequently banned the practice of suspending students for willful defiance after LAUSD-- San Francisco Unified banned the action in 2014 and Oakland Unified banned the action in 2015 (Adams 2015). As demonstrated below in Table 2, district-wide disparities in suspension rates continued a downward trend after the plan was implemented in LAUSD, although Black students were still suspended at the highest rate among their peers.

It is noteworthy that the LAUSD entered into a voluntary resolution agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights in 2009 to address the high and disparate rates of suspension for specifically Black male students (U.S. Department of Education 2009). That being said, the LAUSD's efforts have encompassed the entire student body and have successfully reduced suspension rates for all racial groups; moreover, both the Black-White

and Latino-White gaps narrowed considerably. LAUSD's Academic Performance Index scores were on the rise during the first two years that the scores were available (Losen 2015). The district continued its efforts with LASPD, which came to terms last year by responding to years of community organizing and advocacy, taking large steps toward reducing the use of ticketing and arresting students in schools, as demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3 shows the significant reduction in tickets that were issued district-wide to LAUSD students in the grades 6-12. School ticketing across all categories was decreased by 54.8% from the 2011-12 school year to the 2012-13 school year (Community Rights Campaign 2013). LASPD has significantly reduced the amount of citations being issued for minor offenses such as on-campus fights, petty theft, or truancy, but instead refer students to school administrators or counseling services (Watanabe 2014). This approach shows students that their schools are taking a proactive approach to combating discipline policies that were not nearly as beneficial as they were intended. Once the reform is fully implemented, it will move LAUSD in the right direction to becoming a nationwide leader in putting intervention and support for struggling students before arrests and juvenile court time (Watanabe 2014).

VIII. Conclusion & Discussion

The concern is not about abandoning school discipline altogether, but shaping discipline to be more effective. Discipline in schools ultimately needs to be equitable and reasonable. Severe discipline discrepancies among students from disadvantaged ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds should not be nearly as immense as they currently are, and

drastic school discipline reform across the country is vital. Although school discipline is necessary and many factors need to be taken into consideration when discipline is issued, there needs to be consistency in how similar behaviors are addressed across the student population. Educators, counselors, and administrators need to be focusing on addressing issues with students and retaining them, instead of dismissing them from classrooms and letting authorities take control. Keeping a disruptive student in a class can certainly be a tough order for teachers who are under pressure to meet school accountability measures, but they are also in a unique position to determine the extent in which their students are disciplined. By engaging with their students on a daily basis, teachers are in a singularly empowered position to keep students in the classroom (Elias 2013). When a teacher decides on a less punitive discipline approach in the classroom, a student is more likely to stay in school and complete their education.

School districts can divert students from following into the school-to-prison pipeline by increasing the use of positive behavior interventions and providing support for students. The fact that between the 1996–97 and 2007–08 school years, the number of public high schools with full-time law enforcement and security guards tripled, but the numbers of guidance counselors and teachers have largely remained the same, is sending a very conspicuous message to students (Kang-Brown, Trone, Fratello, Daftary-Kapur, 2013). Safety and order in schools do not have to come at the cost of equity; while all youths should be held accountable for their behavior, school administrators should take responsibility too. To combat the loss of instructional time in exclusionary discipline practices and disparate systems, I have incorporated some discipline policy recommendations

for schools. First, I believe that the most beneficial way to equalize discipline is to abandon the zero-tolerance discipline framework. Schools need to require a higher standard or intervention before a student is suspended or expelled. Behavioral misconduct could have several unassuming causal factors such as an undiagnosed disability or family instability, so it should be required that teachers and administrators intervene to consider the surrounding circumstances of a student's behavior. There should not be any incentives for schools to remove students from classrooms through stringent discipline; rather, schools should be incentivized to retain students. Second, the implementation of appropriate limitations on the use of law enforcement in public schools needs to be enacted. As demonstrated through the reform of LAUSD, the use of punitive law enforcement in schools does not necessarily make campuses any safer, rather it can potentially push struggling students to dropout and fall deeper into the criminal justice system. By taking more responsive approaches to discipline, and not being quick to refer disruptive students to higher administration, teachers and administrators can potentially save students' valuable time in classrooms and prevent them from being dismissed and potentially following down the school-to-prison pipeline.

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Appendix

Table 1

LAUSD Instruction Days Lost to Suspension by Ethnicity

ETHNICITY	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
AM. IND. /ALSK. NAT.	253	235	209	189	100
ASIAN	598	936	992	477	262
AFR. AMER.	23,107	17,874	15,525	12,368	7,888
FILIPINO	537	114	32	271	150
LATINO	46,596	37,490	34,193	30,392	16,469
PACIFIC ISLANDER	364	250	232	146	56
WHITE	3,310	2,884	2,377	2,163	1,361
	74,765	59,783	53,560	46,006	26,286

(Source: LAUSD Office of Data and Accountability, 2012)

Table 2

Three-year Trend in Out-of-School Suspension Rates and Racial Disparities in LAUSD

Year	Ethnicity			Gap	
	Black	Latino	White	B/W Gap	B/L Gap
2011-12	121	31	24	97	90
2012-13	71	17	10	61	54
2013-14	49	11	08	41	38

Note: This table provides the total count of suspensions during the academic year, and counts a student more than once if they were suspended multiple times for different incidents.
Source: California Department of Education

Table 3

Total Number of Tickets Issued by LASPD



(Source: Community Rights Campaign, 2013)

