Juvenile Justice in Mecklenburg County
National Juvenile Justice Awareness Month
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The School-to-Prison Pipeline

The School-to-Prison Pipeline refers to the pathway between the school system and the justice system.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline (STPP) in NC and Charlotte

- **Factors that contribute to STPP**: zero tolerance policies; high stakes testing; exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspension); explicit and implicit bias at individual and system levels [1, 2]
- **NC classifies 16 offenses as mandatorily reported and, in 2016/17, the top 3 reported offenses** for high school students were: drug possession, weapon (not gun/explosive), and alcohol possession. [3]
- **Across the US, NC and in CMS, mandatorily reported offenses comprise 3%** of all school-based offenses. [3,4]
- **That means, 97%, of children are suspended from school for discretionary offenses** (e.g., aggressive/disruptive behavior, insubordination, fighting, and inappropriate language/disrespect) [3,4]
- **In Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools 2016/17, 3.3% of students had one or more discretionary suspensions in grades K-5, 11.2% in 6-8, & 9.2% in 9-12.** By school, CMS suspensions vary from <1% to more than 20% of the student body. [5]
- **Though not considered exclusionary discipline, disciplinary school reassignment removes children from their home school and assigns them to alternative learning placements (ALPs). In 2016/17, across NC, 12,224 students were assigned to ALPs** (a 5% decrease in ALP assignments from last year). [3]
- **Some students are disproportionately affected by the STPP**, including: students of color, poor students, students with disabilities, ESL students, and students who identify as LGBTQ+. [2,4]
- **Youth with just one suspension or expulsion are at increased risk** of juvenile justice (JJ) or criminal justice (CJ) system contact. [4]
In 2016/17, there were 13,206 short term suspensions in Charlotte. At 3.7 out of every 10 students, this is lowest rate since 2007.

Of those who have been suspended, more than 1 in 7 students has subsequent contact with the juvenile or criminal justice system.

- 1 in 5 Black students
- 1 in 6 Latinx students
- 1 in 10 White students

This is in comparison to 2% of students who received no school disciplinary action. [4]

**Consequences of System Involvement**

Youth with Juvenile Justice (JJ) system contact have lower rates of educational attainment and higher rates of dropping out of school. [1, 6, 7]

Youth with JJ system contact have lower employment rates and earnings. [8]

Youth with JJ system contact are more likely to become involved with the CJ system as compared to youth without juvenile justice system contact. [9]
Students of color are more likely to be disciplined with In-school and Out-of-School Suspensions as compared to White students for the same offenses. [10]

Since 2006, STS rates have remained consistent for Black students, increased for Latinx students, and decreased for White students. [3]
The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Steps to Correct the School-to-Prison Pipeline

- School-Justice Partnerships can address the STPP by improving data collection and dissemination, keeping kids in school and out of court, building positive school climate, addressing racial/ethnic disparities, and including discussions on trauma and mental health. [11]
- Research suggests that school-wide initiatives such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Justice can reduce suspension rates [11]
- Support staff (e.g., social workers, nurses, counselors) can improve school climate and help teachers and schools meet the increasingly complex needs children bring with them each day. [12]
- Policies that reduce or ban exclusionary discipline for our youngest students can decrease the associated negative impacts (e.g., anti-social behaviors, school avoidance, low academic achievement) and prevent children from losing valuable time in school. (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools requires that the Superintendent approves all suspensions of K-2 students.)
- These steps can also improve social mobility and the Leading on Opportunity Council's work in Family Stability, Education, Career Readiness, Segregation, and Social Capital.

References


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