

Juvenile Justice in Mecklenburg County

National Juvenile Justice Awareness Month
October (2019)

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

The School-to-Prison Pipeline refers to the pathway between the school system and the juvenile & criminal justice systems.



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]
- In NC schools, 16 offenses are mandatorily reported annually to the State Board of Education and to law enforcement, if necessary.
- In 2017/18, the top 3 reported offenses for high school students were: drug possession, weapon (not gun/explosive), and assault on school personnel. [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 2017/18, K-12 students who attended high poverty schools were more likely to be suspended than their peers at low and moderate poverty school. [5]
- Though not considered exclusionary discipline, disciplinary school reassignment removes children from their home schools and assigns them to alternative learning placements (ALPs). In 2017/18, across NC, 11,322 students were assigned to ALPs (a 7.4% decrease in ALP assignments from last year). [3]
- Some students are disproportionately affected by the STPP, particularly: 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]

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Of those who have been suspended, more than 1 in 7 had subsequent contact with the Juvenile Justice system.



1 in 5 Black students

1 in 6 Hispanic students

1 in 10 White students

Compared to 2% of students who received no school disciplinary action. [6]

Consequences of Juvenile Justice Involvement

- Youth with 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]

School-Justice Partnerships

In 2017, North Carolina passed Raised the Age legislation, which will absorb 16- and 17-year-olds into the juvenile justice system beginning December 1, 2019 (they are currently treated as adults). The bill also authorized the use of School-Justice Partnerships (SJPs). The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts released a toolkit to support districts' efforts to launch or restructure local SJPs [10]. SJPs are groups of community stakeholders aimed at implementing effective school discipline strategies.



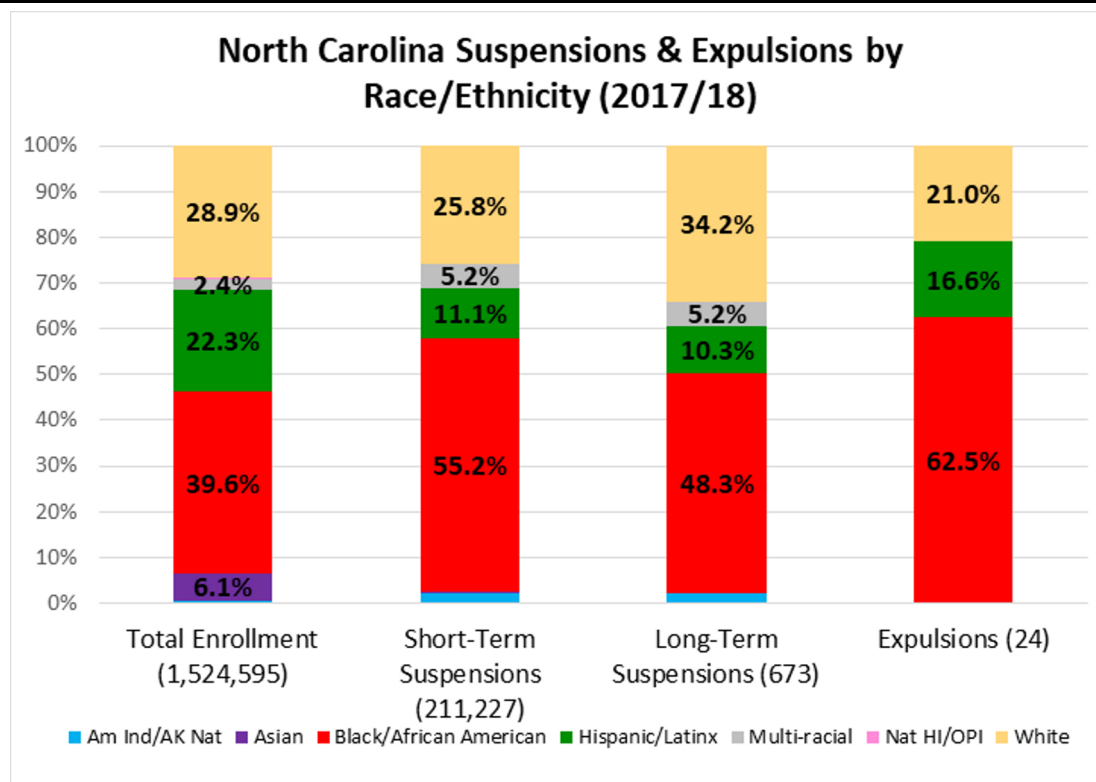
Schools currently tend to rely on exclusionary discipline strategies (e.g., suspension), which are related to higher rates of JJ and CJ involvement and worse outcomes [1, 4, 6, 7, 8]. Effective SJPs engage students to address minor infractions within the school-setting [10, 11]. Specifically, SJPs should help districts implement graduated response models and a continuums of services [10].

SJPs are most effective when they are consistently applied in every school across a district. One strategy to promote consistency is through the use of focus acts, or a list of infractions that will not be referred to law enforcement without progression through the graduated response model and determining appropriate responses to address those acts [12].

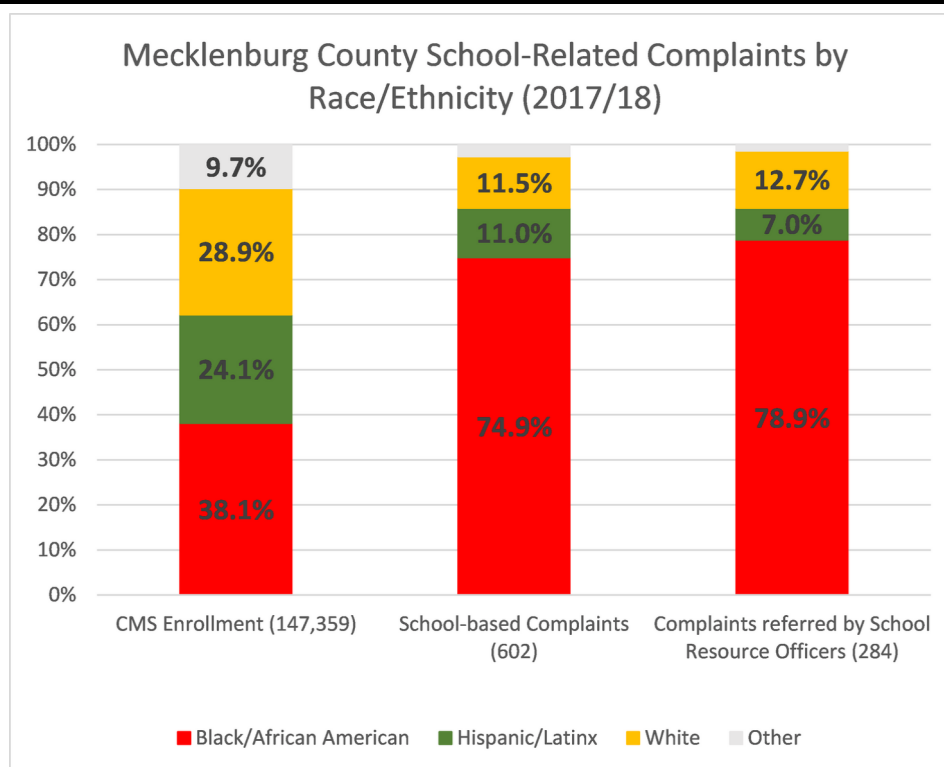
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, local law enforcement, and the Mecklenburg County Courts entered into a SJP Memorandum of Agree (MOA) in 2015 that uses in-school strategies to address misconduct rather than the involvement of law enforcement, to eliminate racial disparities in school discipline practices, and increase consistency in responding to and handling student misconduct [13]. After entering into the MOA, the district saw a decrease in suspensions and school-based court referrals. The local SJP maybe further improved and applied more consistently across the district with the inclusion of local-determined focus acts and a graduated response model.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Students of color, particularly Black/African American students, are more likely to face exclusionary discipline practices (e.g., suspension, expulsion) in North Carolina.



In Mecklenburg County, students of color, particularly Black/African American students, are disproportionately referred to juvenile court for school-related incidents.



The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Steps to Correct the School-to-Prison Pipeline

- School-Justice Partnerships can address the STPP by keeping kids in school & out of court, building positive school climate, addressing racial/ethnic disparities, including discussions on trauma & mental health, and improving data collection & dissemination. [14]
- Research shows implementing school-wide initiatives such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and restorative justice can reduce suspension rates [15]
- 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. [16]
- 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. For instance, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools requires that the Superintendent approves all suspensions of K-2 students.
- Engaging in actions to correct the STPP also improves social mobility, which contributes to the Leading on Opportunity Council's work in Family Stability, Education, Career Readiness, Segregation, and Social Capital.

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