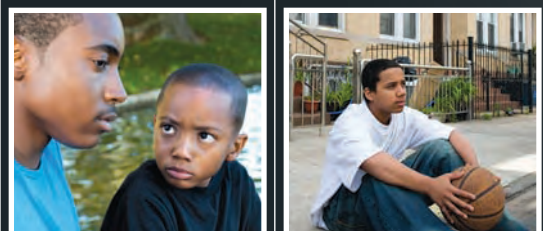


Building Equalizing Schools Within Inclusive Communities

*Strategies in the Classroom
and Beyond that Redirect the
School- to-Prison Pipeline*



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Funded by:

 **The
California
Endowment**



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We would like to thank The California Endowment (TCE) and the Mott Foundation for their generous support of this and related projects of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute. Susan Eaton and Linda DeLauri at the Houston Institute wrote and researched this report. The comments and insights of Johanna Wald, David Harris, and Gina Chirichigno at the Institute greatly improved it. Finally, we owe a debt of gratitude to Robert Phillips and his colleagues at The California Endowment for supporting TCE's leading work on race, gender and equity.



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Part I Introduction

On June 4, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson stood at a podium at Howard University to deliver the commencement speech at the historically black college. It was one year after he had signed the Civil Rights Act, and two months before he would sign the Voting Rights Act.

Johnson that day called for a public effort to widen opportunities for African Americans. The root causes of inequality, he said, are “complex and subtle.” A child’s chances to prosper and fulfill his potential, Johnson said, depend not merely upon his attributes and perseverance but upon the social conditions in the society. Johnson characterized sources of racial inequality, as “a seamless web...They cause each other. They result from each other. They reinforce each other.” Johnson elaborated: “*Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in—by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man.*”¹

The view that poor life chances result from a combination of invisible, past and present-day negative forces, which we have a collective obligation to reverse, are neither a new nor a radical proposition. This idea has run through the American consciousness and been consistently confirmed by scholarly research for at least several generations. In recent years, though, the nation seems to have strayed from this simple understanding.

Wealth and wage gaps are growing. Poverty is on the rise. We imprison a larger share of our residents than any other nation in the world. Indeed, much of the discourse

¹ Johnson (1965, June 4)

and resulting public policy related to youth and opportunity in the United States flows from an appealing but incorrect assumption. The notion is that, after having been “created equal” any child will thrive by making “good choices,” working hard in school, persevering, and maintaining a positive outlook. Under this theory, a parent’s role is to model a work ethic, encourage academic success, and impose rules. Teachers, especially the ones who work in schools of concentrated disadvantage, must at all times maintain “high expectations” for their students.

According to this seductive logic, if teachers, parents, and students, would just behave in the prescribed manner, the academic performance and life chances for children of color in high-poverty schools and neighborhoods would soon reach levels achieved by middle-class kids in predominantly middle-class schools.

We see evidence of this logic in our public discussions, our policy, and practice. In schools, we impose tests and punishments for children and educators deemed to not be working hard enough. In the criminal justice arena, we invoke “personal responsibility” to impose harsher sentences for juveniles, and increasingly punitive criminal-justice policies and practices overall, which have earned the United States the distinction of being the world leader in incarceration.

This report draws on the most robust research available in many fields. It puts forth an alternative, more multidimensional analysis that elucidates the ways increasing social inequality and negative neighborhood conditions converge, and help determine the life course for men and boys of color who attend schools and live in communities of concentrated disadvantage.

The report offers specific recommendations and highlights promising remedies that align with that analysis. We accomplish this by looking carefully at exactly the place where education and criminal justice intersect, and where flawed policy has clear consequences: the rise in harsh, exclusionary school discipline that suspends and expels students at record rates, and African-American males at highly disproportionate rates. Suspension and expulsion increases a student’s likelihood of dropping out, which increases the likelihood of involvement in the juvenile-justice system and even incarceration.

We explore exclusionary discipline not necessarily because we consider it more important than all the other urgent challenges facing African-American males, though it is indeed a powerful generator of inequality. We choose to examine school discipline for three reasons.

One, it offers a window into larger social inequalities and “a way in” to two distinct yet related arenas that have *potentially* significant and direct influences upon boys and men of color: education and criminal justice.

Two, we consider harsh school discipline precisely because we can do something about it fairly immediately. This is both because there are clear alternatives and because a social-science consensus has emerged about its harms.

And three, a close examination of the causes and cures for exclusionary school discipline — or “zero tolerance” — clearly illustrates the need to apply knowledge from a range of fields in developing lasting, effective policy and practice that gets to the root of complex, long-standing social problems.

Drawing attention to the causes of and potential cures for exclusionary discipline offers a concrete, manageable way for educators, and the communities they serve, to begin to untangle and, perhaps, dismantle the more complex, often obscured opportunity-limiting structures of which school discipline is but one small part. Thus, for those of you who consider discipline not your “issue,” or too narrow to spend time on, we urge you to read this report, because we believe there are lessons to draw and to apply to other policies and challenges.

In developing new discipline practice and policy that are in accord with the values and goals of, say, “equalizing” and “educating” and “building members and citizens,” teachers and principals, parents and students must articulate what those virtues look like, not merely in school discipline codes but in interrelated areas, too – public safety, afterschool activities, health, economics.



We think that school discipline may prove a promising way to enter those discussions, if only because educators and advocates across the nation have, in recent years, demonstrated that they can indeed reduce suspension and expulsion and, in turn, create healthier school climates. Because of a research consensus about the harm of zero tolerance, its non-partisan appeal, and common sense alternatives, it provides at least one practical way for schools — and by extension their larger communities — to shine a light on inequality, generally, and become healthier, more opportunity-rich places.

This report is divided into four sections.

- *Building The Pipeline* describes the way in which a combination of neighborhood conditions, together with baseless racial and public safety fears provided seeming justification for exclusionary policies in criminal justice and education.
- *Where We Live*, explores more deeply the constellation of deleterious social conditions in our still segregated, vastly unequal society that give rise to the school-to-prison pipeline and the incarceration crisis, which most severely affect boys and men of color. These confounded social ills directly affect the behavior, mood, attitude, and level of scholarly engagement among children who attend our public schools and get swept into the pipeline, and the boys and men who end up in prison. Student behaviors and adult and institutional reactions to those behaviors are often where life problems begin.
- *The Neighborhood-to-Prison Pipeline* details the use of suspension and expulsion and the related incarceration crisis. We outline the racial disparities, showing the disproportionate harm to children of color.
- *Paving a New Path: Solutions* moves from analysis to action. We offer recommendations and then point to specific policy solutions, models, and programs well-positioned to construct healthier communities, where all members can participate in the economic, social, and political opportunities in the United States.



Part II

Building the Pipeline:

Helping Schools Recapture their Role as Equalizers?

The nation's founder of public education, Horace Mann, in 1857 said: "Education beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance-wheel of social machinery."²

Granted, perhaps Mann was overly optimistic about the level of influence that public schools could have in American society. But a look at the relevant data, and repeated visits to our nation's most challenged schools, strongly suggest that not only are many schools replicating the inequality in the larger society, they are actually *exacerbating* existing inequalities.

This reality is particularly evident when we consider the "school-to-prison pipeline." The experience of the past two decades demonstrates that it was not one malicious policymaker or practice that constructed this pipeline. Rather, it was a confluence of dominant ideas, conditions, and events that created and have maintained this pipeline. This toxic combination included the following:

- a) the seeming public appeal of "get tough" criminal justice policies of the 1980s and 1990s and federal policy enacted in response;
- b) the sense of panic that ensued after several high-profile shootings, which took place in schools during the late 1990s and in 2000;
- c) a rush to and "normalization" of mass incarceration;
- d) the populist demonizing of youth of color;
- e) the persistence and brutality of concentrated poverty and economic instability that engenders chaos in a school environment and cries out for "order;" and
- f) "get tough," "high stakes" testing environments that place huge pressure on school officials to improve aggregate test scores, indirectly encouraging the "pushing out" of students who perform poorly on standardized exams.

² (Mann, H. 1848)

One hyped up, highly racialized version of the perceived threat was presented the 1996 book, *Body Count: Moral Poverty and How to Win America's War Against Crime and Drugs*. The book took center stage in the popular discourse, due in part not only to its sensationalist message but its well-credentialed authors: John P. Walters was the former director of the Council on Crime in America; John Delulio, was a professor at Princeton; and William J. Bennett had been U.S. Secretary of Education under Ronald Reagan.³

In the book, in op-eds, and on talk shows, the authors forecasted the imminent emergence of “remorseless and morally impoverished” young people who would drastically increase the crime rate by the turn of the twenty-first century. (Their prediction was way off. Violence declined⁴).

The authors wrote: “Here is what we believe: America is now home to thickening ranks of juvenile ‘superpredators’ — radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters, including ever more preteenage boys, who murder, assault, rape, rob, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, join gun-toting gangs and create serious communal disorders.” The trio continued: “At core. . .the problem is that most inner-city children grow up surrounded by teenagers and adults who are themselves deviant, delinquent, or criminal.”

This central idea captured America’s popular imagination and held sway in the nation’s ostensibly better-informed policy world, too. By the late 1990s the “superpredator” theory provided intellectual grist for harsh laws against juveniles enacted by nearly every state legislature across the nation, even though youth crime on the streets and in the schools was already waning.

John Delulio would repudiate his earlier warning that “a new generation of street criminals is upon us—the youngest, biggest and baddest generation any society has ever known.” After working with disadvantaged teenagers in Philadelphia, he announced a new conclusion, one well-supported by non-partisan research: “If I knew then what I know now, I would have shouted for prevention of crimes.”⁵

³ Delulio, Bennett & Walters, 1996

⁴ FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 2006; Krisberg, 2009

⁵ (Becker, 2001)

Delulio's enlightenment would come too late. He spoke only years after America's adult criminal justice model — its methods of exclusion and punishment and its roots in racial bias — had come to roost in our nation's public schools.

State and locally enacted zero-tolerance laws and codes, which put in place set, standard punishments for certain infractions, had precedent in federal law. The Gun Free School Act of 1994 applies to all public schools that receive federal funds. It is a zero-tolerance policy in the sense that it requires schools to expel a student for at least one year if she or he brings a firearm to school. The law does allow for discretion, but research suggests that school officials may either be ignoring that provision or not be aware of it.⁶ Public fears about school safety understandably reached a peak in 1999 after a horrific school shooting at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado; twelve students and one teacher were killed in the massacre.

Some research suggests that the proliferation of high-stakes tests —which began in many states in late 1980s, and then were written into federal law and proliferated with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001—also encourage higher suspension and expulsion rates. The theory here is that educators, facing mounting pressure to raise scores, have an incentive to “push out” students who traditionally score poorly on exams.

In a study of “selective discipline” in Florida for the National Bureau of Economic Research, David Figlio found students were indeed suspended for longer stretches of time around test periods.⁷ He concluded: “... this result suggests that schools may be deliberately attempting to reshape the testing pool in response to high-stakes testing. This finding is not observed in the time prior to the introduction of high stakes associated with the testing. These results indicate that schools may be using student discipline as a tool to manipulate aggregate test scores.”⁸

Thus, as the nation built a school-to-prison pipeline alongside a policy of mass incarceration of adults, and in the context of harsher penalties for juveniles and for overburdened schools that don't make the grade, economic and physical conditions

⁶ (Casella, 2003)

⁷ (Figlio, 2005, p. 3)

⁸ *Ibid* at 23.



worsened in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage, which send high numbers of people to prison.⁹ At the same time, however, policies and practices failed to incorporate the basic understanding that increasing segregation and its ever-present attendant, concentrated poverty, do indeed present challenges to social institutions that middle-class, predominantly white schools simply do not confront to the same degree.¹⁰

The next section elaborates upon the particular challenges facing neighborhoods and schools of concentrated disadvantage.

⁹ (Kingsley & Pettit, 2003)

¹⁰ (Brooks-Gun, 2000; Acevedo-Garcia, Osypuk, McArdle & Willians, 2008)



Part III

Where We Live:

How Neighborhoods and Schools of Concentrated Disadvantage Lead to Unequal Educational and Life Opportunities for African-American and Latino Boys and Men

We have learned a lot since Lyndon Johnson delivered his speech at Howard nearly a half-century ago. Research and knowledge now demonstrates more precisely the manner by which a constellation of forces converge to produce and exacerbate inequality, limit opportunity, and diminish life chances.

For example, economic instability and lack of control over one's environment, we have come to understand, creates chronic stress, which creates trauma, which, in turn, tends to spur violence. Dramatic progress in the scientific community—among neuroscientists and biologists—meanwhile, allow us to better understand the ways in which the developing brain is altered by conditions in the social environment. And more optimistically, experience on the ground, coupled with research, leads us to workable, promising solutions that can ameliorate those conditions.

Our emphasis upon the structural and varied forces contributing to diminished life chances for individuals does not, *ipso-facto*, excuse individuals engaging in self-defeating behavior. Nor does our focus endorse a fatalist vision in which human beings have no control over their destinies. Rather, we focus on the many dimensions and sources of inequality precisely to make the case for holistic, multidimensional remedies. And the research tells us that the circumstances into which a child is born, and the community in which he lives and attends school, are increasingly strong predictors of where his life path leads.¹¹

The “school-to-prison pipeline” and swelling incarceration rates are not merely educational or criminal-justice policy problems precisely because their causes and

¹¹ Sharkey (2009)

PARALLEL CRISES

The United States: World Leader in Prison Population

- More than one in 100 adults in the United States is behind bars; one in 53 young adults in their 20s is behind bars.¹
- One in 30 men ages 20 to 34 is behind bars; 1 in 9 black males in that age group is incarcerated.²
- The female incarceration rate is rising faster than for males; for black women in their 30s, the incarceration rate has reached 1 in 100.³
- More than 7.3 million people were on probation, in jail or prison, or on parole at the end of 2008.⁴
- In 2008, more than 2.1 million youth under the age of 18 were arrested; girls accounted for 30 percent of juvenile arrests.⁵
- In 2008, black youths made up 16 percent of the overall juvenile population in the United States, but accounted for 33-52 percent of juvenile arrests, depending on classification of the crime.⁶

U.S. Schools: Soaring Suspension and Expulsion Rates

- Nationwide, schools suspend more than 3 million students and expel more than 100,000 students each year.⁷
- Black students represent 15.3% of the total student population in the U.S., yet 37.4 percent of students suspended.⁸
- Black students are far more likely than their white peers to be suspended, expelled, or arrested for the same types of conduct at school.⁹
- During the 2007-2008 school year, according to the national Survey on Crime and Safety, more than 42 percent of suspensions, expulsions, or other serious disciplinary actions were for "insubordination."¹⁰
- Black students are more likely to be suspended for subjective reasons, such as insubordination, willful defiance, and disrespect.¹¹
- The national rate of prekindergarten expulsion is approximately 7 per 1,000 preschoolers; with black boys expelled at a 4½ times higher rate than other groups.¹²

References: 1-3 Pew Center for the States (2008); 4 Bureau of Justice Statistics (n.d.); 5-6 (Puzzanchera, C., 2009); 7-8 National Center for Education Statistics (2009) and (2009a); 9 Skiba, R.J., et. al. (2000) and The Advancement Project & The Civil Rights Project, (2000); 10 Neiman, S., and DeVoe, J.F. (2009) Survey based on a representative sample of U.S. schools; 11 Skiba, R.J., et. al. (2000) and The Advancement Project & The Civil Rights Project (2000); 10 Skiba, et. al. (2003); 12 Gilliam, W. S. (2005). Based on 2003-2004 data from the National Prekindergarten Study of 52 state-funded prekindergarten systems.

effects begin and spread far beyond schools or courtrooms. Both problems are also evidence of a public health crisis requiring a wide-range of multi-dimensional responses in state legislatures, in Congress, in courtrooms, in communities, and in schools.

Before we introduce the oft-repeated suspension, expulsion, dropout, and incarceration rates for men and boys of color, we provide a larger context. We begin at the national level.

Poverty and Race

Poverty is on the rise in the United States. In 2006, 35 percent of black children, 28 percent of Latino children, and 11 percent of white children lived in poverty.¹²

Statistics from the federal school lunch program provide another useful measure of poverty and income disparities among young people. In 2005, about 41 percent of the nation's fourth graders met eligibility requirements for free and reduced-cost lunches.¹³ However, 73 percent of Latino fourth-graders and 70 percent of black fourth-graders were eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches. About 33 percent of families of Asian fourth-graders met the requirements, and 24 percent of families of white fourth-graders met the requirements.

In the nation at large, poor African Americans remain our most segregated racial minority group. Specifically, about half of America's black residents live in areas where about 75 percent or more of blacks would have to move out in order for the group to be evenly distributed.¹⁴ As for class segregation, Georgetown University Professor Sheryll Cashin noted in her book, *The Failures of Integration*, that “the overall direction of census trends since 1970...has been one of growing economic segmentation of American life space.”¹⁵

Demographers explain that most measures showed a small decline in class segregation during the 1990s, likely a result of a particularly robust economy.

The total number of residents of high-poverty neighborhoods dropped from the 10.4 million peak in 1990 to 7.9 million in 2000. It looked like—and was—progress of a sort. But the level of concentrated poverty in 2000 actually represents an increase from 1970 levels. Since 1970, the number of census tracts (a rough approximation of neighborhoods) with 40 percent poor residents has nearly doubled, from about 1,300 in 1970 to about 2,500 in 2000.¹⁶

¹² (Children's Defense Fund, (2007); U.S. Census Bureau.)

¹³ In 2007, the eligibility for free lunch was a maximum income of \$21,580 for a three-member family. For reduced-price lunch, a family of three must earn less than \$30,710.

¹⁴ (Logan, 2001; Logan, 2002; Polikoff, 2004)

¹⁵ (Cashin, S., 2005)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*



Despite the recent decline in concentrated poverty—and most significant for the purposes of this report and for the work of The Endowment—there has been an increase in the number of children living in “severely distressed neighborhoods.” This number increased by 18 percent between 1990 and 2000.¹⁷ A 2003 study showed that even if there were an overall decline in the number of people living in concentrated poverty, conditions in high-poverty neighborhoods actually became worse in 2000 on every indicator.¹⁸

A recent study from the Pew Charitable Trusts concluded that “neighborhood poverty alone accounts for a greater portion of the black-white downward mobility gap than the effects of parental education, occupation, labor force participation, and a range of other family characteristics combined.”¹⁹

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that children in neighborhoods and schools of concentrated disadvantage are more likely to be exposed to conditions and suffer the instability associated with behaviors that are routinely punished, often severely, by school administrators.

Put simply, high-poverty schools in general are qualitatively different than predominantly middle-class schools. Similarly, these schools and neighborhoods have characteristics – concentrated poverty, community violence, high rates of incarceration, overexposure to unhealthy food, lack of recreation, etc. — which are linked to disruptive individual behavior and psychological conditions that tend to undermine learning and engagement with school.²⁰ Yet, this literature has so far had little influence on education-related policymaking or education-related grantmaking, perhaps because it does not emerge from the educational research field.

¹⁷ O'Hare & Mather (2003). *Severely distressed neighborhoods are defined in terms similar to the Ricketts Sawhill indicators (i.e., percentage of people in poverty; percentage of families headed by unmarried children; percentage of teenagers not in school and who are not high-school graduates; and percentage of unemployed men.)*

¹⁸ Kingsley & Pettit (2003)

¹⁹ Sharkey (2009) at 2.

²⁰ Kelly (2010)

Concentrated Poverty, Schooling, and Neighborhoods

In 2007, 64 percent of African-American students and 63 percent of Latino students attended high-poverty schools, where at least half of the students came from families with incomes so low that they qualified for the free or reduced-fee lunch program.²¹ Only 21 percent of white students attended such schools.²² For Latino students in the western United States, concentrated school poverty is particularly intense. Latino students make up 76 percent of the students in extreme poverty schools, where 90 to 100 percent of the students are poor.

The average Latino student in the western U.S. attends a school that is 83 percent Latino.²³ According to the Pew Hispanic Center, about 16 percent of the teachers in schools attended by a majority of Latino students are not fully credentialed; this is twice the percentage in schools attended by white students.²⁴

The very nature of “poverty” differs markedly for different racial groups. Indeed, on many dimensions, poverty is generally harsher for African-American and Latino children precisely because poor black and Latino children are far more likely than white children to also live in poor neighborhoods and attend higher poverty schools.

For example, a 2008 study of 100 large U.S. metropolitan areas, conducted by Dolores Acevedo-Garcia and her colleagues at the Harvard School of Public Health, demonstrated that unlike the typical poor white child, the typical poor black and Latino child lives in a “low opportunity” environment.²⁵ “The typical neighborhood environment is much worse for black and Latino children than for white children,” the researchers wrote.

In this study, published in the journal *Health Affairs*, researchers found that black and Latino children “consistently” live in more disadvantaged neighborhoods than white children, even the poorest white children.²⁶ What’s more, Acevedo-Garcia and her

²¹ *The National Center for Education Statistics (2009)*

²² Orfield & Lee (2007) at 19. Measure based on 75 percent or more students eligible for free or reduced cost lunch. According to this report, in 2005, “The average Black or Latino student attends a school that is more than half poor.” Poverty concentration is increasing for all groups, including white students. According to the report, the typical white public school student “attends a school that is 31 percent poor, compared with 19 percent poor in 2000.”

²³ *Ibid.* The authors note a “growing presence of very large numbers of Latino students in schools isolated by both ethnicity and poverty.”

²⁴ *The Pew Hispanic Center (2004)*

²⁵ *The study analyzed neighborhood-level (census tract level) data for the 100 metropolitan areas with the largest child populations, which comprise 45 million children. Within each area, they looked at the distribution of children and poor children of racial and ethnic groups across neighborhoods with different levels of opportunity. This included rates of poverty, ownership rates, unemployment, and the share of adults without a high school diploma.*

²⁶ *Acevedo-Garcia, Osypuk, McArdle & Williams (2008)*



colleagues wrote, “a large fraction of black and Latino children consistently experience “double jeopardy” – that is, they live in poor families and in poor neighborhoods.”

“White children,” the study concluded, “very rarely experience double jeopardy.”

“Residential segregation, the researchers write, “is at the root of racial and ethnic disparities in access to opportunity neighborhoods.”

As such studies demonstrate, race still “matters,” even if some public commentators and policymakers declare us or at least wish for a “colorblind” society. Race matters because not all poor children experience what some experts call “accumulated” risk. The difference here breaks down clearly by race: “For the most part,” Acevedo-Garcia and her colleagues concluded: “poor white children in U.S. metropolitan areas do not live in high-poverty neighborhoods.” More concretely, across 100 metropolitan areas, the typical poor white child lives in a neighborhood that has a poverty rate of 13.6 percent. The typical poor black child experiences a neighborhood poverty of 29 percent. The typical poor Hispanic child lives in a neighborhood with a 26.2 percent poverty rate.²⁷

Similarly, in his 2009 report for Pew Charitable Trusts, NYU Professor Patrick Sharkey found: “Over the course of childhood, two out of three black children – 66 percent — born from 1985 through 2000 were raised in neighborhoods with at least a 20 percent poverty rate, compared to just 6 percent of white children.”²⁸

A consensus has developed among child-development experts and public health researchers: Environments of concentrated disadvantage tend to engender behaviors and stresses that are not conducive to learning and that often trigger oppositional attitudes toward institutions. Related to this, high-poverty schools – the institutions that are, at least in theory, supposed to be the equalizer – tend to be chaotic, overwhelmed by symptoms of social problems, and highly unequal on many important measures, when compared with predominantly middle class schools.²⁹

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Sharkey (2009). at 1.

²⁹ Kahlenberg (2010)

Thus, any effort to dismantle the pipeline and pave paths to opportunity will require attention to the detrimental environmental, economic and psychological stresses that characterize the environments where a large portion of children of color live. To take matters a step further, a growing body of research from the public health field in particular strongly suggests that not only must we contend with and vastly reduce the symptoms of segregation and concentrated poverty, but we must also reduce segregation itself.³⁰ Some researchers even argue that residential racial segregation is the foundation upon which black and white health-outcome disparities rest. This segregation—or isolation—social observers speculate, is a source that begets all other sources of inequality and diminished life chances.

Generally, neighborhood quality is worse for children of color. Black and Latino children have far less access to schools that display high levels of academic achievement, and less access to after-school programs, physical safety, and recreational spaces.³¹

Products of the Environment?

Child development research, most notably that of Jack Shonkoff and his colleagues, in a National Academy of Sciences report, *Neurons to Neighborhoods*, clearly demonstrates that it is an accretion of toxic stress and environmental risks — and not simply one factor, such as asthma or poor prenatal care, that impedes learning and well-being — which can lead to adult incarceration and diminished life chances so evident in statistics related to men and boys of color in the United States.³²

As Shonkoff and his colleagues note, there are four major theoretical frames through which neighborhood and community effects are measured. One is “stress theory” which emphasizes the importance of exposures to toxins such as lead paint, or stress or community violence. Another, “social organization theory,” considers the importance of role models and “value consensus” in the neighborhood. A third is “institutional,” which analyzes police, government, and schools and recreation for their impact upon residents. A final frame is “epidemic” theory, which is concerned mostly with the effects of peer influence that “spread” behaviors that undermine success.³³

³⁰ (Acevedo-Garcia & Lochner, 2003; Carr & Kutty, 2008; Squires & Kubrin, 2006; Tilly, Moss, Kirschenman & Kennelly, 2001)

³¹ (Acevedo Garcia et al., 2007)

³² (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p.7) The report concluded: “Children’s early development depends on the health and wellbeing of their parents. Yet the daily experiences of a significant number of young children are burdened by untreated mental health problems in their families, recurrent exposure to family violence, and the psychological fallout from living in a demoralized and violent neighborhood. Circumstances characterized by multiple, interrelated, and cumulative risk factors impose particularly heavy developmental burdens during early childhood and are the most likely incur substantial costs to both the individual and society in the future.”

³³ (Ibid. p. 330)



This report is not wedded to any one frame. Rather, we recognize the confounded nature of these variables. We turn now to a survey of the numerous risk factors that the most robust and recent research identifies, and that disproportionately affect people of color living in neighborhoods and attending schools of concentrated disadvantage, which a majority of students of color attend.

We first survey the cumulative negative conditions strongly associated with high-poverty, racially segregated neighborhoods, all of which are linked to poor mental and physical health outcomes that are, in turn, linked to increased risk of disengagement from school and a higher likelihood of incarceration and poor life outcomes.

In recent years, research from the social-determinants-of-health field, in particular, has broadened our understanding of poor health outcomes, compelling us to see them not merely or even primarily as products of individual “choices,” but as products of neighborhood structures and environments that have been at least several decades in the making. In turn, research also demonstrates that poor mental and psychological health has a direct impact upon school readiness, school engagement, and performance³⁴ and upon parenting methods that influence academic success.

Community Violence

Studies repeatedly show that children living in poor urban areas, disproportionate numbers of whom are children of color, are exposed to high levels of community violence. A seminal 1993 study of violence exposure among fifth and seventh grade students found that 75 percent of students reported witnessing some form of community violence.³⁵ In a sample of 349 adolescents with a median age of 12 from a 2004 study, similar exposure levels were found, with nearly 80 percent of children having witnessed or been victimized by at least one violent event in the previous 6 months.³⁶ A 2000 study found that across each income level, children of color were more likely than white youth to report witnessing violence.

All of this work adds to a growing body of research suggesting that lifetime violence exposure for people of color does not attenuate as household income increases in the

³⁴ This link is well-established in the literature, for example, Dewey (1999), Shephard (1996) and Swingle (1997).

³⁵ (Richters & Martinez, 1993)

³⁶ (Ozer & Weinstein, 2004)

way one might expect. Researchers suggest that the explanation for a lack of attenuation could be continued segregation and discriminatory economic practices that impeded residential mobility for families of color.³⁷

Research also suggests that witnessing and experiencing community violence puts children at increased risk for internalizing and externalizing problems that could lead to learning difficulties. Studies have indicated that being victimized by violence and witnessing violence involving friends and family was associated with depression.³⁸ Another study found higher levels of traumatic stress, depressive symptoms, and lower self-esteem among children in high-violence communities, compared with children from low-violence communities.³⁹

Within the context of this burgeoning body of research on violence exposure, a broad research consensus emerged in early 2000: Even the best parents have only a limited ability to offset the effects of ongoing exposure to violence.⁴⁰ As researchers who conducted a particularly robust 2004 study observed: “Among families living in conditions of poverty, positive parenting, which encompasses high monitoring, support, and cohesiveness, can help children maintain adequate levels of adjustment, but even the ‘best’ of these families will be limited in shielding their children when living in neighborhoods where violence is a constant fact of life.”⁴¹

Similarly, another study in 2004 found that when violence was rarely witnessed, high levels of monitoring and family support were associated with beneficial effects such as diminished substance use, but when violence was witnessed frequently, the benefits of both factors disappeared.⁴² Yet another study around this time observed that the quality of caregiver-children interaction and caregiver emotional regulation were each protective at low but not high levels of violence exposure. Further, youth with good ability to regulate their emotions were just as likely as youth with poor emotional control to have symptoms of depression and anxiety at high levels of violence exposure.⁴³

³⁷ (Crouch, Hanson, Saunders, Kilpatrick & Resnick, 2000)

³⁸ (Richters & Martinez, 1993)

³⁹ (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1998)

⁴⁰ (Luthar & Goldstein, 2004)

⁴¹ (*Ibid.*, p. 503)

⁴² (Farrell & Sullivan, 2004)

⁴³ (Kliewer, et. al. 2004) See also (Hammack, Richards, Luo, Edlynn, & Roy, 2004) This study showed that social support was protective at low but not high, levels of violence.



One 1998 study found that when violence exposure was compared to other life stressors, it was uniquely related to increases in aggression.⁴⁴ There is evidence, too, that repeated exposure to violence will increase the likelihood that children will see violence as effective and normative.⁴⁵ Post-traumatic stress and aggression, and “externalizing” behavioral disorders have been found to be more common among children who have regularly witnessed community violence.⁴⁶

Lead Exposure and Poisoning

We might think of lead poisoning as an issue of the 1970s and 80s, perhaps because the negative effects of lead poisoning, especially for children, were well established by then.⁴⁷ However, lead remains a contemporary problem, especially for children and families who live in poverty, who are more susceptible to lead’s damaging effects.

Lead exposure has been associated with various types of brain damage, including diminished cognition. Once lead is absorbed into the bloodstream, some of it is deposited into human organs, most especially the liver. Although use has been curtailed recently, in the past, lead was widely used in paint, solder for water pipes, and gasoline.

The U.S. government banned lead paint and solder in 1978 and 1986, respectively. By 1996, leaded gasoline had been phased out. These efforts resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of U.S. children with blood lead levels considered “of concern” (from 13.5 million in 1978 to 310,000 in 2002).⁴⁸

But many older buildings, especially those in poor, urban neighborhoods, still have lead paint on walls and windowsills. The federal government in 2008 issued new rules designed to protect children from exposure to lead-based paint during repairs and renovations to homes and buildings. The new rules will take effect in 2010.

⁴⁴ (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998)

⁴⁵ (Margolin & Gordis, 2000)

⁴⁶ (Singer, Anglin, Song, & Lughofer, 1995)

⁴⁷ For example, Richardson (2005) who found, “Childhood lead exposure is associated with reduction in adult gray matter volume. This includes areas responsible for executive functions, mood regulation and decision-making.” These findings were more pronounced for males. See also (Cecil, et. al., 2008; Canfield, et al., 2003; Stretesky & Lynch, 2001; Stretesky & Lynch, 2004)

⁴⁸ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.), because lead poisoning often occurs with no obvious symptoms, it frequently goes unrecognized. Lead poisoning can cause learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and, at very high levels, seizures, coma, and even death.

Most significantly and most recently, a 2008 longitudinal study that began to follow children in 1979 found that elevated prenatal and postnatal blood-lead concentrations are strongly associated with high rates of criminal arrests and alleged violent behavior in adulthood. By far the strongest relationship between childhood blood-lead levels and criminal behavior was to arrests involving violence.⁴⁹ This was the first such study to investigate the relationship between actual developmental exposure to lead and adult criminal behavior. (Past studies had documented the relationship between lead and adult criminal behavior, such as homicide, but they always used a “proxy” for lead paint poisoning, such as “bone lead levels” in young adults.)

The 2008 longitudinal study’s co-author, John Wright, a professor of criminal justice at the University of Cincinnati, where the study was conducted, commented: “I did not expect we would see an effect, much less a substantive effect and even less likely a highly resilient effect...The fact that we are now able to detect the effects from childhood exposures now into adulthood stands as a testament of lead’s power to influence behavior over a long period of time.”⁵⁰

Lack of Healthy Food and An Abundance of Unhealthy Food

In 2005, the U.S. Congress passed H.R. 554, the “Personal Responsibility in Food Consumption Act of 2005.” Its goal was to prevent lawsuits that would hold the food industry liable for obesity and other health problems. This is another example of the way in which the “personal responsibility” framework dominates discourse and policy regarding public health. Putting aside for the moment valid questions about the food industry’s social responsibilities, we must, once again, consider the larger context and forces at play.⁵¹

Researchers in the United States, concerned with rising rates of obesity and diabetes, especially in youngsters, have in recent years been focusing more attention upon the *context* of people’s diets. These broader contextual studies demonstrate that poor neighborhoods, especially ones identified as African American, are exposed to fast food in far greater concentrations than are middle-class neighborhoods. Even mixed-race neighborhoods were less likely than predominantly white,

⁴⁹ Wright, et al., (2008).

⁵⁰ See *Childhood Lead* (2008) Science Daily report on Wright study.

⁵¹ (Flournoy & Treuhaft, 2005)



higher-income neighborhoods to have access to healthful foods that would enable individuals to even make good dietary choices.⁵²

As Dr. Naa Oyo Kwate, professor of public health at Columbia University wrote in the journal *Health Place*: “If health disparities are to be adequately addressed, attention must be paid not only to the role of the food industry, but to the inequalities underlying the production of its markets and patterns in consumption.”⁵³ Dr. Kwate’s study is remarkable for its illumination of the way race-based segregation itself engenders the density of fast-food restaurants in high-poverty neighborhoods, which have been linked to poorer health.

In her study, for example, she demonstrated that “unemployment and economic disinvestment, ...provides available labor pools and increases community receptiveness to fast food restaurants; and weakens community political strength, thereby reducing possible opposition to siting.” She concluded: “The manner in which segregation acts as a fundamental determinant of fast food density brings to light the relevance of structural factors in changing behavior.”

Empirical research demonstrates an association between low area income and fast food prevalence in the United States,⁵⁴ but Kwate’s work goes further by highlighting the mechanisms through which this phenomenon occurs. More generally, David Williams and his colleagues at the Harvard School of Public Health demonstrate that conditions associated with segregated neighborhoods, e.g., fewer food choices and stress, tend to discourage healthful food choices and encourage unhealthy ones.⁵⁵ It bears repeating that poor physical health is strongly associated with poorer cognitive functioning and poorer school performance which, in turn, diminishes life opportunities. Obesity, in particular, which is linked to fast food consumption, is associated with poorer performance in school.⁵⁶

⁵² (Baker, Schootman, Barnbridge, & Kelly, 2006)

⁵³ (Kwate, 2008)

⁵⁴ (Burdette & Whitaker, 2004; Stewart & Davis, 2005)

⁵⁵ (Williams, 2007)

⁵⁶ (Schwimmer, et. al., 2003)

Asthma's Unequal Effects

While lead poisoning declines, asthma is on the rise in all racial and ethnic groups. Asthma disproportionately affects children who live in high-poverty neighborhoods, which generally have more toxins and asthma-inducing pollutants. Recent research also suggests a relationship between the level of stress in a community, the widespread perception of neighborhood problems, and asthma.⁵⁷

For decades, indoor environmental factors that are more common in lower-income neighborhoods, including cockroaches, mold, and dampness, have been shown to be related to higher relative asthma rates among urban children.⁵⁸ Though the relationship between asthma and high-poverty neighborhoods is well-established, it is not fully understood why, after controlling for socioeconomic status and some neighborhood variables, poor African- American children continue to have higher rates than other racial groups.⁵⁹ (Mexican American children, in the Southwest, for example, despite high poverty levels, have some of the lowest asthma rates, while Puerto Rican children in the Northeast have some of the highest rates.)⁶⁰

Asthma has profound implications for schooling, as research shows that children with asthma are far more likely to miss school and fall behind than are students who do not have asthma.⁶¹ This is particularly true for cases of moderate to severe asthma.⁶² Asthma, studies show, account for more school absences than any other chronic disease.⁶³

In one 2006 study, researchers tracked 1,537 absences in a predominantly African- American school district in the Midwest. They found that 31 percent of absences there were due to asthma.⁶⁴ Excessive school absence contributes significantly to poor school performance.⁶⁵ Poor school performance is one of many variables associated with dropping out of school.⁶⁶ Dropping out of school, in turn, is strongly associated with poor economic outcomes, crime, and incarceration.⁶⁷

⁵⁷ (Shankardass, et. al., 2007) For a discussion of community-level actions that could reduce asthma attacks, see Joint Center Health Policy Institute & PolicyLink, 2004.

⁵⁸ (Gore & Schal, 2007; Committee on the Assessment of Asthma and Indoor Air, 2000)

⁵⁹ (Tortolero, et. al, 2007)

⁶⁰ (Akinbami, Flores & Morgenstern, 2006)

⁶¹ (Mooie, Sterling, Figs & Castro, 2006; Silverstein, et. al., 2001)

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ (Doutl, Williams, Freezer & Holgate, 1996)

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ (Fowler, Davenport, & Garg, 1992)

⁶⁶ Jimerson, Egeland, Srouge & Carlson (2000) note that their results demonstrate "the association of the early home environment, the quality of early caregiving, socioeconomic status, IQ, behavior problems, academic achievement, peer relations, and parents involvement with dropping out of high school by age 19.

These results are consistent with the view of dropping out as a dynamic development process that begins before children enter elementary school. Psychosocial variables prior to school entry predicted dropping out with power equal to later IQ and school achievement test scores."

⁶⁷ (Lochner & Moretti, 2001)



Maternal Depression

Depression is more prevalent among poor mothers and among single mothers. When controlling for other plausible sources, depression is strongly associated with poverty.⁶⁸ A study of 5,820 poor mothers found that 41 percent screened positive for depression. Other studies find similar rates of depression of between 40 to 50 percent among low-income mothers of young children screened at community health clinics.⁶⁹ Studies of the general population of mothers find that 20 percent of mothers report depression three years after birth of a child.⁷⁰

Maternal depression is strongly related to hostility and irritability toward a child. If a woman is also experiencing economic stress, depression is also associated with lower levels of praise and affection.⁷¹ This is consistent with studies on depression, generally, which find that economic stress exacerbates the symptoms of depression.⁷² Research demonstrates that maternal depression is related to psychological stress among daughters and lower educational attainment among sons. Also, such effects of maternal depression predicted child conduct problems 2 to 8 years following the initial assessment of depression.⁷³

A 2000 study considered how neighborhood conditions might affect the relationship between maternal depression and parenting, finding that mothers who were depressed used more punitive parenting strategies, while mothers who had help from others were less likely to use punitive strategies.

Researchers went on to demonstrate, however, that, in higher-crime, poor neighborhood, the positive effects of social support, which might alleviate depression and the less effective parenting associated with it, diminished. Note the similarity here, between these findings and exposure to violence studies that find that even the best parenting is limited in its ability to ameliorate the negative effects of being exposed to violence in higher-poverty neighborhoods.⁷⁴ In a study of neighborhood influence in Chicago, researchers found that concentrated disadvantage and community violence predicted a higher likelihood that parents will be physically aggressive toward their children.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ (Lanzi, et al., 1999)

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Civic & Holt (2000) report, more specifically, 28 percent of 5303 mothers reported substantial symptoms of depression at 17 months after delivery; 20 percent at 36 months. In this study, maternal depressive symptoms were significantly associated with child behavior problems.

⁷¹ (Lovejoy & Graczyk, 2000)

⁷² *Ibid.* at p. 585.

⁷³ (Ensminger, Hanson & Riley, 2003)

⁷⁴ (Ceballos & McLoyd, 2002)

⁷⁵ (Molnar, Buka, Brennan, Holton & Earls, 2003)

The Built Environment and Mental Health

The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, an interdisciplinary study of how families, schools, and neighborhoods affect child and adolescent development, found that children who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods had significantly worse mental health than children raised in more advantaged neighborhoods, even after controlling for child and family background and income.⁷⁶

Cornell University Professor Gary Evans' work on the relationship between the physical environment and mental health points to several environmental characteristics that negatively effect mental health and that are more prominent in high-poverty neighborhoods. This includes crowding, noise, indoor air quality, and light. Higher residential density interferes with the development of socially supportive relationships, which can increase psychological stress, Evans concluded.

Further, high-rise buildings for low-income families often lack sufficient space for the development and maintenance of social networks. The dearth of safe outdoor space to play often leads parents to keep children inside. This, in turn, heightens interfamilial conflict, which increases stress. Evans also explored the psychosocial processes that help us understand how the built environment influences mental health. The forces at work in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage include a lack of personal control over one's surroundings, impeded social support, and lack of exposure to "restorative natural elements."⁷⁷

Toxic Stress and Trauma

Now that we have detailed some of the various stressors affecting children who live in distressed neighborhoods, we must move to another facet of the research literature in order to understand more deeply exactly how the accumulation of such stressors affect a child's school performance and behavior. We find guidance in the literature on trauma, produced by child development experts, psychologists, and neuroscientists.

Much of this literature concerns children traumatized by family violence, but accumulated toxic stress and exposure to violence of the sort common in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage seems to produce many of the same

⁷⁶ (Xue, Leventhal, & Brooks-Gun, 2005)

⁷⁷ (Evans, 2004; Evans, 2003). See also Lee & Rubin, 2007 about "community health" generally and the "built environment."



symptoms in children. Professor Bessel van der Kolk of Boston University School of Medicine, proposed a new diagnosis, “developmental trauma disorder,” to account for the broad array of neurobiological, developmental, emotional, and behavioral consequences of childhood trauma.⁷⁸

Trauma can include persistent economic instability, community and/or family violence, and persistent stress caused by unpredictability and the threat of danger. Children, researchers explain, react to trauma in a variety of ways. It is quite typical, however, that a traumatized child’s view of the world as a potentially dangerous, unpredictable place will undermine a child’s ability to form positive relationships with teachers and peers, engage in academic work, process information, and be attentive. Further, research shows that children who have been or who are continually suffering from forms of trauma often appear to be ambivalent, aggressive, demanding, and disruptive. Experts point to a range of typical behaviors of traumatized children. These include impulsivity, hyper vigilance, verbal and physical aggression, defiance, and withdrawal.⁷⁹

In his book, *On Playing a Poor Hand Well*, clinical psychologist Mark Katz looks at the behavior of a traumatized child from an unaware adult’s point of view, and suggested that understanding the source of a child’s behavior can lead adults to more effective responses to that behavior.

“Not realizing that children exposed to inescapable, overwhelming stress may act out their pain, that they may misbehave, not listen to us, or seek our attention in all the wrong ways, can lead us to punish these children for their misbehavior. The behavior is so willful, so intentional. ‘She controlled herself yesterday, she can control herself today.’ If we only knew what happened last night, or this morning before she got to school, we would be shielding the same child we’re now reprimanding.”⁸⁰

Be careful not to misunderstand this analysis. It is not that children of color, because of their environments, are unable to learn at high levels or be engaged with school or control their behaviors. Rather, the conclusion here is that educators must be sensitive to the particular environments from which children come and craft policies and practices that will assist children in reaching their full potential in the classrooms.

⁷⁸ (van der Kolk, 2005)

⁷⁹ (American Psychiatric Association, 2007; Breslau, Wilcox, Storr, Lucia, & Anthony, 2004)

⁸⁰ Katz (1997, p 7) references Weiner (1993)

Likewise, because of the varied, interrelated sources of stress and trauma, foundations should fund solutions on multiple levels. This includes school-based solutions, community solutions, and housing and regional planning solutions that might reap up concentrated poverty and reduce segregation.

Incarceration's Impact on Community Health and Prosperity

Incarceration is not just an “outcome” of social inequality and lack of economic opportunity. Mass incarceration, researchers are beginning to understand, has itself exacted an enormous toll upon families, certainly, and also, upon neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage that send large shares of people—usually men and boys of color—to prison.

In other words, high incarceration rates are not just a reflection of a low opportunity neighborhood. Mass incarceration fuels the lack of opportunity in such environments. There is no research evidence that would suggest that mass incarceration does not make conditions better or safer in low-income, low-opportunity neighborhoods. Mass incarceration, mounting research suggests, likely makes those communities worse off and more dangerous. It has particularly dramatic, negative effects upon children.

More and more children have parents in jail or prison. The most recent statistics, from 2002, show that more than 1.5 million children have at least one parent in state or federal prison.⁸¹ But about 10 million more have parents who were incarcerated at some point in those children's lives.⁸² Between 1991 and 1999, the number of children who had an incarcerated parent increased by 50 percent, or a half-a-million children.⁸³ Specifically, in California, an estimated 856,000 children have at least one parent involved in the criminal justice system.⁸⁴

Experts agree that children of incarcerated parents are likely to develop a variety of problems related to having a parent who is incarcerated. Also, the most recent research suggests that, after controlling for a host of other risk factors, incarceration of a parent exerts a particular type of trauma, perhaps because of the stigma attached

⁸¹ La Vigne, Davies & Brazzell (2008) writing for The Urban Institute note, “While these figures help to approximate the number of children with an incarcerated parent, they fall short of accurately representing the true size of this population. Most estimates are derived from a 1997 Bureau of Justice Statistics survey and given the ever increasing volume of adults behind bars, the number of children currently with an incarcerated parent is likely to be much higher.”

⁸² (Mumola, 2000) Note that these estimates are based upon 1997 data. See also (Seymour, 1996, p 472)

⁸³ (La Vigne, Davies & Brazzell (2008) citing Mumola, 2000)

⁸⁴ (Simmons, 2000; Nieto, 2002; California Legislative Analyst Office, 2000; California Department of Corrections, 1999, p. 46)



to incarceration and because it has the power to create new stresses in so many areas of a child's life. Devastating emotional separation, economic hardship, disruption of living arrangements, and social stigma combine to make parental incarceration a source of enormous stress for a child.

Behavioral reactions of children to parental incarceration include anxiety, withdrawal, and resistance to rules and outside authority, aggressive school behaviors, and rejection of limits on behavior.⁸⁵ A recent review of evidence suggests an interdependent relationship between having an incarcerated parent and anti-social behavior, child mental health, school failure, future unemployment, and delinquency.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ (Johnson, 1995)

⁸⁶ (Murray & Farrington, 2007)



Part IV

The Neighborhood-to-Prison Pipeline:

A Well-Worn Path from Suspension, Expulsion, Dropping out, and Incarceration

As stated, increasing numbers of children and teens in the United States are getting suspended and expelled from public schools.⁸⁷ Such suspensions and expulsions make students more vulnerable for falling onto the track to jail and prison. We use the term “school-to-prison pipeline” as shorthand for three phenomena:

- One, the increasing use of “zero-tolerance” discipline policies that establish mandatory or predetermined punishments for certain behaviors. Such policies are intended, at least in part, to not only “punish” but to deter further misbehavior. These policies have led to increased expulsion and suspension, which denies opportunity to learn, which has been linked to dropping out.⁸⁸ Research links lack of learning opportunities and dropping out to incarceration.⁸⁹
- Two, we use the term “school-to-prison pipeline” to describe the practice in which educators refer students to the criminal justice system for relatively minor infractions that might have been previously or better handled within the school.
- And three, we use “school-to-prison pipeline” to describe the less tangible proliferation of a criminal justice culture, apparatus, and architecture in places of learning.⁹⁰

Exclusionary Discipline On the Rise

About 7 percent of all public-school children were suspended from school in 2006,⁹¹ more than double the rate suspended in the 1970s⁹². Fifteen percent of all black children, 7 percent of Latino children, and 5 percent of white children were suspended

⁸⁷ (U.S. Department of Education, 2007)

⁸⁸ (Rafaele Mendes, 2003)

⁸⁹ (Haney, 2003)

⁹⁰ Organizations and institutions differ on the meaning of the “school-to-prison pipeline.” The American Psychological Association, for example, uses it more exclusively to refer to educator referrals to the criminal justice system for relatively minor infractions.

⁹¹ (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009); Fenning & Rose, 2007).

⁹² *Ibid.*

in 2006. Smaller shares of students were expelled that year: .5 percent of all black students, .2 percent of Latino students, and .1 percent of white students.⁹³

For more than three decades, simple investigations have revealed that harsh school discipline policies are imposed upon children of color at highly disproportionate rates.⁹⁴ The most likely ones to travel the pipeline are African-American males. The racial disparities have widened since 1972, when 6 percent of black students and just 3 percent of white students were suspended from school.⁹⁵

In California, public school educators suspended more than 770,000 students in 2007. The figure includes more than 332,000 student suspensions for infractions related to violence, crime, or drugs and alcohol. That's 6 out of every 100 students, up from 5 per 100 the year before, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*.⁹⁶ The Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA), based at UCLA, found that in California in the 2002-03 school year, African-American students represented 8 percent of the state's public school enrollment, but 19 percent of out of school suspensions.⁹⁷ Latino students make up about half of the state's enrollment, and also about half of the state's expulsions and suspensions.⁹⁸

Decrying an escalation in harsh, exclusionary school discipline and its ensuing “school to prison pipeline” educators, civil rights lawyers, civil libertarians, parents, and students, have, in the last decade, successfully moved “zero-tolerance” to the center of educational policy discussions.

The effort was helped along by widespread media coverage, emanating from across the ideological spectrum. News reports chronicled absurdities perpetrated by overzealous bureaucrats.

⁹³ (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007a & 2007b) *Digest of Education Statistics Table 144 (2000 figures) and Table 152 (2004 figures)*

⁹⁴ For example, see *Children's Defense Fund (1974)*. This year, U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights found suspension rates for black students two and three times higher than suspension rates for white students. Research consistently found this pattern. See also (Gregory, 1996; Shaw & Braden, 1990; Leone et al., 2003; Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2002). Rabinovic and Levin (2003) found that in Massachusetts during the 2000-2001 school year, while Latino and African-American students were only 19 percent of school population, they represented 57 percent of school exclusions. In 2000, researchers found that African-American students are two to three times as likely to be suspended or expelled as other students (Skiba, Michale, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000).

⁹⁵ (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007a & 2007b; (*Digest of Education Statistics Table 144 (2000 figures) and Table 152 (2004 figures)*)

⁹⁶ (Asminov, 2008)

⁹⁷ Institute for Democracy (2006) calculations based upon Office for Civil Rights, 2002 Elementary and Secondary School Survey.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

In Florida, teachers called in police who handcuffed a wailing 5 year-old black girl. (It made the rounds on YouTube).⁹⁹ Administrators in Colorado expelled a 10 year old girl whose mother had packed a kitchen knife in her lunch box so that her daughter could cut up her apple.¹⁰⁰ (The girl was expelled even though she'd turned in the "weapon" to her teacher.) A kindergartener in Virginia brought in a beeper from home, showed it to a classmate during a field trip and got suspended. In February, 2010, officials in Queens, NY hauled a 12 year-old girl from her 6th grade classroom for doodling on a desk with an erasable pen.¹⁰¹

Beyond the anecdotes, though, the sharpest and most consistent criticism, and one borne out by research, is that suspension and expulsion trigger a vicious cycle by further alienating the most vulnerable children from school, pushing the disillusioned youngsters into the streets, and then onto the track to jail.¹⁰² Hence the evocative "school-to prison pipeline" metaphor.

Not only do suspension and expulsion rob students of instructional time and endanger their academic performance in the short term, but well-controlled research studies have demonstrated a strong association between suspension/expulsion and dropping out of school.¹⁰³ Dropping out, it is well established, is strongly associated with involvement in the criminal justice system and incarceration.¹⁰⁴

Some studies even suggest a direct association between suspension/expulsion and incarceration,¹⁰⁵ even though the direct link between suspension/expulsion and dropping out is better established. One study in Texas, for example, found students with a history of school discipline to be 23 percent more likely than students without such history to get caught up in the criminal justice system. Suspension and expulsion were the strongest predictors of future involvement in the criminal justice system.¹⁰⁶

In the last several years, something rare in social policy has emerged: a consensus. Even the notably neutral American Psychological Association has weighed in on zero-tolerance. In 2008, a task-force of APA-appointed researchers published a review

⁹⁹ (WFTV.com, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ (Cauchon, 1999).

¹⁰¹ (Monahan, 2010).

¹⁰² (Advancement Project, 2005)

¹⁰³ (Tobin, Gugai & Colvin, 1996)

¹⁰⁴ (Lochner & Moretti, 2004)

¹⁰⁵ (Skiba, Simmons, Staudinger, Rausch, Dow & Feggins, 2003)

¹⁰⁶ (Carmichael, Whitten & Voloudakis, 2005); (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986)



of school discipline research and concluded that so-termed zero-tolerance punishments, such as expulsions and suspension, have achieved the opposite of their purported intent.

“School suspension in general,” the APA study read, “appears to predict higher future rates of misbehavior and suspension among those students who are suspended,”¹⁰⁷ and did not make schools any safer.

And while it might seem logical that more police and security gadgetry will make a building safer and make students feel safer, research indicates that the opposite is true. Researchers found that relying on metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and locker searches increased the risk of disorder within a school.¹⁰⁸ The APA task force concluded that the mere existence of zero-tolerance policies contribute to incarceration by encouraging educators to turn to the juvenile justice system to settle minor disciplinary matters. It is African-American males who are most likely to be ensnared in the zero-tolerance net, just as it is African-American men most likely to populate our prisons.

APA noted not just racial disparities, but stressed, too, the inclination of educators to punish students of color, particularly African-American males, more harshly than whites for similar offenses. “African-American students may be disciplined more severely for less serious or more subjective reasons,” the task force wrote.¹⁰⁹

One study of suspension in Indiana found that though only 12 percent of the 2004-‘05 school population was African American, African Americans accounted for 36 percent of out-of-school suspensions and nearly 30 percent of expulsions. Suspension rates are highest in urban districts and these are of course the districts that enroll a disproportionate share of students of color.¹¹⁰ Some research has demonstrated that urban administrators were more likely to follow zero-tolerance policies to the letter without considering mitigating circumstances, while administrators in rural districts used such policies in a more “interpretive” manner. In other words, rural administrators considered mitigating circumstances and the particular circumstances that led to the infraction.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008) at 854.

¹⁰⁸ (Johnson, Emiko, Boyden and Pitz, 2001); (Beger, 2003)

¹⁰⁹ (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008) at 854.

¹¹⁰ See for example, Dunbar & Villarruel (2004) who use Michigan as a case study.

¹¹¹ Derived from (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007a & 2007b)

Reasons for suspensions also differ markedly by race. For example, most white students come up for suspension for smoking, vandalism, leaving school without permission, or obscene language. Black students are more likely referred for arguably more subjective reasons such as showing disrespect, excessive noise, making a threat, and loitering.¹¹²

Russell Skiba and his colleagues studied 37 states and found a strong relationship between racial disparities in school suspension and overall juvenile incarceration rates.¹¹³ Indeed, racial disparities in suspension do correlate closely with the racial disparities we find in state juvenile-prison populations. Nationally, in 2003, youth of color made up 38 percent of the U.S. youth population, yet, they represented 65 percent of the youth in secure detention facilities.¹¹⁴

In California, in 2007, black youth were 7 percent of the overall youth population but 17 percent of youth arrested, 25 percent of youth placed in secure detention, and 26 percent of cases referred to adult court.¹¹⁵

In his study, *“The Color of Justice: Understanding and Addressing Racial Inequity in School Punishment,”* Russell Skiba and colleagues at Indiana University reviewed disciplinary data from all middle-school students (11,001) in a large Midwestern urban school district. They found that African-American students are referred to the office for less serious and more subjective reasons than white students, and generally received harsher punishments than white students accused of similar offenses. They concluded that “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.”¹¹⁶

Looking at these numbers, some people would conclude that blatant racial discrimination caused these disparities. In some cases, that might indeed be true. But more subtle forces may also be at play.

¹¹² (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000)

¹¹³ (Skiba, Simmons, Staudinger, Rausch, Dow, & Feggins, 2003)

¹¹⁴ (W. Haywood Burns Institute, 2007)

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000)



Education research identifies several underlying problems that may be contributing to the persistent problem of racial disparities in exclusionary school punishments. Some research suggests that racially disproportionate disciplinary punishment may originate in the classroom, with teachers more likely to refer African-American student than white students for suspension.¹¹⁷ This suggests that teachers—possibly unwittingly or due to cultural miscommunication—may be misinterpreting actions of African-American males as confrontational or threatening.¹¹⁸

While rates of graduation vary and are the source of great contention among scholars, repeated studies suggest that only about half of the nation's African-American, Latino, and American-Indian students graduate from high school.¹¹⁹ In the nation's largest districts, graduation rates often drop to the 30 to 40 percent range.¹²⁰

A growing body of research points to the power of implicit bias in decisions that affect life outcomes for people of color. Implicit bias – or “unconscious bias” refers to unconscious negative feelings about particular racial or ethnic groups that might clash with one’s publicly professed views or feelings about such groups.¹²¹

In other words, a teacher may say she does not think that her African-American students are more prone to violence than her white students, and she may truly believe that she holds that view. However, because of images or conditioning from a variety of sources over many years, she may hold wholly unconscious negative feelings about African Americans that do indeed affect her actions. This leads some social psychologists and others to advocate for further professional education that might bring such prejudices and their consequences to light, lead to self-examination and, in the end, possibly reduce huge racial disparities in school discipline and harsh juvenile sentencing.

Meanwhile, Professor Randall Beger of the University of Wisconsin argues that just at the time courts dispensed with constitutional safeguards protecting students, schools stepped up intrusive surveillance tactics. School-based policing, Beger posits, “may be the fastest growing area of law enforcement.”¹²²

¹¹⁷ Vavrus, & Cole (2002) demonstrated that removing a student from class for disrespectful and/or disruptive behavior was a highly subjective and contextualized decision based upon subtle race and gender relations that were not adequately addressed in discipline policies.

¹¹⁸ For an excellent discussion of this phenomenon, see Ferguson (2000).

¹¹⁹ (Greene & Forster, 2003; Swanson, 2004a) Graduation rates inspire much controversy about methodology and data reliability. See, for example, Mishel & Roy (2006) and Swanson (2003 and 2004b)

¹²⁰ (Swanson, 2004a)

¹²¹ (Sunstein, & Jolls 2006; Lane, Kang & Banaji, 2007)

¹²² (Beger, 2003)

Various law enforcement agencies have increased the use of criminal justice apparatus in schools, often in a well-meaning attempt to make schools safer. This includes metal detectors, tasers, surveillance cameras, canine units, and biometric hand readers.¹²³ Generally, public schools also have increased the presence of police on their campuses. Los Angeles, New York, and many other cities have their own their own school police agencies.¹²⁴ By conservative estimates, there are 20,000 sworn police officers assigned to public schools.¹²⁵

As of August 2005, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) provided \$753 million to more than 3,000 police departments to fund more than 6,500 school-based police officers through the COPS in Schools Program (CIS).¹²⁶ Often, such officers are called "School Safety Officers" or "School Resource Officers" (SROs). In addition, COPS committed approximately \$23 million to support training for COPS-funded SROs and school administrators.¹²⁷ The National Association of School Resource Officers confirms Berger's view that school-based policing is the "fastest growing area of law enforcement."¹²⁸

This national-level increase in punitive school policy does not appear to be a rational response to increased school violence. The most recent government data, in fact, indicates a decline in school violence.¹²⁹

Indeed, we built the school-to-prison pipeline concomitant with our collective construction of a system of mass incarceration. In February 2008, the Pew Center on the States reported that "three decades of growth in America's prison population has quietly nudged the nation across a sobering threshold: for the first time, more than one in every 100 adults is now confined in an American jail or prison."¹³⁰

The Pew Center report shows that 1 in 30 men between the ages of 20 and 34 are incarcerated. For black males, however, that figure is one in nine. One in every 53 people in their 20s is behind bars.¹³¹ The U.S. per capita incarceration rate is

¹²³ (Brown, 2003)

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* See also (Advancement Project, et.al, 2005; Mukherjee, et. al., 2007; Balmer, et.al., 2006)

¹²⁵ (Berger, 2003)

¹²⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, *Office of Community Oriented Policing Services* (2005).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ (NASRO, n.d.)

¹²⁹ (Dinkes, Forest Cataldi, Lin-Kelly & Snyder, 2007)

¹³⁰ (The Pew Center on The States, 2008)

¹³¹ *Ibid.*



700 per 100,000 citizens, which is the world's highest rate, and 7 times the world average.¹³² The U.S. prison population more than doubled from 1980 to 1990 alone.¹³³

Pew joins several other research organizations in concluding that growth in incarceration has not been driven by either an equal increase in crime or by general population growth. Like the school-to-prison pipeline and zero-tolerance policy, prison growth, Pew concludes, “flows principally from a wave of policy choices that are sending more lawbreakers to prison, and through popular ‘three-strikes’ measures and other sentencing enhancements, keeping them there longer.”¹³⁴ It is precisely this harsh, punishment-as-deterrent paradigm that education officials have adopted from the criminal justice playbook and applied to children and teenagers in public schools.

In his 2006 book *Punishment and Inequality in America*, Harvard sociologist Bruce Western demonstrated that punitive policies that increase incarceration backfire, and end up hurting the communities they are ostensibly designed to protect. Western documents the strong link between mass incarceration and inequality, particularly among African-American men. Incarceration, he argued, is not merely a symptom of social inequality, but itself creates and exacerbates inequality by undermining families and further separating poor communities of color from American mainstream opportunities and life. Western's study, for example, showed that previous incarceration reduces a man's annual earnings by 40 percent. The risk of divorce is also heightened by incarceration. This is highly consequential because steady work and a stable emotional relationship are two variables strongly linked with a crime-free life.¹³⁵ “Incarceration,” Western wrote “undermines these steps to an honest living.”

Western's quantitative analysis demonstrated that incarceration was not merely an outgrowth of problems such as urban poverty. Incarceration was a conscious collection of policy responses that exact their own long-term, negative effects upon communities. Western argued that such policies not only fail to protect communities from crime, but widen the inequality gap and the psychological distance between people of color who live in distressed communities and everyone else.

¹³² (International Centre for Prison Studies, n.d.)

¹³³ (Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.)

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* at p. 4.

¹³⁵ (Western, 2006; Western & Pettit, 2005; Western & Pettit, 2004)

“It is now time to reconsider our twenty-year experiment with imprisonment,” Western wrote. “By cleaving off poor black communities from the mainstream of American life, the prison boom has left us more divided as a nation. Incarceration rates are now so high that the stigma of criminality brands not only individuals, but a whole generation of young black men with little schooling. While our prisons and jails expanded to preserve public safety, they now risk undermining the civic consensus on which public safety is ultimately based.”¹³⁶ A similar analysis could be applied to harsh, exclusionary school discipline. It too is both a symptom of social inequality and an engine of that inequality.

School Culture & Behavior

It is equally crucial to consider the less tangible, but highly consequential “culture” of public schools, and the way that culture might itself contribute to student behavior, which then leads to suspension, expulsion, arrest and incarceration. Negative school culture, ethnographic research strongly shows, not only can engender aggressive, “anti-social” behavior, but also provide the context in which exclusionary policies come to feel both sensible and natural to adults who work there.

Research indicates that students generally feel more connected to and engaged with schools when they perceive the teachers as caring and the discipline as fair and proportional to the offense. This is significant because studies have linked a student’s sense of “connectedness” or attachment to school with reduced risk for teen pregnancy, violence, and substance abuse.¹³⁷ Similarly, a study by Sue Thorson found that while students recognize the need for discipline and do not resent it if they feel it is fair and justified, they do object to “cookie cutter” punishments that serve up set, mandatory sanctions rather than treating each student as an individual.¹³⁸

While it might seem logical that more police and security apparatus will make a building safer and, thus, contribute to a healthier educational climate in which students feel secure, research indicates that exactly the opposite is true.

A study of discipline practices in the United States showed that relying on metal detectors, surveillance cameras and locker searches actually increased the risk of

¹³⁶ (Niemann Foundation, 2007)

¹³⁷ (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Surgeon General, 2001)

¹³⁸ (Thorson, 1996)



disorder within a school.¹³⁹ Similarly, the proliferation of police in schools may also contribute to mistrust and alienation on the part of students, both of which could exacerbate oppositional behavior and ultimately undermine school safety. A 2006 study in the *Journal of Criminal Justice* found that “typical” school police training programs do not sensitize officers to students’ educational needs or the impact of aggressive measures on the learning environment. Relative to educators, officers are less likely to consider educational outcomes in discretionary matters, including the decision to arrest.¹⁴⁰

A review of the research and experience with the school-to-prison pipeline—one we believe is closely related with our nation’s corrosive infatuation with incarceration—clearly shows that an important step in redirecting that pipeline will be better informed, inclusionary school-based policies and practices that enhance a student’s engagement with school.

We must be cautious, however, not to demonize educators who employ ill-advised, ineffective zero-tolerance policies. Educators and education policymakers did not create the structures of inequality that give rise to the school- to-prison pipeline by themselves. In our most distressed, poorer communities, teachers, guidance counselors, and principals have quite often been left alone to respond to the host of social ills and inequities that undermine their daily efforts to educate children and teens.

One study that examined teachers’ attitudes toward school discipline found that almost all recognized that suspensions were not effective in addressing student misbehaviors, yet they continued to support the use of suspensions because they needed immediate relief in their classrooms and did not feel equipped to tackle the deeper emotional and psychological needs of their students.¹⁴¹

Given these realities of high-poverty schools of concentrated disadvantage, harsh discipline may, from the point of view of some educators, represent an intelligible, if ill-advised attempt to impose some kind of order on an inherently chaotic, overwhelmed environment.¹⁴² But it needn’t be that way.

¹³⁹ (Johnson, Boyden & Pittz, 2001; Berger, 2003)

¹⁴⁰ Brown (2006) finds that in the past decade the numbers of school police assigned to schools has risen dramatically.

¹⁴¹ (Wald & Casella, 2003)

¹⁴² Rothstein (2004) details the challenges facing schools of high poverty.



Part V

Paving a New Path: Solutions

Recommendations and Strategies that Build Inclusive Schools and Communities

The positive news is that a national scan of promising practices and proven interventions that either directly address or indirectly affect the number of school suspensions and expulsions—a key predictor of academic failure, school dropout, and entrance into the juvenile justice system—reveals myriad programs, services, and strategic approaches.

To their credit, superintendents, principals, school board members, district attorneys, police chiefs, juvenile judges, children’s advocates, and parent groups across the country are recognizing the devastating consequences of high rates of school suspensions and expulsions, and are taking steps to reduce these. Their efforts include national and state education and juvenile-justice reform initiatives, district efforts to revise school discipline codes, in-school character education and social justice curricula, out of school arts and recreation programs, school-university academic partnerships, preventive health and mental health programs, youth-led advocacy and education campaigns, faith-based programs, legal advocacy, community-policing focused events, and many others.

It is heartening to see such a wide range of groups and professional sectors working to improve life chances of at-risk youth. However, many of these efforts have limited capacity, and face challenges of “scaling up” or replication. Some also lack sufficiently

Zero-tolerance policies...are basically pushing the debt forward. We need to be more sophisticated.¹⁴³

— DR. ROBERT SEGE, Lead author, American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement [on] Role of the Pediatrician in Youth Violence Prevention

¹⁴³ As quoted in Klass, P. (2009, June 9). *At Last Facing Down Bullies and Their Enablers*. *The New York Times*.

hard data about their effectiveness to satisfy policymakers and funders. Another challenge is that many programs are designed and implemented in isolation. Practitioners are often unaware of other organizations with similar missions and programs that might become partners, thus improving delivery and reaching more children.

Here, our key recommendations emphasize two interrelated strategies. One focuses upon finding a common language and framework so that diverse groups can work across traditional boundaries. Second, we seek to employ preventative measures that arise from a variety of fields and research bases, and that have demonstrated potential to make a direct, immediate impact upon school disciplinary practices and student behavior and engagement in school.

More specifically, our recommendations focus on strategies that together help weave a seamless web of support for students and families:

1. Change children's environments by creating positive school climates and engaging the larger community in positive youth development.
2. Support the delivery of an affordable, accessible, high-quality continuum of health care, social services, and other family supports through investment and long-term commitments in full-service community schools.
3. Provide families the tools and resources necessary to become equal partners and allies in their children's education.

These recommendations arise from research in public health, education, housing, geography, and other disciplines that compels us to focus particular attention on children who attend schools and live in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage. After all, these are the children who are disproportionately suspended, expelled, banished to inadequate alternative schools, pushed or drop out of school, arrested, and, ultimately, incarcerated, either as juveniles or as adults.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Change children's environments by creating positive school climates and engaging the larger community in positive youth development.

Creating positive differences in school climate¹⁴⁴ directly affects the lives of all students because—as children—they have little choice but to enter their school environments every day. For some, school is a safe haven that promotes learning and self-fulfillment. For others it is a place of conflict, frustration, failure, punishment, and, at times, cultural miscommunication that leads to disaffection, banishment, exclusion and, increasingly, entanglement in the juvenile justice system.

School climate influences behaviors of teachers, students, administrators, school resource officers, and parents alike. It is defined both by the physical environment and by daily human interactions that reflect the shared ideas shaping a particular school's identity and standards for expected behaviors. These shared ideas include educational philosophy, assumptions, values, beliefs, and attitudes.

By observing and understanding school climate, we can implicitly answer such vital questions as: Is diversity valued and respected? Do adults feel an obligation to create a caring environment? Do they treat students with respect and dignity? Are parents full partners in resolving behavioral problems?

School climate reflects the “personality of the learning environment,¹⁴⁵” and is often defined and defended as just “the way we do things here.¹⁴⁶” It communicates to parents and students whether they are welcome and supported. It influences teacher morale and job satisfaction. It affects how students feel about coming to school, their motivation and openness to learning and intellectual risk-taking, and whether or not they feel physically and emotionally safe. Above all, it often determines whether discipline policies are punitive or prosocial. Prosocial policies are proactive efforts to teach, model, and reward good behavior and positive social skills (e.g., caring, respect, courtesy, patience) rather than reactive responses to bad behavior.

Few schools explicitly define and manage school climate. Yet a significant body of research shows that poor school climate negatively affects a child's ability to learn, and increases the likelihood for truancy, misbehavior, and disciplinary challenges. In healthy school climates, students do better academically and their social and emotional well-being improves.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ While some researchers and educators define school climate, school culture, and learning environment as distinct concepts, the terms are often used interchangeably. National School Climate Center (2008)

¹⁴⁵ Perkins (2008)

¹⁴⁶ Townley (1999)

¹⁴⁷ Perkins (2008); National School Climate Center(2008); Tableman(2004)



How students feel about the climate in their school is the subject of *Where We Learn*, a nationwide survey of some 32,000 students in 108 urban schools. While the results are promising in that students were hopeful for the future and generally felt good about themselves, their schools, and their teachers, several areas of concern emerged.

- Trust and respect between teachers and students influence academic achievement and are imperative in maintaining an effective learning environment. Ideally, students will trust their teachers and teachers will respect students. Yet,
- 34.6 percent of respondents do not believe that teachers treat everyone fairly and 40.1 percent are not sure they can trust their teachers.
- One-fifth (20.8 percent) of students say they do not believe teachers respect the students in their school. Broken down by race, 31.5 percent of African-American students feel that students are disrespected, compared with 17.5 percent of white students, 14 percent of Hispanic students, and 12.4 percent of Asian students.
- Significant percentages of students of all races (37 percent African American, 31.7 White, 41.5 Asian) believe some races of children are smarter than other races of children.
- 24 percent of all respondents are uncertain about their safety.
- Students are sensitive to their classmates' behavior problems. Students perceive the school's safety and their willingness to learn in relation to the number of disruptive classmates. More than 50 percent of survey respondents witnessed an episode of bullying at least once a month. Sixty percent of 7th and 8th graders agreed that students fight a lot in their school.

Mutual Respect and an Ethos of Caring: Pillars of a Positive School Climate

Schools with positive school climates do not always look alike. Administrative structures, personnel, educational philosophies, resources, and even the location and arrangement of the physical plant all influence school climate. But most school climate researchers agree that healthy school climates make explicit commitments to being *safe* and *caring*.¹⁴⁸ In positive school climates, safe schools are orderly; they have clear rules—or a set of values—to guide conduct; they have disciplinary practices that are both fair and consistently applied; and student-teacher, teacher-parent, and all personnel interactions within the school are based on mutual respect.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Sandler, Wong, Morales & Patel (2000); Perkins (2008); Tableman (2004)

Caring schools evoke a strong sense of “connectedness,¹⁵⁰” i.e., how connected the school is to the community and how connected teachers, students, and parents are to one another. Research strongly suggests that students who feel a strong bond to at least one caring and responsible adult at school do better academically and are less likely to engage in risk-taking behavior, such as premature sex, violence, and drug use.¹⁵¹

Families who participate in their child’s schooling, and develop relationships with faculty and staff and with other families, are better positioned to be an integral part of decision-making on issues affecting their children’s education. Schools contribute to the personal growth of families by sharing knowledge of child development and by supporting parental engagement and the development of parenting skills that support and reinforce the value of academic achievement and behavioral expectations.

The School Climate Challenge

Two Promising Approaches— Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, & Developmental Assets

Positive school climates do not arise without concerted effort and financial costs. Students, parents, and school personnel— teachers, administrative and building staff, school-based mental health professionals, and school safety/resource officers—must work together to actively create and sustain a positive school climate.¹⁵² In order to ensure schools make school climate a priority, policies, legislation, and funding must exist to support multi-year efforts to transform school cultures and to sustain positive climates.¹⁵³

According to the American Educational Research Association, there is a general consensus on the elements that comprise school climate and culture. However, more than 50 school climate inventories or approaches exist. Each has a slight variation in definition, measurement instruments, and design and implementation strategies. Educational researchers have deemed several school- climate change strategies to be effective, evidence-based practices. These include *Caring Schools Communities*TM, *Communities that Care*, and the *Center for Social and Emotional Education’s Five Stage Approach*.

¹⁵⁰ McNeely, C., Nonnemaker, J., & Blum, R. (2002)

¹⁵¹ National School Climate Center (2008)

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Perkins (2008); National School Climate Center (2008); Sandler, Wong, Morales & Patel (2000)



Evidenced-Based Practice: Why it Makes a Difference

Definitions

- Evidence-based practice
- Implementation Fidelity
- Meta Analysis

Only School-wide Positive Behavior Support and The Search Institute’s Developmental Assets approach and Communities that Care, a community asset-building strategy, are highlighted here. We highlight School-wide Positive Behavior Support and Developmental Assets here, in part, because they have strong national support and a solid foothold in the education communities of several states. Also, the programs share a commitment to parent engagement and the establishment of strong links between school personnel and community-based systems of care for children and youth with socio-emotional-behavioral and socio-economic challenges.

While both include strategies to create positive school climates, the two differ in their primary locus for action, research basis, and preferred target age group. School-wide Positive Behavior Support is centered in the school, grounded in applied behavior research, and is most effective at the pre- kindergarten-elementary level. The Developmental Assets approach is centered in the home and community, grounded in child development and resilience research, and focuses primarily on adolescents and teens.

School-Wide Positive Behavior Support¹⁵⁴

The University of Oregon, in partnership with the University of Connecticut, is home to the federally funded National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (www.pbis.org). The Center provides capacity-building information and technical support about behavioral systems to assist states and districts in the design of effective schools. It is the hub for the PBIS Network.

The PBIS Network includes researchers and implementation specialists at eight universities and four educational resource centers that work with individual schools, school districts, and state education agencies to provide ongoing training and technical assistance to introduce and sustain School-wide Positive Behavioral Support.

¹⁵⁴ Research literature and education, mental health, and juvenile justice practitioner publications use Positive Behavioral Support(s) (PBS), Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support(s) (PBIS) and School-wide Positive Behavioral Support(s) (SWPBS) interchangeably.

School-wide Positive Behavior Support has gained momentum nationally as a leading strategy to improve overall student behavior and to identify and provide support services to children with family dysfunction and mental health issues.

Selected Endorsements

- Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act
- American Association of School Psychologists
- Southern Poverty Law Center
- Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
- Dignity in Schools Campaign

As of July 2008, 7,660 schools in 46 states have defined PBIS teams, and initiated the PBIS training process with support from PBIS Network partners.¹⁵⁵ Thirty-six states have state-level initiatives that support PBIS initiatives in public schools.¹⁵⁶ Three states – Michigan, Maryland, and Illinois – have instituted statutes that either recommend or require PBIS in public schools.

School-wide Positive Behavior Support is a direct response to what many educators view as failed exclusionary practices (i.e., suspension, expulsion, substantially separate special education settings), which have neither stopped behaviors such as aggression and defiance that disrupt classrooms nor met the mental health needs of students.¹⁵⁷ The Positive Behavior Support approach seeks to “prevent the development and intensifying of problem behaviors and maximize academic success for all students,” according to the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior.¹⁵⁸

School-wide Positive Behavior Support emphasizes successful learning and social development of all students through structured implementation of discipline and proactive positive behavioral support systems. This “systems approach¹⁵⁹” is not a packaged curriculum. Rather, it is a comprehensive strategy to select, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions designed to promote and support positive behavior that contributes to a school climate conducive to learning.

¹⁵⁵ Rob Horner, personal communication (August 3, 2008)

¹⁵⁶ Campbell & Horner (2007)

¹⁵⁷ Horner, Sugai & Vincent (2005)

¹⁵⁸ National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Supports (n.d.)

¹⁵⁹ Sugai & Horner (2007)



Strong Evidence of Effectiveness

The PBIS model emerged from extensive research in special education and educational psychology conducted at the University of Oregon, with support from the U.S. Public Health Service and the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Special Education Programs (OSEP). School-wide PBS is an increasing focus of research literature in the educational, juvenile justice, and children's mental health fields. This expanding body of research¹⁶⁰ documents that schools employing School-wide PBS experience:

- Significant decreases in disciplinary referrals
- Reduction in the numbers of suspensions, with some studies pointing to reductions of 50 percent or more
- Fewer incidences of physical and verbal assaults by students
- Improved student perceptions of school safety
- Lower truancy and dropout rates
- Increased and enhanced teaching time
- Improved academic achievement

The core elements of the SWPBS approach are: 1) a commitment to proactive prevention of problem behavior; 2) a three-tiered student support model; 3) robust information systems and data-driven decision-making; 4) school-wide leadership teams to guide PBS implementation; and 5) ongoing technical assistance and coaching to ensure fidelity to the school-wide PBS approach.

Proactive prevention measures include clearly defined school-wide behavioral expectations, and a graduated system of discipline in which consequences for behavioral infractions are communicated to all students and consistently applied.

In this approach, consequences are not punitive. Rather, the actions in response to inappropriate behavior are intended to help decrease inappropriate behaviors. Actions might include peer mentoring, conflict-resolution training, a student-teacher behavioral contract, or other strategies to help the student manage his or her own behavior.

This discipline system is balanced with a system of rewards (e.g., praise, privileges, prizes) for "good" behavior that enables a smoothly-functioning educational environment. Teachers and other school personnel explicitly assume responsibility for teaching,

¹⁶⁰ Washburn, Stow, Cole, & Robinson (2007); Bazelton Center for Mental Health Law, (2006); Warren, et. al, (2003)

modeling, and rewarding positive behavior. Desirable student behavior becomes a “skill to be learned and taught in much the same manner as academic skills.¹⁶¹”

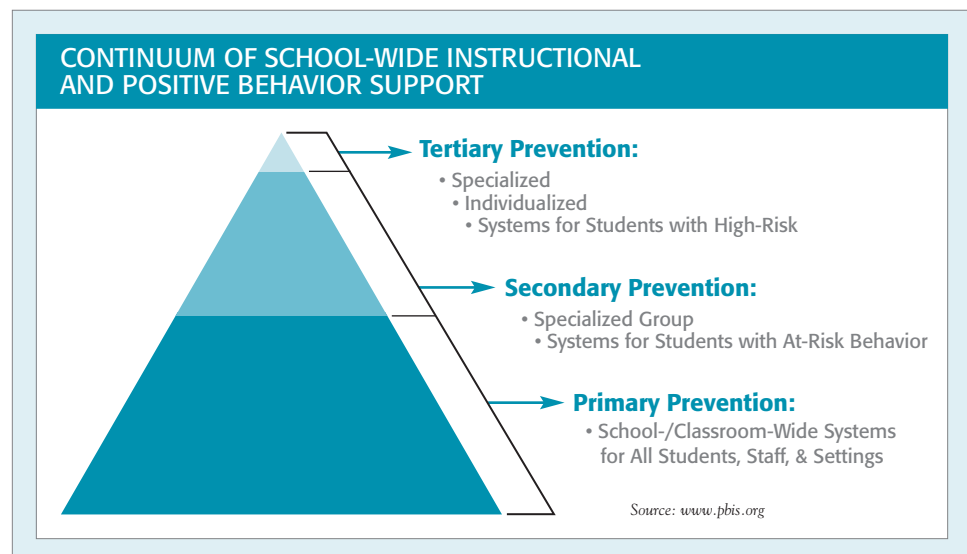
When successfully implemented, school-wide PBS establishes “a positive school climate in which behavioral expectations for students are highly predictable, directly taught, consistently acknowledged, and actively monitored.¹⁶²” Monitoring includes ongoing, systematic assessment of the nature, prevalence, and effects of antisocial behavior on students and school personnel. The school-wide PBS team reviews office disciplinary referrals, observations and records of student interactions in classroom and common areas, and other data. This allows them to make informed decisions about strategy adjustments, deployment of resources, and identifying students for group or individual support.

Three Tiers of Support – a Public Health-Based PBS Model

The three-tiered school-wide PBS approach draws from the public health field.

Each tier of prevention and support is increasingly focused and intensive, responding to students with various degrees of behavioral problems.

The primary—*universal*—tier applies to all students in the school. At the primary tier, School-wide PBS often serves as a platform for related programs that promote



¹⁶¹ Colvin (2007, p. 9)

¹⁶² Sprague & Horner (in press)



OLWEUS™ BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM: HELPING VICTIMS, VICTIMIZERS, AND BYSTANDERS

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than 30 percent of students ages 12–18 reported being bullied or cyber-bullied in school with little variation across gender or race.¹ Unchecked, bullying negatively affects the learning environment for all students—those who are bullied, the bullies themselves, and those who witness the acts of aggression—and may lead to lifelong physical, emotional, and mental health issues.

In response to the increased incidence and documented negative health effects of bullying and cyber-bullying among school-age children, the American Academy of Pediatrics devoted a new section of its official policy statement on youth violence prevention to the problem. The AAP recommends schools adopt the Olweus™ Bullying Prevention Program.²

Developed by Dan Olweus, a research psychologist and pioneer in bullying research, the program draws from more than 35 years of research, implementation, and evaluation in Europe and the United States. The Olweus™ Bullying Prevention Program is a whole school change program with community, school-wide, classroom, and individual level interventions, which emphasize improved peer relations and positive and safe school climates.

To learn more about the Olweus™ Bullying Prevention Program, go to: www.olweus.org

¹ (NCES, 2009)

² Committee on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention (2009)

socio-emotional learning and youth development. At many schools, these include the *Olweus™ Bullying Prevention Program, Second Step*, or other evidence-based character education or social skills training curricula.

The secondary—*selected*—tier applies to “at-risk” students whose problem behaviors are habitual. These students receive targeted interventions in groups of students with similar behavior problems or behaviors that seem to occur for the same reasons (e.g., truancy, fighting) and/or across similar settings (e.g., hallway class transitions). Many schools employ conflict resolution or restorative practices as secondary interventions.

The tertiary—*indicated*—tier focuses on “high risk” students whose needs have not been met through tier- one and tier-two interventions. These students require more intensive interventions that engage mental health and child services agencies to work with the child and his or her family. Tertiary supports usually integrate functional behavioral assessments in which families and mental health practitioners explore underlying reasons for misbehavior. The child and his or her family receive wraparound services, a family-centered, service integration model. In this model, a collaborative team of service providers works with students, families, and teachers to tailor community services and supports for the child.

The PBS research base indicates that about 80 percent of students respond successfully to primary behavioral supports. Secondary supports work for about 15 percent and 1 to 5 percent require intensive individual tertiary interventions.¹⁶³ Recent research in urban schools indicates the percentages of students in the secondary and tertiary tiers may be higher, in part, because of the stress of extreme poverty and community violence.¹⁶⁴

School-wide PBS in Action

PBIS initiatives are in place in schools, juvenile justice, and mental health facilities nationwide. The approach has “spread across the country like wildfire” according to one proponent.¹⁶⁵

In California, researchers in the PBIS Network work directly with 95 schools in Orange County and the Campbell School District. In 2007, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)—the nation’s second-largest school district—mandated School-wide Positive Behavior Support for all schools as part of a revised district-wide Discipline Foundation Policy.¹⁶⁶ The LAUSD policy grew out of a three-year effort of planning,

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: MOVING FROM CONFLICT TO COOPERATION, CONNECTION AND A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Restorative practices are grounded in a simple premise, according to the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), “Human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them. ...Punitive and authoritarian to mode and the permissive and paternalistic for mode are not as effective as the restorative, participatory, engaging with mode.” The overly harsh, authoritarian, and often arbitrary punishments of zero tolerance policies alienate children and their families and lead to disconnection from school. Yet, students who misbehave must be held accountable. Restorative practices, which include informal interactions and formal processes such as peer mediation and family group conferencing, actively engage misbehaving students in identifying those who may have been harmed by their actions, accepting responsibility, and negotiating an agreement on how to repair the harm. It is important for those who have been harmed to have an opportunity to express their feelings to the offenders. Restorative actions might range from a personal or public apologies, financial remuneration, and community service.

To learn more about restorative practices, See Safer Saner Schools, a program of the International Institute for Restorative Practices Training and Consulting Division at: safersanerschools.org

¹⁶³ Hill, Ramsey & Greshman (2003-2004)

¹⁶⁴ Warren, et. al. (2003)

¹⁶⁵ Lester (2008)

¹⁶⁶ Los Angeles Unified School District (2007)



piloting, and training, as well as student, parent, and community engagement in the planning process and determination of the guiding principles for the community.¹⁶⁷

Maryland and Illinois are the leaders in statewide implementation of School-wide PBS. Strong leadership and funding from national and state education and health and human services agencies have allowed these states to both build extensive PBS technical assistance and support networks and commit to full integration of school-based mental health services.

PBIS Maryland (www.pbismaryland.org) has supported implementation of School-wide PBS in more than 500 schools as of 2008. PBIS Maryland projected more than 700 PBIS Maryland schools by 2010. The comprehensive effort is coordinated by a state leadership team, which includes the Maryland Department of Education; the Sheppard Pratt Mental Health System, a private, non-profit behavioral health organization; Johns Hopkins Center for the Study for Youth Violence; the Department of Juvenile Services Mental Health Administration; and 24 school district leaders.

Johns Hopkins began a longitudinal evaluation in 2002 to assess the quality of training at schools, the fidelity of implementation, and the effects on student behavior and academic achievement. Based on initial data, office referrals declined by 42 percent in middle schools. This translates to a recovery of 40 days of school administrator time and 119 days of student instructional time.¹⁶⁸

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health jointly fund the PBIS Maryland evaluation. The rigorous, randomized effectiveness trial compares 21 PBIS schools and 16 “Focus/Comparison” schools for the period baseline plus 4 years (Spring 2002 - Spring 2007) in which data were collected on 29,423 students and 3,563 staff. In April 2008, Johns Hopkins reported the following preliminary findings:¹⁶⁹

- PBIS schools reached and sustained high fidelity
- PBIS increased all aspects of organizational health
- Positive effects/trends for student outcomes

¹⁶⁷ Zeff (2008)

¹⁶⁸ Alexander, Barrett & Leaf (2007)

¹⁶⁹ Bradshaw & Leaf (2008)

- Fewer students with 1 or more Office Disciplinary Referrals (both major and minor infractions)
- A 25 percent reduction in suspensions
- An increasing trend in the percentage of students scoring in the advanced and proficient ranges of state achievement tests

In the next phase, Johns Hopkins researchers will analyze individual student change and explore what role gender, race, socioeconomic status, or special education classification might play in the effect of the program.

PBIS Maryland views advancement of school-mental health system integration as a key goal and has rallied strong support for children’s mental health and school mental health among state policy leaders. A new state grant program will support integration of schools and mental health systems, and provide funds to increase student access to high-quality mental health care by developing innovative approaches linking school systems with the local mental health system.

The Illinois State Board of Education funded the Illinois PBIS Network to “build capacity of schools, families, and communities to promote social and academic success of all students, including those with emotional/behavioral and other disabilities.” At the close of fiscal year 2007, 654 schools in 170 Illinois districts were implementing some level of PBS, representing 16 percent of schools and approximately 20 percent of districts statewide. By fiscal year 2011, the Illinois PBIS Network targets an increase to 1,200 schools.

In Illinois, some schools have not fully implemented the three-tier PBS model. A comparison of suspension rates per 100 students between partially and fully implemented schools revealed that fully implemented PBIS schools had demonstrated fewer suspensions and were able to devote more resources to tier three interventions. Students in tier three were most often at risk of removal from home, school, and/or community placement. Illinois PBIS tracked a small cohort of eight students for six months while receiving wraparound services. All demonstrated positive and statistically significant decreases in risk.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ *Illinois PBIS Network (2007)*



Challenges to School-wide PBS

It is important to note that implementation fidelity is a major theme in the PBS literature. In other words, adoption of School-wide PBS requires strict adherence to the implementation model that has been tested and proven effective in order to achieve similar results. This requires a sustained commitment of school and district leadership, “buy in” from all stakeholders, high-quality data collection methods, ongoing coaching and technical assistance, and access to high-quality, community-based systems of care. Without such elements, which often require state and district-level policy changes and additional financial and human resources, PBS’ success rates are unlikely to be replicated.

Moreover, since PBS is a strategy rather than a proscribed program, each school develops its own discipline system of behavioral expectations and consequences based on its own culture. In some schools, the commitment to being a “caring” or “trauma sensitive” school community may be absent. Other schools may continue to include definitions of “willful defiance” that are open to cross-cultural misinterpretation, as well as exclusionary practices such as out-of-school suspensions for truancy, and stress-inducing prevention measures such as random weapons searches with metal detectors.¹⁷¹

The key to student success is a commitment to the PBS response that augments discipline with behavioral supports and fully engages students and families in the process of examining and correcting behavior that interferes with school climate and student success.

Some critics caution that some schools may adopt School-wide PBS too narrowly. In order to effectively meet the needs of all students — and in particular, those most in need of support — schools must commit to the three-tiered model, and *not* be tempted to adopt “PBS Lite.” Schools must actively integrate mental health services and systems of care, and commit to PBS for all children across the three tiers of PBS intervention.¹⁷² Some PBS researchers also advise that School-wide PBS is most effective at the pre-kindergarten and elementary school levels. It is imperative that intervention start early, since antisocial behavior driven by severe emotional or behavioral disturbance becomes less responsive to intervention in adolescence.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ As examples, see Zeff (2008) and Lester (2008)

¹⁷² Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law (2006)

¹⁷³ Hill, Ramsey & Greshman (2003-2004)

The Developmental Assets Approach

For the last 50 years, Search Institute (www.search-institute.org), the Minneapolis-based non-profit research organization, has advanced its mission to provide “leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities.”¹⁷⁴ In 1990, Search published *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th – 12th Grade Youth*, which introduced its signature approach, “Developmental Assets.”

Grounded in a meta-analysis of scientific research on child and adolescent development, risk prevention, and resiliency, the thesis of the approach is that certain developmental assets are necessary building blocks of positive youth development. This includes positive experiences, relationships, opportunities, and personal qualities that young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. These assets both help prevent high-risk behavior and promote school success.

The Search framework divides 40 “Developmental Assets” equally between *external* and *internal* assets.

External assets emphasize the role of families, neighborhoods, schools, and religious organizations in providing support, empowerment, and constructive use of time, as well as boundaries and expectations. Among the 20 external assets are parental involvement in schooling; a caring and encouraging school climate; clearly defined rules and consequences for school behavior; opportunities to serve the community; and availability of youth programs and activities.

Search’s Developmental Assets Approach Is Associated with Improved School Climate, More Engaged Parents, and Stronger Community-based Youth Development Programs.

Selected Endorsements

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- America’s Promise Alliance
- YMCA of USA
- Faith and Service Technical Education Network (FASTEN)
- Ohio Summit on Children – Promising and Proven Approach designation

¹⁷⁴ Search Institute (n.d.)



Internal assets support a commitment to learning, instill positive values, develop social competencies, and promote a positive identity, including achievement motivation, a sense of personal responsibility, conflict resolution skills, and a positive view of one's personal future.

The Evidence for the Developmental Assets Approach^{175,176}

The Developmental Assets Survey consists of 156 questions covering adult and peer relationships, youth behaviors, and attitudes towards their school, family, and community. The survey measures the 40 Developmental Assets, 24 risk behaviors, 10 high-risk behavior patterns, and 8 thriving indicators. More than 2 million¹⁷⁷ 6th- to 12th-grade youth in communities across the United States and Canada have completed the survey.

Search, in partnership with the Children First initiative in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, launched a multiyear study of Developmental Assets among 6th-12th grade youth. This study measured Developmental Assets longitudinally (1997, 1998, 2001) and links young people's asset profiles to their actual school records. Conducted by the Minnesota Institute of Public Health, this evaluative study offers insights into the patterns of Developmental Assets through adolescence. It also examines of the power of Developmental Assets over time. The evaluation found that students in the 9th grade program demonstrated fewer risk behaviors (e.g., drugs, and alcohol and tobacco use), and showed increased commitment to school as measured by attendance and improved academic performance.¹⁷⁸

Recent analyses of Search Institute's aggregate dataset of 217,277 6th- to 12th-graders (including 69,731 youth of color) surveyed in 318 U.S. communities during the 1999-2000 school year found the following:

- African-American, American-Indian, Asian-American, Latino/a, White, and multiracial youth benefit similarly from experiencing more of the 40 developmental assets in their lives, regardless of their socioeconomic status.
- Developmental assets protect youth of all racial/ethnic groups from engaging in 10 different high-risk behaviors, including violence, alcohol use, and illicit drug use.

¹⁷⁵ Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Sesma (2006); Sesma & Roehlkepartain (2003)

¹⁷⁶ Search Institute (n.d.)

¹⁷⁷ Marc Mannes (personal communication, August 7, 2008)

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

- Students from *all racial/ethnic backgrounds* with high levels of assets (31–40) are about five to 12 times as likely as those with few assets (0–10) to be successful in school.
- The importance of particular categories of assets varies by race/ethnicity, suggesting the need for focused, ongoing dialogue within communities of color about their strengths and opportunities for nurturing healthy children and youth.

Engaged Communities

The Search approach to youth development rests on the premise that an “engaged community” of individuals, schools, and organizations must recognize its responsibility to ensure that young people have the resources, opportunities, and strengths to succeed. Search encourages and supports families, communities, schools, youth development, and faith-based organizations in “intentional asset building” that is based upon an asset inventory of their own youth and student populations. Armed with youth surveys and school and community resource data, communities and schools must develop and implement a “strategic prevention framework” that targets both the development of specific assets and an overall increase in the total assets in the youth population.

A critical goal of the asset-building approach is to create a new cultural norm among adults, whereby they accept and act upon a social responsibility to contribute to healthy development of young people—not only their own children but also the children of their neighbors and members of the larger community. The strength of the assets

PARENTS AS ASSET BUILDERS

The Fresno, CA-based Family Leadership Connection (FLC) employs the Search asset-building model. FLC serves as Search Institute’s training resource for parent engagement in the United States and Canada. In California, FLC founders Patty and David Bunker have trained more than 10,000 parents and guardians in asset building through “Parenting Partners,” a seven-week set of classes for increasing parenting skills and involving low-income parents and guardians in their children’s’ school success.

The Family Leadership Connection is a faith-based ministry that emphasizes equipping churches to lead parent outreach teams. Elementary, middle, and high schools throughout California have welcomed teams from area churches to lead parenting classes on the school campus. The Parenting Partners curriculum is approved for Prop 49 funding by the California Department of Education’s After School Resource Center, and many districts are part of the curriculum for their Migrant Education, Program Improvement, and Literacy programs.



approach is that it provides a common language and framework for diverse groups working across traditional boundaries to improve the life chances of young people. An emphasis on parent/adult education and engagement programs contributes to the success of the approach.

Developmental Assets in Action

Search's Development Assets Approach has been widely disseminated, with broad-based applications in youth-development organizations, schools, parent-education programs, and juvenile-justice entities. Most notably, Search Institute partnered with YMCA-USA and YMCA-Canada to form the Abundant Assets Alliance (www.abundantassets.org), which has three long-term goals:

1. To support the transformation of local YMCAs to be asset-rich resources;
2. To equip local YMCAs to be catalysts and partners for community transformation; and
3. To join with other organizations across North America to influence social norms and policies.

San Jose-based Project Cornerstone (www.projectcornerstone.org) is a shining example of Abundant Assets in action. The YMCA of Santa Clara Valley serves as the parent organization, and was a founding member of the Youth Alliance that launched Project Cornerstone in 1998. As of 2008, the Project Cornerstone collaborative includes more than 70 organizations, such as community-based youth and family serving organizations, city and county offices and agencies, businesses and corporations, and foundations and community groups, as well as the County Office of Education and more than 130 schools. America's Promise recently named San Jose one of the "100 Best Communities for Young People," citing Project Cornerstone as a key reason for the designation.¹⁷⁹

Project Cornerstone seeks to "build a web of support around every young person in its community."¹⁸⁰ The web includes families, schools, community centers, juvenile-justice entities, mental-health providers, faith communities, and local businesses. Project Cornerstone recognizes that these resources—parts of the web—are often disconnected from one another and not linked to children and youth themselves. Project Cornerstone actively facilitates connection and communication to ensure

¹⁷⁹ Project Cornerstone (n.d)

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

that young people can count on individuals and organizations working together to provide them with consistent support and guidance.

Project Cornerstone's strategies and accomplishments directly respond to voices of local youth. In 1999, Cornerstone partnered with nine school districts and the County Office of Education to conduct Search Institute's Developmental Asset survey with 7,000 7th- to 12th-graders throughout the county. In 2005, 15,000 students in grades 4 through 11 throughout the county completed the survey.

The San Jose Unified School District and the Morgan Hill Unified District adopted the assets approach by engaging students, staff, and teachers in promoting caring school climates and using annual school climate data as part of performance evaluations for principals. Fifty-three elementary, middle, and high schools have student, parent, and/or staff leadership teams implementing asset-building action plans to promote safe, caring school climates and reduce bullying/peer abuse. Initial results include:

- A 50 percent decline in behavioral referrals to the principals at Title I schools after partnering with Cornerstone through student leadership activities for one year.
- Referrals for behavior problems at a partner middle school dropped by nearly 99 percent in just 3 months for 22 students who became tutors for younger children. The students, who were failing academically, had 257 referrals from September through March but only 1 referral from April through June, usually a time of increased referrals. The students and their teachers reported improvements in their motivation, confidence, and effort in their schoolwork.
- Another middle school experienced a 12 percent increase in its caring school climate and consistent decreases in high-risk behaviors due to their asset-building efforts over 2 school years.
- 89 percent of students surveyed said they feel their schools are safer for all students, after educators implemented asset-building action plans.

Project Cornerstone demonstrates the effectiveness of strategies that focus on 1) finding a common language and framework for diverse groups to work across traditional boundaries and improve the life chances of young people; and 2) preventive measures with potential for direct, immediate impact.



Search Institute research demonstrates that the more developmental assets young people have in their lives, the less likely they are to use drugs or engage in risk-taking behavior. Intrinsic to both the School-wide PBS and Developmental Assets approaches is recognition that for some children neither prosocial discipline nor positive youth development through intentional asset building will overcome the effects of physical and mental health issues based in childhood trauma and extreme poverty. Successful implementation of either strategy is predicated on solid systems of care and access to high-quality, affordable, community-based mental health and other support services for all children and families.

“Doris and I talk a lot about the backpack—the things these kids have to bring to school in their backpacks, all the problems they have. Unlike teachers and other adults, who have other outlets and resources to deal with it; they can lay on the couch for therapy, take time off. The kids can’t do that. They can’t say, ‘I can’t deal with this. I am going to take vacation or go here.’ How can we hold them responsible for their actions and attitudes, if we do not give them the same resources that we now demand in our workplace?”

— Doris and Jesse Willard, Parent Advocates, Modesto City, California¹⁸¹

In July 2008, Randi Weingarten, the newly elected president of the American Federation of Teachers, the nation’s largest teachers union, called on municipal leaders and school districts nationwide to create full-service community schools.^{182, 183} The demand for coordinated and/or co-located services that integrate education, public health, mental health, social services, transportation, childcare, recreation, enrichment, and other community-based resources has been echoing in the U.S. for more than a decade, since Joy Dryfoos’ seminal 1994 publication, *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families*, but has still not been implemented to scale.

RECOMMENDATION: Support the delivery of an affordable, accessible, high-quality continuum of health care, social services, and other family supports through the development and support of full service community schools.

¹⁸¹ Jesse and Doris Willard, personal communication (June 27, 2008)

¹⁸² The terms “full service schools” and “community schools” are some sometimes used synonymously but “full service” conveys a commitment to health services.

¹⁸³ Dillon (2008)

More recent attention to the alarming numbers of young people either dropping out or being pushed out of school through exclusionary practices creates new impetus for the promising model of integrated, community-based service delivery. An extensive body of research documents the impact of undetected and untreated socio-emotional-behavioral problems, basic health problems (i.e., dental, vision, hearing, malnutrition), and parental engagement on school success.

Researchers, practitioners, and advocates also highlight the continuing challenge of making quality, basic health services affordable and accessible to all children and families in need—particularly children who live in areas of concentrated disadvantage. Effective systems of care must be grounded in the community, thereby removing “barriers of time and distance”¹⁸⁴ that hamper effective communication and cooperation between service providers, educators, and parents and guardians.

The high-profile call by the AFT president is echoed by others vested in improving the quality of our nation’s schools and improving academic outcomes and life chances for children of color.¹⁸⁵ Among them are Grantmakers for Education, one of the largest philanthropic affinity groups, and a newly formed coalition of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers who advocate for a *Broader Bolder Approach to Education* (www.boldapproach.org). The foundation for the “broader, bolder approach” is the undeniable heft of educational, public- health, and socio-economic research that documents the potent impact of factors outside of the traditional school mission and setting have upon education. Parenting, health, and poverty, together with cognitive, cultural, and character development, are powerful factors in children’s ability to overcome socio-economic disadvantage and achieve academic success.

School-based Mental Health Services

Advocates have been more successful in garnering support for policies that expand the availability of school-based mental-health services, with several acts pending in Congress and in state legislatures. The narrow focus on school-based mental health is warranted. According to research compiled by the Center for Health and Health Care in Schools, 75 percent of children in need of mental health services do not get the help they need.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Ouellette, Briscoe & Tyson (2004, p. 307)

¹⁸⁵ Bazelon (2006); Warren, et. al (2003); Lawson and Sailor (2000); *The Forum for Education* (2008); Grantmakers for Education (2006)

¹⁸⁶ Center for Health Care and Health Care in Schools (n.d)



Children of color not only have less access to mental-health services and are less likely to receive needed care, but they often receive a poorer quality of mental-health care. Research suggests that schools may function as the “de facto mental-health system¹⁸⁷” for children and adolescents. Of those children fortunate enough to receive care, 70 to 80 percent receive it in a school setting.

Yet, school-based health programs represent a wide range—from part-time basic care provided by an unlicensed aide to a full-time comprehensive health clinic that offers preventive and treatment services. Only about 60 percent of the nation’s 1,500 school-based health centers have mental-health professionals on staff.

Research suggests that the most effective approach to helping children at-risk for or experiencing socio-emotional difficulties are wraparound services and multi-systemic therapy. Both are systematic approaches centered in the family but that actively engage key players such as the child’s peers, school, and community. The aim is to build a supportive network of extended family, friends and neighbors, and other caring adults to help the child and his/her family make and maintain positive changes.

Nearly ten years ago, in *Problem Behavior Prevention and School-Based Health Centers: Programs and Prospects*, researchers from the Urban Institute pointed to school-based health centers as a “sorely underutilized¹⁸⁸” resource that should be the focal or primary point of attack for the delivery of prevention intervention services.¹⁸⁹

The researchers noted that despite the many strengths of the school-based health centers—including popularity with families and students, ability to provide care for students without access to regular providers, and capacity to provide a wide range of services in a convenient setting—lack of a reliable funding base posed a significant challenge. They said the funding base had to be addressed for school-based health services to achieve their full potential in meeting the mental and physical health care needs of disadvantaged youth.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p 2

¹⁸⁸ Eisen, M., Pallitto, C. & Bradner, C. (1999), *online chapter 1, paragraph 10*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

The YMCA Community Schools approach is similar to the Abundant Assets approach described above, as it focuses on bringing “the assets of an entire community to bear in preparing children and families for success.”¹⁹⁰

More than 100 YMCA community schools now dot the country. While YMCAs support many more schools in communities throughout the United States, the goal of a YMCA Community School is to “form a deep, truly seamless relationship between the school and the YMCA...where communication is open and there is a clear understanding of roles and mutual respect for expertise at the table” according to Mary Blank of the Coalition of Community Schools. Blank sees the YMCA as the “best equipped organization to help the community school effort,” and her organization has partnered with the YMCA to increase the number of YMCA Community Schools. A hallmark of the YMCA Community Schools is the strong emphasis on families and breaking down barriers to parent engagement in schools.

Two forces fuel the effort to organize parent involvement in schools. First, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) defines parental involvement as regular, two-way, and meaningful communication between families and teachers regarding students’ academic learning and other school activities. This definition comes from the National PTA’s National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.¹⁹¹

Successful parent involvement strategies vary among states, districts, and individual schools, and focus on structured programs that provide parents and guardians resources to actively support their children’s academic achievement. This includes such things as family literacy, parenting classes, and college and career planning programs. Many schools engage service organizations such as the Fresno-based Family Leadership Connection, described above, or Los Angeles-based Families in Schools (www.familiesinschools.org)

RECOMMENDATION: Support local advocacy efforts by providing parents and guardians with tools and resources necessary to become equal partners and allies in the educational and academic success of their children.

¹⁹⁰ Robertson (2008)

¹⁹¹ Parent Teacher Association (n.d.)



to deliver parent and family involvement programs. Investing in community schools would strengthen the ability of schools to engage parents as active partners in learning.

The second driving force for parent involvement comes from parents, guardians, and community members who advocate for improved school performance or changes to school policies or practice. Persistent racial achievement gaps, drop out/push out issues, and zero-tolerance discipline policies that disproportionately punish minority youth are rallying issues for them. Many parents and guardians confront these challenges for the first time when they attempt to advocate for their children and find themselves met with resistance until they join forces with others and form grassroots advocacy groups.

The second scenario transformed Jesse and Doris Willard into lifelong parent advocates. The Willards advise action groups nationwide and also served on the National Education Association's task force on suspensions. The Willards' story is instructive.

Five years ago, the Modesto City High School in Modesto, California, suspended their teenage son after he fought with a classmate. Concerned about the lack of due process—and what they felt was “disrespectful treatment” from school personnel when they tried to investigate the facts of the incident—they decided to take action. They placed an ad in a local paper asking parents with similar experiences to call them.

Some 30 people attended their first meeting. The parents shared concerns about the disproportionate numbers of African Americans and Latinos who were receiving suspensions. The group brought in the American Civil Liberties Union, working with Northern California's Racial Justice Project for consultation. With the support and expertise of the ACLU, the Modesto parent group gathered data, reported their findings to the school board, and spoke out against discrimination.

According to Jesse Willard, “We really just started getting involved in taking them [Modesto High School] to task on their disciplinary due process... Our goal was to hold them accountable to our children as they hold our children accountable for everything.” Ultimately, the Modesto City School District appointed a community affairs officer and overhauled its discipline policy after input from the parent advocate group.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Jesse and Doris Willard, personal communication (June 27, 2008)

Investing in Parents & Guardians as Advocates

Grantmakers for Education, the Association of Small Foundations, and the Social Venture Partners fund advocacy efforts as one of seven critical needs for education philanthropy investment.¹⁹³ Communities and parents must be able to marshal information, access legal services, and communicate effectively not only to be able to advocate for individual student and school-level changes, but also to influence state and federal policies that affect their local schools.

Parent, student, and community engagement plays an “essential role in making schools more responsive and holding schools accountable for serving low income communities of color,¹⁹⁴” according to Harvard sociologist Mark R. Warren, whose research focuses on community organizing in low income communities of color.

Warren argues that building a political constituency for public schools is essential to addressing inequalities embedded in American public education. Parents, according to Warren, must be viewed “not as recipients of services, but as public actors and change agents, people capable of being leaders in their community.¹⁹⁵” Community organizing that fosters the leadership development and empowerment of parents builds the social capital of the community and shifts the relational power to create more cooperative and productive parent and school relationships.

The phrase “the school-to-prison pipeline” offers a visual image of the pivotal developmental period—usually in middle and high school—when so many children of color, particularly children who live in areas of concentrated disadvantage, make fateful and irreversible turns away from school toward dropping out, delinquency, and, ultimately, prison. It is a tragic and all too common trajectory that begins in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage, and rapidly accelerates during the school years.

Yet, it is a journey that is eminently preventable. As President Johnson understood so well almost half-a-century ago, the actions that lead to school exclusion and dropping out represent the culmination of “a hundred unseen forces.” In our efforts to redirect

¹⁹³ Grantmakers for Education (2006)

¹⁹⁴ Warren (2005) p. 2 of web print version; Mediratta and Fruchter (2001)

¹⁹⁵ Warren (2005) p. 22 of web print version



the pipeline back toward opportunity and high- school completion, it is critical that these unseen forces be identified, and brought out into the open. For that is where the most durable and effective solutions lie—in the partnerships between the schools, the communities, and the parents to lift up and reclaim our children.

This report is by no means exhaustive. Across the country, schools are working collaboratively with law enforcement, with community and recreational agencies, with parents, with legal advocates, with area researchers, with businesses, and with health and mental health professionals to craft innovative and creative new programs designed to engage young people at risk of dropping out and court involvement. Many of these are successful and deserve to be replicated. Each day, they save lives.

However, for this brief, we have concentrated on those programs that are based in sound research, already demonstrate a track record of success, are being widely replicated, and seek to create the “web of support” that we believe all young people need and deserve in order to succeed and thrive.



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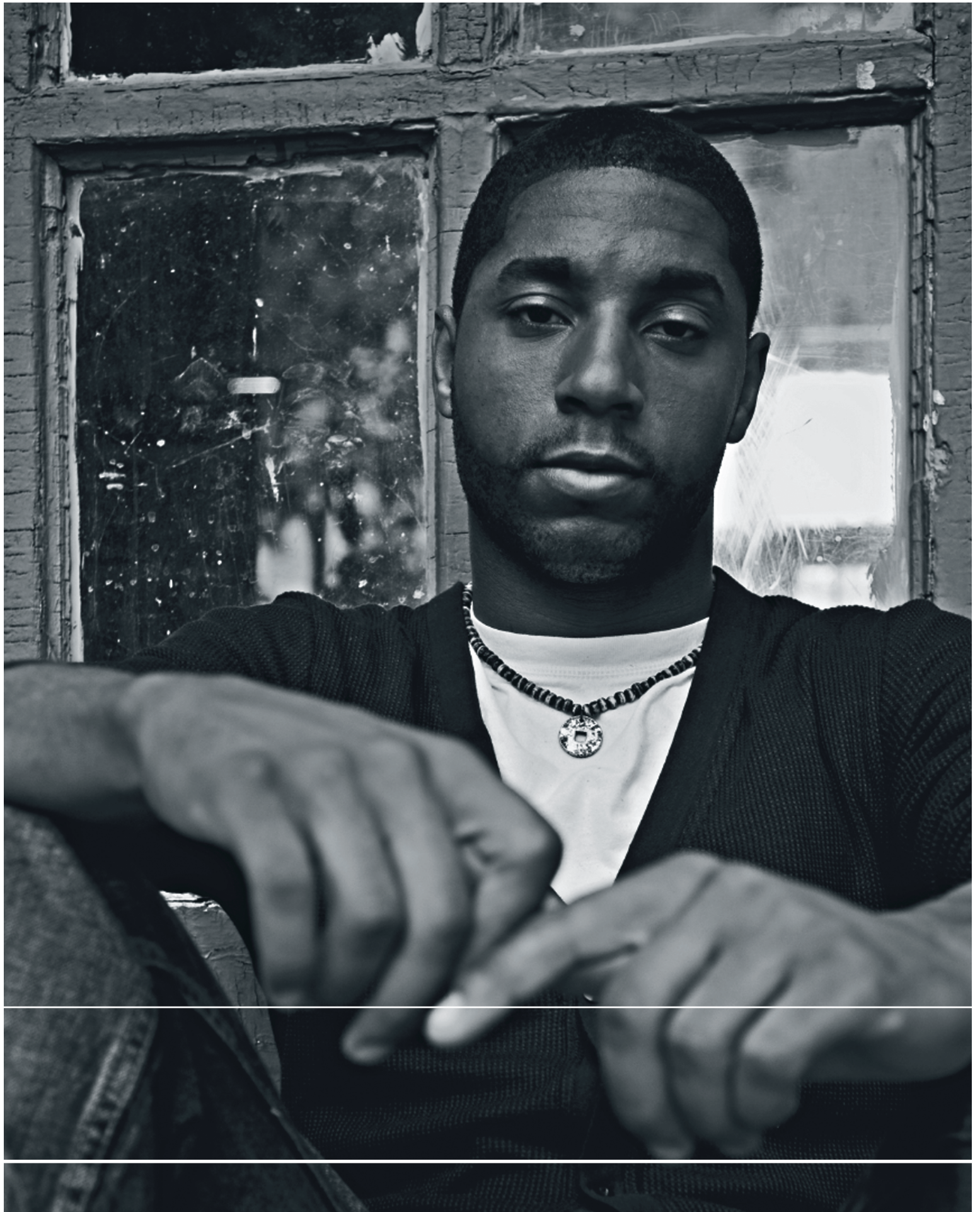
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Prepared by:

**The Charles Hamilton
Houston Institute for
Race and Justice at
Harvard Law School**

Funded by:



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TCE 033010