

THE \$746 MILLION A YEAR SCHOOL-TO- PRISON PIPELINE

The Ineffective, Discriminatory, and Costly
Process of Criminalizing New York City Students



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Executive Summary

Since the start of the 2013–2014 school year, tens of thousands of New York City’s (NYC) students have been arrested, suspended, or given a summons at school. NYC public schools’ continued reliance on punitive school climate strategies—in-school police presence and alarmingly high suspensions rates—are ineffective, harm students and exacerbate existing inequities along lines of race and disability. These strategies also drain public funds that could be used to help ensure that all young people receive the support, resources, and access to opportunities they need to thrive.

Harsh disciplinary policies, executed by both police and school personnel, lead to high rates of permanent dropout as well as ongoing, and often escalating, entanglements in the criminal legal system.* This pattern is widely referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline.”¹ NYC’s school-to-prison pipeline is rooted in a history of racial segregation and the punitive treatment of Black and Latinx** children in our public schools.² More recently, officials have imbedded Broken Windows policing strategies in schools by directing resources toward criminal punishment for low-level infractions and continue the practice of criminalizing normal youthful behavior.³ For years, youth-led organizations and other advocates have organized to transform approaches to school culture from punitive discipline that push students out of school to restorative practices that facilitate improved environments and provide social and emotional supports. These efforts have resulted in some changes, but students still experience high rates of exclusionary discipline and disparities remain deeply entrenched within the school system.

Supportive Schools are Safer than Punitive Schools: NYC Chooses a Punitive Approach

The school-to-prison pipeline is enabled by the Department of Education (DOE) and the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

* This report uses “criminal legal system” rather than “criminal justice system” to acknowledge the many forms of systematic injustice which are reproduced and entrenched by policing practices, courts, and prisons.

** Latinx is a gender-neutral alternative to Latino/Latina.

- The NYPD currently assigns 5,511 personnel to the School Safety Division (SSD), including 190 armed officers and 4,692 School Safety Agents (SSA). Many of the officers and agents within this division are empowered to detain, arrest, and issue court summonses to students. In 2016, law enforcement, including NYPD officers and SSAs made 1,263 arrests, and issued 907 summonses and 922 juvenile reports to students in public schools.⁴
- In the 2015–2016 school year, the Department of Education removed students from class 11,943 times, suspended students for five days or less 27,122 times, and suspended students for five to 180 days 10,525 times.⁵ Suspensions led to children missing a minimum of 316,104 days of school in the 2015–2016 school year; the equivalent of 1,756 school years.⁶ In that amount of time, a single student could attend a four-year college 439 times over.⁷

Suspensions, arrests, and interactions with police have a negative impact on school climate and academic performance. An analysis of patterns of arrest and dropout in Chicago public schools suggests that students arrested in the 9th or 10th grade are significantly more likely to drop out of high school than non-arrested students with similar socioeconomic backgrounds.⁸ Suspensions increase the likelihood that students will drop out by 15 percent, and significantly increase their chances of interacting with the criminal legal system.⁹ Over time, these harsh and punitive systems of discipline also generate “collateral damage” which “negatively affects the academic achievement of non-suspended students in punitive contexts.”¹⁰

The presence of police in schools, along with the harsh discipline policies implemented by school officials, have been justified as necessary for ensuring safe learning environments in schools with predominantly Black and Latinx populations. However, there is no clear evidence to support the argument that punitive policies create safer learning environments.¹¹ In fact, schools that adopt these policies are no more safe or orderly even after years of punitive enforcement.¹² By contrast, research demonstrates that investment in strong and supportive relationships between staff and students is the greatest predictor of school safety.¹³ Despite this evidence, NYC still employs far more NYPD personnel than social workers and guidance counselors. Compared to 5,511 NYPD School Safety Division personnel, there are only 2,800 full-time guidance counselors and 1,252 full-time social workers employed to support the city’s 1.1 million students.¹⁴

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The Impact of NYC’s Harsh Policies on Black and Latinx Students and Students with Disabilities

The school-to-prison pipeline deepens the stark disparities in NYC schools, particularly along lines of race and disability. Research shows that Black and Latinx students do not misbehave more frequently or more severely than White students yet are disproportionately policed, as indicated by the most recent data from the NYPD:¹⁵

- Compared to White students, police are 8.3 times more likely to intervene in a disciplinary situation if a student is Black, and 4.4 times more likely to intervene if a student is Latinx.¹⁶
- Black and Latinx youth make up 92 percent of all arrests, 91.7 percent of all summonses, and 91.4 percent of all juvenile reports, highly disproportionate to their presence in the school

population, which is 67.1 percent.¹⁷

- These policies have an especially harsh impact on immigrant students, which is compounded by the current federal administration’s commitment to deporting undocumented individuals who have committed any chargeable offense, no matter how small.¹⁸

The DOE’s practice of exclusionary discipline has similarly disparate racial impacts.¹⁹ The DOE’s most recent data show that:

- Black students make up 27 percent of the student population but account for 54 percent of students receiving long-term suspensions and 48 percent of students receiving suspensions up to five days.^{**20}
- While students with disabilities are only 18.7 percent of the student population, they account for 42.7 percent of students receiving long-term suspensions, 37 percent of those receiving suspensions lasting up to five days, and 40 percent of students removed from a class.²¹

\$746 Million a Year: The Economic Impact of Ineffective, Harsh, and Discriminatory Policies

We have known for years that these criminalizing and exclusionary practices are discriminatory, but they are also expensive. **Each year, the school-to-prison pipeline in NYC costs more than \$746.8 million. This figure includes a minimum of \$397.6 million in direct investments through the city budget and \$349.1 million in social costs, which include \$108 million in lost tax revenue.**²²

While astonishing, these figures still vastly undercount many of the direct costs of this system which are obscured by a lack of data. These unknown costs include the use of metal detectors and cameras, as well as the costs of litigation and incarceration. In addition, while the School Safety Division budget is more than \$357.1 million, its personnel execute less than 12 percent of all the arrests, summonses, juvenile reports and other interventions in schools, leaving much of the personnel and administrative costs unknown.²³

The Young People’s School Justice Agenda

Young people are at the forefront of a growing movement demanding that New York City divest from punitive, ineffective, costly, and discriminatory disciplinary policies, and instead invest in creating schools that respond to student needs and provide all students with access to opportunities necessary to thrive in school and beyond. The Young People’s School Justice Agenda, developed by youth leaders, highlights the vision for supportive and inclusive schools.

The Young People’s School Justice Agenda Calls on New York City to:

- **Divest from over-policing young people** by removing police officers and metal detectors; ending arrests, summonses, and juvenile reports for all non-criminal violations and misdemeanors; and creating alternatives to arrests and incarceration for students charged with felonies.

*** This report uses “long-term suspensions” to refer to Superintendent Suspensions, which are between five and 180 days. “Suspensions lasting up to five days” refers to Principal Suspensions.

- **Invest in supportive programs** by implementing restorative practices citywide;²⁴ creating a mental health service continuum; increasing the number of trained and supervised guidance counselors and social workers; and providing culturally responsive education.
- **Invest in opportunities for students to thrive** by creating a universal youth jobs program; providing reduced-fare MetroCards for all low-income residents, and free unlimited MetroCards for students; supporting College Access programs; and providing free, high-quality public higher education at CUNY.
- **Change policies to help create safe and inclusive schools** by expunging students' criminal and discipline records; clearing outstanding warrants from summonses; eliminating suspensions for defying authority; mandating guidance interventions before the use of suspensions; limiting long-term suspension to 20 days; and fulfilling a ban on suspending students in Kindergarten through third grade.

New York City's *divestment* from the School-to-Prison Pipeline, would provide at a minimum **\$397,646,303** that could be *re-invested* in:

Supportive Programs

Restorative Practices

\$66,000,000

Mental Health Service Continuum

\$7,725,000

Culturally Responsive Education

\$60,000,000

Guidance Counselors and Social Workers

Opportunities for Students to Thrive

Universal Youth Jobs

\$163,000,000

Reduced-fare MetroCards for Low-Income New Yorkers

\$115,000,000

College Access Programs

\$15,000,000

Free, High-Quality Public Higher Education at CUNY

Free Unlimited MetroCards for Students

