



MASS INCARCERATION AND THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE



Discussion Brief

The school to prison pipeline is the trend wherein school-age children are pushed from the public school system into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The school to prison pipeline furthers the societal issue of mass incarceration because increasing populations of people are incarcerated at younger ages. The problem begins in an uneven distribution of resources and money in public schools. These inadequate and insufficient resources create a second-hand environment of learning, leading many students to drop out or disengage. In addition, zero-tolerance policies in schools criminalize nonviolent offenses which would typically be handled administratively. Often, police instead of faculty members are relied upon to enforce discipline in school hallways, leading to a rise in school-based arrests and charges for relatively minor infractions. Rates of suspension and expulsion have significantly increased according to the ACLU, funneling students further into the pipeline. This pipeline targets those with learning disabilities, students with histories of poverty, abuse, or neglect, children of color and minorities. Once children are involved in the justice system, they tend to be denied basic constitutional rights. For example, 80% of court-involved children do not have lawyers. Additionally, students who find themselves in juvenile detention centers often have access to very few educational resources. This creates a barrier for re-entry into society and push these students into a cycle of crime and arrests. We must resist the school to prison pipeline in order to promote a more equitable society, prevent mass incarceration, and invest in the lives of children, regardless of race or socioeconomic class.



Discussion Questions

1. Have you personally witnessed, seen or read in the media about any instances of school to prison pipeline?
2. How can the barrier for re-entry of students into society be eased?
3. If you were to write a letter to your Congress representative concerning the school to prison pipeline, what would be a solution you would propose?



Activity

Watch the TEDx Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBhMTXnw6xU>, regarding Kiera Wilmot's felony charges and experience. Research Ahmed Mohamed's clock incident, Dominick Green's cyber hacking charges, and Salecia Johnson's arrest. How can simple pranks and misunderstandings be framed negatively and escalate to the point where school age children are severely charged and punished? Think about a minor infraction or disciplinary measure that you have witnessed in school and think about how that incident can be retold and reframed as a crime.