

The School-to-Prison Conveyor: Intervening Early and Preventing Criminalization of Youth

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Abstract- *The school-to-prison conveyor is a significant problem driven by the practices which push students and policies that helps in regulation, especially from the marginalized communities, without educational environments and are involved in the criminal justice system. Factors involve zero-tolerance policies, disproportionate disciplinary actions, criminalization of minor infractions, a presence of the resource officers and police in schools to contribute in this issue. The article focuses on addressing this issue which requires early intervention and prevention strategies. Implementing restorative justice programs, Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and providing mental health services can create a more supportive school environment². Engaging parents and the community, reforming school policies, and training teachers to recognize and address implicit bias are essential steps. Additionally, creating inclusive and supportive school climates and adopting alternative disciplinary approaches can significantly reduce the negative impacts of the conveyor. Successful case studies have shown that these interventions can lead to positive outcomes, underscoring the need for federal and state policy changes and local school district initiatives. Focusing on early intervention and prevention can help demolish the school-to-prison conveyor and will also create a more supportive along with an equitable educational system for all students.*

I.INTRODUCTION

The school-to-prison conveyor, a term describing the troubling national trend of those children being channelized through the public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems, has its roots deeply embedded in several early laws and policies.

This systemic issue has evolved over decades, shaped by a series of legislative actions, social policies, and administrative decisions that have disproportionately affected marginalized and minority youth. Understanding these early laws is essential for grasping the complexities of the school-to-prison conveyor and developing effective strategies to dismantle it.

Origins and Early Laws

The idea of the school-to-prison conveyor can be traced back to the mid-20th century, during which the American educational and judicial systems began adopting increasingly punitive approaches to student behaviour. A significant catalyst was the rise of the "tough on crime" movement in the 1980s and 1990s, which saw a shift towards harsher penalties for criminal behaviour, including that of juveniles. During this period, zero-tolerance policies³ were implemented in schools, which mandated predetermined, typically severe consequences for specific offenses, regardless of the individual circumstances or context of the behaviour.

The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994

One of the significant legislative action that contributed to the school-to-prison conveyor was the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. This law mandated that schools receiving a federal funding must expel any of the student being found bringing a firearm to the school for at least one year is a federal law. While the intention was to create safer school environments by

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² Curran FC (2016). Estimating the effect of state zero tolerance laws on exclusionary discipline, racial discipline gaps, and student behaviour. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 38, 647–668.

³ American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? American Psychologist, 63, 852–862.

reducing gun violence, the implementation of this law had broader implications. It paved the way for the adoption of zero tolerance policies across various infractions beyond firearms, including possession of drugs and involvement in physical altercations. The strictness of these policies resulted in students facing harsh penalties, such as long-term suspension or expulsion, for relatively minor offenses. This significantly increased their likelihood of dropping out and becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

Zero Tolerance Policies

The extensive adoption of such zero tolerance policies in the 1990s was a key factor in the growth of the school-to-prison conveyor. These policies, originally designed to address serious offenses like drug possession and weapons in schools, soon extended to a wide array of behaviours, including truancy, dress code violations, and even minor classroom disruptions. The uniform enforcement of these policies frequently led to excessively harsh penalties for students of colour and those with disabilities. Research indicates that most of the African-American students are three times higher or more likely to face suspension or expelled compared to their white peers for similar infractions. The punitive nature of zero tolerance policies contributed to a significant rise in school-based arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system, further entrenching the conveyor.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997

Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was initially enacted to protect the rights of students with the disabilities and also guarantees them access to a free and appropriate public education, the 1997 amendments introduced provisions that led to unintended consequences. These amendments included disciplinary measures that allowed schools to remove students with disabilities from their regular educational setting for up to 45 days if they committed

certain offenses, such as possession of drugs or weapons or inflicting serious bodily injury. Although intended to maintain a safe learning environment, these provisions made it easier for schools to exclude students with disabilities, often without providing the necessary support services. This exclusionary practice contributed to the criminalization of students with disabilities, many of whom were already vulnerable due to their educational and behavioural needs.

School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs

The 1990s also witnessed a substantial rise in presence of the law enforcement officers in schools, commonly referred to as School Resource Officers (SROs). Initially introduced to enhance school safety and build positive relationships between students and law enforcement, SRO programs quickly became a double-edged sword. While the presence of SROs was intended to deter serious criminal activity and provide a sense of security, their role often expanded to handling routine disciplinary matters traditionally managed by school administrators. This shift resulted in the criminalization of minor infractions, such as disruptive behaviour, which would previously have been addressed through internal school disciplinary procedures. The heightened law enforcement presence in schools resulted in more school-based arrests, disproportionately affecting minority students and contributing to the school-to-prison conveyor.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, a major federal legislation, aimed to enhance education and its relatable outcomes by holding the schools accountable for students performance through a method of standardized testing. Despite its commendable goals, the implementation of NCLB⁴ had several unintended consequences that worsened the school-to-prison conveyor. Schools under pressure to meet performance benchmarks sometimes resorted to excluding low-performing students through

⁴ According to Professor James Ryan, “the temptation to exclude low-performing students, enhanced by the NCLBA, can hardly be denied: One less student performing below the proficiency level increases the overall percentage of students who have hit that benchmark.” Ryan, at 969-70; see also NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE & EDUC. FUND, at 5 (explaining

that accountability laws encourage schools to exclude students from school whom school officials believe may bring down the school’s test scores); Darling-Hammond, at 252 (“Perhaps the most adverse, unintended consequence of NCLB’s accountability strategy is that it undermines safety nets for struggling students rather than expanding them.”).

suspensions, expulsions, or referrals to alternative schools to boost overall test scores. This practice, known as "pushout," disproportionately affected minority and low-income students, who were more likely to struggle academically due to various socioeconomic factors. The emphasis on high-stakes testing also led to increased stress and pressure on students and educators, contributing to a punitive school climate that prioritized compliance over support.

State-Level Legislation

In addition to federal laws, various state-level legislation and policies further entrenched the school-to-prison conveyor. Many states adopted their own versions of zero tolerance policies, often extending beyond federal mandates to include a broader range of behaviours deemed unacceptable. For instance, some states implemented mandatory expulsion policies for students involved in fights, even when the incidents did not involve weapons. These state laws reinforced the punitive approach to school discipline, leading to higher rates of suspension, expulsion, and juvenile justice referrals. Furthermore, the lack of consistency in state laws regarding school discipline and the absence of due process protections for students exacerbated the issue, leaving many students without adequate recourse or support.

Social and Racial Implications

The intersection of these early laws and policies with broader social and racial dynamics cannot be overlooked. The punitive measures embedded in zero tolerance policies, coupled with the discretionary

power of school administrators and law enforcement officers, often resulted in discriminatory practices. Implicit bias and racial stereotypes played a significant role in the disproportionate targeting of minority students for disciplinary actions. African American and Latino students, in particular, faced higher rates of suspension, expulsion, and arrest compared to their white peers. These disparities were exacerbated by socioeconomic factors, as students from low-income families often lacked access to legal representation and advocacy, making them more susceptible to the school-to-prison conveyor.

The Role of Advocacy and Reform Efforts

Recognizing the detrimental impact of these early laws and policies, advocacy groups, educators, and policymakers have been working to reform the disciplinary landscape in schools. Organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Funds⁵ have led efforts to challenge zero tolerance policies and advocate for the restorative justice practices. These practices focused on repairing the harm and also addressing the root causes of a behaviour through dialogue and helps in community involvement, rather than punitive measures. Schools that have implemented restorative justice practices have seen significant reductions in suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests, demonstrating the potential of alternative approaches to disrupt the school-to-prison conveyor.

Legislative Reforms and Future Directions

⁵ FLA. STATE CONFERENCE NAACP, ADVANCEMENT PROJECT & NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUC. FUND, INC., ARRESTING DEVELOPMENT: ADDRESSING THE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE CRISIS IN FLORIDA 6 (2006) [hereinafter ARRESTING DEVELOPMENT], http://b.3cdn.net/advancement/e36d17097615e7c612_bbm6vub0w.pdf (stating that 103 during the 2004–2005 school year, there were 26,990 school-based referrals to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and seventy-six percent of those referrals were for disorderly conduct, trespassing, and fighting without a weapon); ACTION FOR CHILDREN, FROM PUSH OUT TO LOCK UP: NORTH CAROLINA'S ACCELERATED SCHOOL-TOPRISON PIPELINE

9–10 (2013), http://www.ncchild.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/05/2013_STPP-FINAL.pdf. (“Students were most commonly referred to the juvenile justice system for low-level offenses.”); JUSTICE POLICY INST., EDUCATION UNDER ARREST: THE CASE AGAINST POLICE IN SCHOOLS 15 (2011) [hereinafter EDUCATION UNDER ARREST], http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest_fullreport.pdf (observing that during the 2007–08 school year in Jefferson County, Alabama, ninety-six percent of students referred to juvenile court were for misdemeanours that included disorderly conduct and fighting without a weapon).

In recent years, legislative efforts at both federal and state levels have sought to address the school-to-prison conveyor. The law i.e. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, has succeeded No Child Left Behind (NCLB), incorporated measures designed to decrease reliance on exclusionary discipline and foster positive school environments. Additionally, several states have enacted laws to limit the use of suspensions and expulsions, particularly for minor infractions, and to promote the use of restorative practices. These legislative reforms represent important steps towards dismantling the school-to-prison conveyor, but continued vigilance and advocacy are necessary to ensure their effective implementation and to address ongoing disparities.

As a result, the early laws and policies that contributed to the school-to-prison conveyor have left a lasting impact on both the American educational and judicial systems. From the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 and the emergence of zero-tolerance policies to amendments to IDEA and the establishment of School Resource Officer (SRO) programs⁶, these legislative actions have shaped a disciplinary environment that disproportionately affects marginalized and minority youth. The focus on punitive measures, combined with implicit bias and socioeconomic factors, has led to the criminalization of student behaviour and the exclusion of vulnerable students from educational opportunities. Tackling the school-to-prison conveyor requires a holistic approach, including legislative reform, the adoption of restorative justice practices, and a commitment to equity and inclusion in education. By examining and addressing the early laws that contributed to this issue, we can endeavour to create more equitable and a supportive system of education for all students.

The school-to-prison conveyor has been shaped by various laws and policies over the years, but significant changes have also occurred in the past two

decades as awareness of the issue has grown. These legislative changes and policy reforms have aimed to mitigate the negative impacts of the earlier punitive measures and address the underlying factors contributing to the criminalization of youth. Understanding these post-laws is crucial for comprehending the progress made and the ongoing challenges in dismantling the school-to-prison conveyor.

Post Legislative Reforms and Policy Changes

A key piece of legislation in recent years is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, which succeeded the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The ESSA sought to offer all states with greater flexibility in shaping their accountability systems while highlighting the significance of a supportive and inclusive school environment. In contrast to NCLB's heavy emphasis on standardized testing, which often resulted in punitive actions against underperforming schools and students, ESSA encourages states to incorporate non-academic factors, such as students engagement and school climate environment into the frameworks of accountability. This shift is significant as it recognizes the importance of creating a positive school environment that can prevent the criminalization of students.

In addition to ESSA, several states have enacted laws to reform their disciplinary policies and reduce the reliance on exclusionary practices like suspensions and expulsions. For example, California's Assembly Bill 420, passed in 2014, eliminated the use of "wilful defiance" as a reason for suspending students in grades K-3. This move was crucial because "wilful defiance" is a vague category that has been disproportionately applied to students of colour. By restricting its use, the law aims to reduce racial disparities in school discipline and keep more young children in the classroom⁷.

⁶ PETER FINN ET AL., U.S. DEP'T OF JUST., OFFICE OF CMTY. ORIENTED POLICING SERVS., A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING, MAINTAINING, AND SUCCEEDING WITH YOUR SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAM 51 (2005),

http://www.popcenter.org/Responses/school_police/PDFs/Finn_et_al_2005.pdf.

⁷ Higher Education: Gaps in Access and Persistence Study, NAT'L CTR. FOR EDUC. STATS., <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012046/chapter6.asp> (reviewing rigorous courses particularly math) (last visited Jan. 11, 2016); UNIV. OF CAL.

Another significant state-level reform is Texas Senate Bill 107, passed in 2013, which requires schools to implement positive behaviour interventions and supports (PBIS) and other evidence-based strategies to improve student behaviour. The bill also mandates that schools establish graduated sanctions for disciplinary infractions, ensuring that minor misbehaviours are met with appropriate and proportionate responses rather than automatic suspensions or expulsions. This law demonstrates an increasing acknowledgment of the need for a more supportive and rehabilitative approach to school discipline.

Restorative justice practices⁸ have also gained popularity as an alternative to all the traditional punitive measures. This practiced approach emphasized on repairing the harm and also helped in restoring relationships instead of merely punishing misbehaviour. Several states and school districts have adopted restorative justice programs to address student behaviour. For example, Oakland Unified School District in California implemented a district-wide restorative justice program that has led to significant reductions in suspensions, improved school climate, and better academic outcomes. These programs generally include facilitated dialogues between affected parties, community service, and other restorative activities that assist students in understanding an impact of their actions and making amendments.

A role of the law enforcement in the schools is also scrutinized and reformed in the various jurisdictions. The presence of school resource officers (SROs) has

been a contentious issue, as their involvement often leads to the criminalization of minor infractions. Some districts have taken steps to limit the role of SROs or remove them altogether. For instance, the Denver Public Schools Board of Education voted in 2020 to phase out SROs by the end of the 2020-2021⁹ school year, reallocating funds to support mental health services and restorative practices instead. This decision reflects a growing consensus that school safety can be better achieved through supportive measures rather than increased law enforcement presence.

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) was enacted in 1974¹⁰ and reauthorized multiple times, most recently in 2018, has also played a crucial role in addressing the school-to-prison conveyor. The JJDP sets standards for the treatment of juvenile offenders and encourages the use of alternatives to detention. The 2018 reauthorization included measures designed to reduce the use of detention for status offenses behaviours that are not considered crimes for adults, such as truancy and running away and to promote evidence-based practices that enhance outcomes for youth. By focusing on alternatives to incarceration and promoting rehabilitative approaches, the JJDP helps to reduce the criminalization of youth for behaviours that can often be addressed more effectively through community-based interventions.

The Department of Education at federal level and the Department of Justice issued joint guidance in 2014 aimed at addressing discriminatory discipline

UNDERGRADUATE WORK TEAM OF THE STUDY GROUP ON UNIVERSITY DIVERSITY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS 19 fig.6 (2007), http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/diversity/documents/07-diversity_report.pdf

⁸ Zehr H (2015). *The little book of restorative justice: Revised and updated*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

⁹ The Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue, *Restorative Discipline in Schools*, <http://www.utexas.edu/research/cswr/rji/rdinschools.html> (explaining the philosophy of restorative justice); see also Thalia N.C. González & Benjamin Cairns, *Moving Beyond Exclusion: Integrating Restorative*

Practices and Impacting School Culture in Denver Public Schools, in *JUSTICE FOR KIDS: KEEPING KINDS OUT OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM* 241, 241 (Nancy E. Dowd ed., 2011); see also González, (discussing use of restorative justice to repair harm and change behaviour, enhance school safety, and improve graduation rates)

¹⁰ OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION, *JUVENILE OFFENDERS AND VICTIMS: 2014 NATIONAL REPORT* 121 (Melissa Sickmund & Charles Puzanchera, eds. 2014), <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/nr2014/downloads/NR2014.pdf> [hereinafter OJJDP 2014 NATIONAL REPORT].

practices in schools. This guidance, part of the "Rethink School Discipline" initiative, provided schools with resources and recommendations for creating fair and effective discipline policies that do not disproportionately impact students of colour or those with disabilities. While this guidance was rescinded in 2018 under the Trump administration, it marked an important step towards recognizing and addressing the systemic biases which contributed to the school-to-prison conveyor.

Alongside these legislative and policy changes, numerous advocacy efforts have been undertaken to raise awareness and drive reform. Few of the organizations such as American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)¹¹, NAACP Legal defence and Educational Fund¹² and the National Centre for Youth Law have played a crucial role in exposing disparities in school discipline and pushing for policy changes at local, state, and federal levels. These groups have also offered legal support to students and families impacted by discriminatory discipline practices, working to safeguard their rights.

Data collection and transparency have also become critical tools in addressing the school-to-prison

conveyor. The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)¹³, managed by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, offers comprehensive data on school discipline practices, including expulsions, suspensions, and also referrals to the law enforcement. This data is disaggregated by race, gender, disability status, and other factors, allowing policymakers, researchers, and advocates to identify disparities and target interventions where they are most needed. Increased transparency and accountability in school discipline practices can help ensure that reforms are effectively implemented and that progress is monitored over time.

Mental health services and support systems are increasingly recognized as essential components of efforts to prevent the criminalization of youth. Schools are expanding their counselling and mental health services to address the underlying issues that often manifest as behavioural problems. By offering students access to mental health professionals and support systems, schools can address issues like trauma, anxiety, and depression, which may contribute to disruptive behaviour. Early identification and intervention can prevent these issues from escalating

¹¹ Stephen Pevar, Senior Staff Attorney, American Civil Liberties Union, Racial Justice Program

¹² FED. ADVISORY COMM. ON JUVENILE JUSTICE, ANNUAL REPORT 2010 10 (2010); NAACP LEGAL DEF. & EDUC. FUND, DISMANTLING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE 5 (2005), http://www.naacpldf.org/files/publications/Dismantling_the_School_to_Prison_Pipeline.pdf; Linda Darling-Hammond, Race, Inequality and Educational Accountability: The Irony of 'No Child Left Behind', 10 RACE, ETHNICITY & EDUC. 245, 252–255 (2007); James E. Ryan, The Perverse Incentives of the No Child Left Behind Act, 79 N.Y.U. L. REV. 932, 969–70 (2004); ADVANCEMENT PROJECT, supra note 119, at 28–33; Deborah Gordon Klehr, Addressing the Unintended Consequences of No Child Left Behind and Zero Tolerance: Better Strategies for Safe Schools and Successful Students, 16 GEO. J. ON POVERTY L. & POL'Y 585, 602–03 (2009); Michael P. Krezmien et al., Juvenile Court Referrals and the Public Schools: Nature and Extent of the Practice in Five States, 26 J. CONTEMP. CRIM. JUST. 273, 274 (2010).

¹³ U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC. OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, supra note 5, at 6. The CRDC data is corroborated by substantial additional localized data. See Russell J. Skiba, Mariella I. Arredondo & Natasha T. Williams, More than a Metaphor: The Contribution of Exclusionary Discipline to a School-to-Prison Pipeline, 47 EQUITY & EXCELLENCE IN EDUC. 546, 550 (2014); MATTHEW P. STEINBERG, ELAINE ALLENSWORTH & DAVID W. JOHNSON, STUDENT AND TEACHER SAFETY IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS: THE ROLES OF COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND SCHOOL SOCIAL ORGANIZATION 46 (2011) (maintaining that low-performing students are less likely to be engaged in school and more likely to be frustrated and misbehave); see also Matthew P. Steinberg, Elaine Allensworth & David W. Johnson, What Conditions Support Safety in Urban Schools?: The Influence of School Organizational Practices on Student and Teacher Reports of Safety in Chicago, in CLOSING THE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE GAP: EQUITABLE REMEDIES FOR EXCESSIVE EXCLUSION 118, 125 (Daniel J. Losen ed., 2015) (explaining that low-achieving students are less likely to be engaged and more likely to act out)

and reduce the need for punitive disciplinary measures.

Integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs in schools is a promising strategy. SEL programs teach students crucial skills such as conflict resolution, emotional regulation and empathy. While equipping the students with tools to manage the interactions and emotions, these programs can foster a positive school climate and reduce behavioural issues. Schools that have adopted SEL programs often report improvements in student behaviour, academic performance, and overall well-being.

Community involvement and partnerships are also essential in preventing the school-to-prison conveyor. Engaging parents, community organizations, and local stakeholders in school activities and decision-making can build a supportive network for students. Community-based programs and after-school activities offer positive outlets for students' energy and opportunities for personal growth. Strong connections between schools and communities can help address the broader social and economic factors contributing to the criminalization of youth.

In summary, the past two decades have seen significant legislative and policy reforms aimed at addressing the school-to-prison conveyor and preventing youth criminalization¹⁴. The shift from punitive to supportive and restorative approaches in school discipline, along with increased awareness and advocacy, has led to meaningful progress in creating more equitable and inclusive educational environments¹⁵. Despite these advances, challenges remain, and ongoing efforts are needed to ensure effective implementation of reforms and to provide all students with the support and opportunities they need to succeed. By focusing on early intervention, mental health services, restorative practices, and community involvement, we may work

towards demolishing the school-to-prison conveyor and can help in building a more just, equitable and a supportive educational system for all youth.

II. PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES

Addressing the school-to-prison conveyor requires a comprehensive strategy focusing on prevention and early intervention. Several key approaches are as follows:

1. Restorative Justice Practices: This emphasizes in repairing the harm and restoring relationships rather than focusing on punishment. This approach involves mediation, conflict resolution, and community service, encouraging students to take responsibility for their actions and understand the impact on others. Schools that have implemented restorative justice practices report reductions in suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests.

2. Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS): It is a proactive approach which helps to promote positive behaviour through reinforcement and support. By establishing clear expectations and providing consistent feedback, PBIS helps create a positive school climate. Schools using PBIS have seen improvements in student behaviour and academic performance, along with reductions in disciplinary actions.

3. Counselling and Mental Health Services: By providing an access to such services is an essential for addressing all the underlying issues that may contribute to behavioural problems. Schools should employ counsellors, social workers, and psychologists to support students' emotional and psychological well-being. Early identification and intervention can prevent minor issues from escalating into more serious problems.

¹⁴ Some of this report is taken from the following sources: Jason P. Nance, Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Tools for Change, __ ARIZ. ST. L. J. __ (forthcoming), http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2671447; Jason P. Nance, Schools, Police, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline, 93 WASH. U. L. REV. __ (forthcoming),

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2577333.

¹⁵ National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): What Is It and Why Should We Care?, THE ADVOCACY INST., http://www.advocacyinstitute.org/advocacyinaction/NAEP_SWDs.shtml.

4. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Educators need training to recognize and address implicit bias, cultural differences, and trauma-informed practices. Professional development programs should focus on equitable discipline strategies and building positive relationships with students. By equipping teachers with the skills to manage classrooms effectively, schools can reduce reliance on punitive measures.

5. **Parental and Community Engagement:** While engaging parents and all the community in school activities and their decision-making process helps to create a supportive environment for students. Schools should establish strong partnerships with families and community organizations to provide additional resources and support. Engaged communities can advocate for equitable policies & practices, helping to dismantle a school-to-prison conveyor.

III.POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective prevention also requires changes at the policy level. Some of the recommendations are:

1. **Reform Zero-Tolerance Policies:** Schools should transition from zero-tolerance policies to more flexible disciplinary approaches that take into account the context of each incident. Policies should prioritize keeping students in school and addressing behavioural issues through supportive measures.

2. **Limit the Role of SROs:** The role of SROs should be clearly defined, with a focus on safety rather than discipline. Schools should establish protocols to ensure that minor infractions are handled by educators, not law enforcement. Training for SROs on adolescent development and de-escalation techniques is also essential.

3. **Implement Data Tracking and Accountability Measures:** Schools should gather and analyse data on disciplinary actions to identify and address disparities. Transparency and accountability are crucial for ensuring that policies are applied fairly. Regular reviews of disciplinary data can help schools make informed decisions and adjust practices as needed.

4. **Increase Funding for Support Services:** Adequate funding for mental health services, counselling, and

restorative justice programs is essential. Policymakers should allocate resources to support these initiatives and ensure that schools have the necessary staff and training to implement them effectively.

5. **Promote Inclusive School Environments:** Schools should foster inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and promote a sense of belonging. This includes implementing culturally responsive curricula, supporting student-led initiatives, and addressing systemic biases that contribute to a school-to-prison conveyor.

IV.CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

The school-to-prison conveyor deputize for a critical intersection of education and justice, where disciplinary policies and practices contribute to the criminalization of youth, particularly those from marginalized communities. Intervening early and preventing the criminalization of youth require comprehensive and multifaceted strategies that address the root causes and systemic factors contributing to this conveyor. Overall, addressing the school-to-prison conveyor requires a concerted effort from educators, policymakers, communities, and advocacy groups. By focusing on early intervention, mental health services, restorative practices, and a community involvement, where we can build a more just, equitable and supportive educational system that enables all the students to succeed. These comprehensive strategies can help dismantle the school-to-prison conveyor and ensures that every student has the chance to flourish in a safe and in an inclusive learning environment.