

Breaking the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Education not Incarceration!

a syllabus developed for the
Regional School Assembly: Keeping Our Kids in the Classroom
#BreakthePipeline

Presented by
Educators for Social Justice
<http://www.educatorsforsocialjustice.org/>



Introduction

The “school-to-prison pipeline” is an alarming national trend wherein children -- mainly African American and Latino -- are pushed out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. This funnel starts with very young children and for this reason MCU and many other organizations have joined forces to #Keep Kids in School. This syllabus presents an introduction to some of the issues related to the school-to-prison pipeline. The audience for this syllabus includes parents, educators, and community members. Throughout the syllabus you will find a variety of reading materials – from newspaper articles, journal articles, books, websites, to documentaries and children’s literature. You will find across the syllabus that the following threads are addressed: practices and policies of institutionalized racism, the effects of racism, and examples of intervening in the school-to-prison pipeline. In order to break the school-to-prison pipeline, it is important to understand the complexity of institutionalized racism and how this plays out in classrooms, schools, juvenile detention centers, and in prisons. We also need examples of successful interventions. Throughout this syllabus, we have centralized the voices, narratives, and experiences of people of color. Each component includes a “Taking Action” section where people are encouraged to practice what they have learned and get involved with the fight for breaking the school-to-prison pipeline. The central idea is that children should be educated, not incarcerated.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline: An Overview

The materials in this section provide a basic overview of the school-to-prison pipeline. Many of the issues addressed in this first section will be brought up again throughout the syllabus.

- Sokolower, J. (2011/2012). Schools and the New Jim Crow: An Interview with Michelle Alexander. Rethinking Schools, 26, 2, Retrieved from http://www.rethinkingschools.org//cmshandler.asp?archive/26_02/26_02_sokolower.shtml

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Members

- Christensen, L. (2011/2012). The classroom-to-prison-pipeline. Rethinking Schools, 26, 2,

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Members.

- Flannery, M. E, (January 5, 2005) The School-to-prison-pipeline: Time to shut it down. NeaToday, Retrieved from <http://neatoday.org/2015/01/05/school-prison-pipeline-time-shut/>

Audience: Teachers and administrators



Note: This is an article written for teachers and administrators about the dangers of Zero Tolerance and the need for more effective and equitable discipline practices.

- FRONTLINE: Prison State | School-to-Prison Pipeline PBS documentary retrieved from <http://ninenet.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/fl32-soc-psjuvexperts/prison-state-school-to-prison-pipeline/>
- Blumenthal, D. (2015). Prison state: School to prison pipeline. WGBH Educational Foundation.

Audience: Secondary students

This documentary was adapted from the PBS series, “Prison State” for students in grades 6-12. It examines the message that students in some areas get that prison will be a part of their lives as it was with their family members before them and how that leads to the overrepresentation of African Americans in jails in the US. The site also has questions for discussion.

Take Action!

1. Write a letter to your school board members, superintendent and newspaper about your local school districts engagement (or lack of engagement) with the #Keeping Kid in Schools initiative
2. Join or start a Bias Motivated Incident Team model
3. Join the efforts to #keepkidsinclass by e-mailing keepkidsinclass@gmail.com

Criminalization and Imprisonment of Children

Over 2,000 community members in the region identified eliminating Pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade out of school suspensions as a signature call to action of the Ferguson Commission in 2015. The materials in this section provide an overview of the practices and policies, which result in criminalizing Black and Brown youth in the United States.

- Fuentes, A. (2011/2012). Arresting development: Zero tolerance and the criminalization of children. *Rethinking Schools*, 26, 2.

Audience: Teachers, Parents, Community Members

- Giroux, H. (2015). Terrorizing students: The criminalization of children in the US police state. *The New York Times*, Wednesday, 11, November 2015.

Audience: Parents, teachers, community members, high school students

- Morris, M. (2015). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools*. New York: The New York Press.

Audience: Parents, teachers, community members, high school students

According to Morris, “This book presents narratives that I hope will inspire us all to think about the multiple ways in which racial, gender, and socioeconomic inequity converge to marginalize Black girls in their learning environments” (p.13). She examines these narratives that teachers and other school stakeholders have about the collective identity of Black girls which cause African American girls to be disproportionately receive the kind of discipline which leads to delinquency and incarceration.

- Morrison, T. & Morrison, S. (1999). *The Big Box*. NY: Hyperion Books

Audience: Children

This is a children’s book that focuses on how children’s differences can be interpreted by educators. It offers a repetitive refrain and, ultimately, encourages children and teachers to embrace difference.

- Elementary Genocide – Documentary
<http://thesource.com/2014/01/13/elementary-genocide-documentary-tackles-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-dilemma/>

Audience: Teachers, Community Members, Parents

Take Action!

1. Recognize that a culture of racism harms white children, too. It keeps them separated from their classmates and from being fully human. It may cause them to harm others without intending to and keeps them from developing the skills, practices, and empathy to live fully in a multiracial society. It also cuts them off from the diverse wisdom, history, and narratives that are the fabric of America. WeStories is a group committed to engaging white families in multicultural children’s literature so they engage productively and confidently with issues of race, racism, and anti-racism. Become part of WeStories: <http://www.westories.org/>
2. Speak up when you see a school practice or policy that is has a harmful impact on historically marginalized children
3. Commit to “reading” practices and policies from the perspective of someone who has experiences oppression
4. Interrupt hurtful language
5. Insist that your local school district proactively interprets the state statute that makes fights on school property a Felony. Contact Dietra Wise with MCU (revdwise@yahoo.com) and ask for an example of a Memorandum of Understanding between the police and the school district.



The Juvenile Court System

This section includes fictional and nonfictional works to give readers insight into the experience of those going through the juvenile justice system.

- Center for Court Innovation, Kids, Courts and Communities: Lessons from the Red Hook Youth Court. Retrieved from <http://www.courtinnovation.org/research/kids-courts-and-communities-lessons-red-hook-youth-court>

Audience: Educators, Parents, Community Members

- Connecticut Governor Dannel P. Malloy, Address to Justice Summit, September 2016
<https://youtu.be/PK7kSrA09sl>

Audience: Educators, Parents, Community Members

Dannel P. Malloy, the governor of Connecticut, was the keynote speaker at Justice Innovations in Times of Change, a summit sponsored by the Center for Court Innovation and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance in September 2016. The governor spoke about reforms under way in his state that have raised the age of criminal responsibility to 18, reduced the use of incarceration and lowered crime to levels not seen since the 1960s.

- Myers, W.D. (1999). *Monster*. New York: Harper Collins.

Audience: Young Adults

National Book Award finalist and Coretta Scott King Award winner, *Monster*, is written as a screen play and journal entries from Steve Harmon, a 16-year-old in juvenile detention on trial for murder. The movie of Steve's creation traces his experience in jail and his trial.

- Myers, W.D. (2010). *Lockdown*. New York: Harper Collins.

Audience: Young Adults

Lockdown is a National Book Award finalist and Coretta Scott King Award winner telling the story of Reese in first person. Reese is in the second year of his sentence at a juvenile correction facility for steal prescription pads when defending a weaker boy gets him in trouble. He is afraid that he will ended up in an adults' prison, but he gets a chance.

- Phillips, C. (May 14, 2016). 'These systems are connected': MCU calls for change in school discipline, juvenile courts. Interview on St. Louis Public Radio. Retrieved from:
<http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/these-systems-are-connected-mcu-calls-change-school-discipline-juvenile-courts>

- Schien, Z.(August 13, 2015). Racial Discrimination & Failure of Due Process Among Constitutional Violations in St. Louis Family Court, DOJ Report Says. The National Juvenile Justice Network. Retrieved from: <http://www.njjn.org/article/racial-discrimination--failure-of-due-process-among-constitutional-violations-in-st--louis-family-court-doj-report-says>

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Members

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2016).Developing solutions to build a brighter future for children, families, and communities. Retrieved from: <http://www.aecf.org/>

This website includes many resources on the justice system and suggested reforms. It also offers opportunities to volunteer.

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Members

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation.(Sept. 28, 2015) Lesbian, gay, bisexual,and transgender youth in the juvenile justice system: A guide to juvenile detention reform #11.JDAI Practice Guides Collection Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/resources/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-youth-in-the-juvenile-justice-system>.

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Member

- The Juvenile Justice Network. (2016). About Us. Retrieved from <http://www.njjn.org/article/racial-discrimination--failure-of-due-process-among-constitutional-violations-in-st--louis-family-court-doj-report-says>

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Members

Overview of The Juvenile Justice Network: “The National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) leads a movement of state-based juvenile justice reform organizations and alumni of its Youth Justice Leadership Institute to fight for a fairer youth justice system that’s appropriate for youth and their families. NJJN advocates for policies and practices that treat youth in trouble with the law with dignity and humanity and which strengthen them, their families and their communities” (NJJN)

Take Action!

1. Volunteer with an organization such as Annie E. Casey to help close youth detention centers that are harming our young people.
2. Volunteer with an organization such as the Juvenile Justice Network to fight for a fairer youth justice system.
3. Educate yourself and others Go to Teaching Tolerance and view the videos and materials in their “Restoring Justice” tool kit. <http://www.tolerance.org/toolkit/toolkit-restoring-justice>

4. At the request of public districts, the Midwest Equity Assistance Center staff provides a variety of free services including professional development workshops, seminars, in-service training, and information for parents, teachers, and administrators. Phone: 785-532-6408; www.meac.org

Mass Incarceration

The materials in this section explore why the US imprisons so many more of her citizens than any other nation.

- Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York: The New York Press.

Alexander explains how the US criminal justice system has created a contemporary racial caste system in the name of the War on Drugs through the mass incarceration of African American men. Laws unfairly target African American men. Those labelled a felon are denied voting, housing, education and employment rights. She asserts that mass incarceration today serves much the same purpose as pre-Civil War slavery and the post-Civil War Jim Crow laws, and calls for a major social movement to end it.

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Members

- Sojoyner, M. (2016) *First strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Member

“Damien M. Sojoyner fills a significant gap in literature by problematizing the school-to-prison pipeline, offering a more nuanced analytical frame than the one represented in most contemporary popular discourse. *First Strike* helps us understand what is happening to young people in under-resourced schools and the ways that their experience reflects an eroding commitment to education in favor of punishment” Beth E. Richie, University of Illinois at Chicago

- Stevenson, B. (2014). *Just mercy: A story of justice and redemption*. New York: Spiegel & Grau.

A memoir by Bryan Stevenson, a lawyer and the founder of the Equal Justice League which defends the poor and unjustly accused. The record of one of his first legal cases in which he defends Walter McMillan who was found guilty of a murder that he did not commit. Stevens explores the concepts of love and mercy as he faces the injustices of the US legal system.

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Members

- Stevenson, B. (March, 2012). Bryan Stevenson: We need to talk about injustice [video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Member

Stevens says that the opposite of poverty is not wealth but justice. Stevens discusses his own background and his experiences fighting for those who cannot find justice in the US Justice System.

- 13th. DuVernay, A. (2016). 13th. United States: Netflix.

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Member

13th refers to the 13th Amendment which abolished slavery except for criminals. Now the total number African Americans imprisoned has surpassed the number enslaved in the 1850s. DuVerney, director of the movie Selma, traces the racism of the US justice system from the time of slavery through this time of mass incarceration.

Take Action!

1. Know your Rights. Visit the ACLU's website to learn more about your rights if you are stopped or detained by the police, immigration officials, or FBI. <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/what-do-if-youre-stopped-police-immigration-agents-or-fbi>
2. Challenge your own notions of who is in or prisons today. Educate yourself on the connection between race, poverty and imprisonment by exploring the resources above.
3. The Ferguson Report calls for more transparency in the Ferguson Court procedures particularly to stop people from being imprisoned because they are unable to pay excessive fines. (Ferguson Report, p. 97-102). Keep track of the Ferguson Police website.

Racism, Policing, and Public Policies

Many of the materials in this section address the public policies, which enforce and reproduce institutionalized racism. They also focus on the impacts of institutionalized racism including poverty, hunger, and trauma.

- Boyles, A. (2015). Race, Place and Suburban Policing: Too Close for Comfort. CA: University of California Press.

Audience: Parents, teachers, community members

This book contextualizes a case study of Meachum Park in Kirkwood, MO - a historically African American neighborhood -- in the context of national racialized policing, nationally profiled shootings, and racialized violence. She shows the history of struggle over land, power, and justice through interviews, document analysis, and observations. The residents of Meachum Park experienced recent eminent domain and re-segregation; all



the while, the public officials claim there is “no problem with race.” She argues that police interactions are an extension of the consent of the community. To change, we must change the racist culture of our communities.

- Rothstein, R. (2014). The making of Ferguson: Public policies at the root of the troubles. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from: <http://www.epi.org/publication/making-ferguson/>

Audience: Parents, teachers, community members, high school students

- A Place at the Table – Documentary

Audience: Parents, teachers, community members, middle, and high school students

- Flake, S. (2005) Bang! New York: Hyperion.

Audience: 8th grade and up.

This book deals with the trauma of institutionalized racism that plays out in violent crime. Mann’s brother was shot on the front steps of his own house. He can’t get the sight of the blood out of his head. His mother stops eating. His father says he is too soft, and tries to train him to be stronger, but that all goes wrong.

- Booth, C. (2006). Tyrell. New York: Scholastic, PUSH.

Audience: YA fiction, 9th grade and older

Los Angeles Times Book Award winner and ALA Best Book for Young Adults, Tyrell, is the gripping story of a fifteen-year-old African American boy whose father is in prison for the third time. He is living in a roach-infested shelter with his seven-year-old brother whom he must protect and support financially, so he drops out of school. His mother pressures him to sell drugs to make money. He doesn’t want to end up in jail, so he has another plan.

- Volponi, P. (2005) Black and white. New York: Penguin.

Audience: YA

Multiple award winner, Black and White, tells the story of Eddie who is white and Marcus who is black. They are best friends and the leaders of the basketball team until they make a terrible mistake which brings them in contact with the criminal justice system.

Take Action!

1. According to The Ferguson Report, “Lack of Community Engagement Increases the Likelihood of Discriminatory Policing and Damages Public Trust” (p.86). Join efforts to connect the policy and community. Contact your local police department to see what you can do to help.

2. Another suggestion of The Ferguson Report is that teachers, administrators and parents form teams with the SRO at your school to share best practices in “maintaining a learning environment without unnecessarily treating disciplinary issues as criminal matters or resulting in the routine imposition of lengthy suspensions” (The Ferguson Report, p.94).
3. Call for justice and demand that Congress pass the Preventing Tragedies Between Police and Communities Act of 2016.
4. Hold your educational leaders accountable! Sign this Open Letter which requests all of the school districts and educational leaders in the St. Louis metro region to put time, energy, resources, and intention between ending racism in schools and communities:
<http://www.dearstlouis.com/open-letters/dear-st-louis-regional-school-leaders>

Restorative Justice & Anti-Oppressive Practices

The materials in this section focus on alternatives to the traditional discipline practices and zero tolerance policies that have helped create the School-to-Prison Pipeline.

- Classen, R., & Classen, R. (2008) Discipline that restores: Strategies to create respect, cooperation, and responsibility in the classroom. South Carolina: Book Surge Publishing.

Audience: Teachers, Administrators

Classen and Classen provide a rationale and strategies to practice school discipline that fosters respect and cooperation instead of intimidation.

- Gonzalez, T. (2012) Keeping kids in schools: Restorative justice, punitive discipline, and the school to prison pipeline. Journal of Law and Education, 41 (2), 281-335.

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Members

- PBIS.org (2015) Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. Retrieved from <https://www.pbis.org/>.

Audience: Teachers, Administrators

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, PBIS is “based on principles of applied behavior analysis and the prevention approach and values of positive behavior support.” This website provides links to information: videos, plans, blueprints and events on this positive rather punitive system for creating behaviors in schools that foster learning.

- Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2011). Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline Through Racial Literacy Development in Teacher Education. Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, 8 (2), 116-120.

Audience: Parents, Teachers, Community Members



- Smull, E., Wachtel, J. & Wachtel, T. (2012) Family power: Engaging and collaborating with families. Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: International Institute for Restorative Practices.
This book helps stakeholders become better partners with the families of their clients and students to work in the best interest of children using restorative practices.
- Teaching Tolerance. (2016) Toolkit for restoring justice. Teaching Tolerance. Retrieved from <http://www.tolerance.org/toolkit/toolkit-restoring-justice>.

Audience: Teachers, Administrators

This is a lesson plan on the Teaching Tolerance website to introduce students to restorative practices including videos illustrating the methods. It also links to some other activities on restorative practices.

Take Action!

1. Teachers and administrators, learn about and implement the more positive discipline strategies above and try some in your classroom.
2. If you are already using Restorative Practices or PBIS, share with your colleagues.

For more information, contact Educators for Social Justice: esj.stl@gmail.com