

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

## Suspended Chances: An Examination of the School-to-Prison Pipeline in Memphis Public Schools

Item Type	Other
Authors	Perkins, Lexi M.
Publisher	Memphis, Tenn. : Rhodes College
Rights	<p>All materials in this collection are copyrighted by Rhodes College and subject to Title 17 of the U.S. Code. This documentation is provided for online research and access purposes only. Permission to use, copy, modify, distribute and present this material, without fee, and without written agreement, is hereby granted for educational, non-commercial purposes only. The Rhodes College Archives reserves the right to decide what constitutes educational and commercial use. In all instances of use, acknowledgement must be given to Rhodes College Archives and Special Collections, Memphis, TN. For information regarding permission to publish this material, please email the Archives at <a href="mailto:archives@rhodes.edu">archives@rhodes.edu</a>.</p>
Download date	2026-03-17 00:43:15
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10267/24083">http://hdl.handle.net/10267/24083</a>

SUSPENDED CHANCES: AN EXAMINATION OF THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE  
IN MEMPHIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Lexi M. Perkins

Rhodes Institute for Regional Studies

Advisor: Dr. Natalie Person

August 1, 2014

SUSPENDED CHANCES: AN EXAMINATION OF THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE  
IN MEMPHIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Since the beginning of public education, schools have been expected to set and enforce rules that protect both the students' and teacher's health, safety, and well-being while simultaneously creating a productive learning environment for all students. As society has changed over the last century and public schools have become more prevalent, policy makers and practitioners continue to struggle with how and when to discipline students. Recently, there has been a significant amount of media uproar regarding the unnecessary over-use of out-of-school suspension<sup>1</sup>(Hastings, 2013). Suspension and expulsion can have detrimental social and psychological consequences such as academic disengagement and maladaptive or delinquent behaviors.

This paper will explore the disciplinary policies in Memphis public schools that seemingly prioritize punishment over education. Excessively rigid educational environments for students promote negative behaviors and are not appropriate for school-age children. Students are not being prepared for college or a career in an educational environment that does not promote creativity, risk-taking, and dedication. Instead, through the overly harsh, inflexible, and often prison-like policies, students are conditioned to accept being treated as delinquents rather than being encouraged to succeed. Current policy and educators' attitudes must change in order to remedy this problem and to prepare adolescents for success, rather than the criminal justice system.

---

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, out-of-school suspension, and suspension refers to any period lasting no longer than 10 days where a student is not allowed to return to school.

A paradox exists within the implementation of policy and student outcomes. Strict and inflexible policies (meant to create a controlled, high-performing student body) lead to higher rates of suspension and expulsion, while schools that use discretion and flexibility in the implementation of policy, have more positive behavioral and disciplinary outcomes (Arcia, 2006). Many schools across the nation have adopted the view (consciously and less deliberately) that it is more important to control students' behavior than it is to educate them (Kasprisin, 2013). The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the phenomenon of pushing students out of school and into the criminal justice system through policies that criminalize students and disenfranchise students from the educational system (NAACP, 2014).

### **Components of The Pipeline**

#### **Exclusionary Discipline**

Exclusionary discipline policies are the primary component of the school-to-prison pipeline. There is no data that indicates suspension and expulsion improve student behavior (Chute, 2013). Though, schools with high rates of suspension and expulsion are associated with lower achievement (Chute, 2013). Policies that push students out of the classroom inherently deny students the right to an education under the guise of necessary and effective discipline (Kasprisin, 2013). Exclusionary policies, when used excessively or inappropriately, are easily categorized as civil rights issues. Teachers and administrators have the ability to choose the students that they will and will not educate through the implementation of exclusionary discipline (Losen & Martinez, 2013; NAACP, 2014).

## **Police in Schools**

The increasingly common police presence in school is a significant contributor to the pipeline as well. Classroom disruptions that traditionally have only required a teacher's attention are now handled by the in-school police, which are commonly referred to as School Resource Officers (SRO's) (Rethinking Schools, 2012). Often, the duties of SRO's are not clearly defined, which leads to inappropriate punitive action. SRO's are meant to handle infractions that involve the law, like weapons, drugs, etc., and to prevent further criminal acts. It is not uncommon though, for SRO's to get involved in disciplining students for breaking school rules, like disrespect or tardiness (Kasprisin, 2013).

With police involvement, school arrests become more common and the school-to-prison pipeline affects more students (NAACP, 2014). A 2012 study states that the amount of school-based arrests has risen over the past few decades. Misbehaviors that have traditionally been handled by the teacher or other school personnel, can now involve the in-school police officers, which has resulted in an increase of school-based arrests and far more severe consequences (Dahlberg, 2012). Most of the arrests are of Black and Latino boys, for non-violent infractions (Dahlberg, 2012). Nationally, the criminalization of disruption and disrespect is a substantial contributor to the school-to-prison pipeline (Elias, 2013).

## **School Quality**

The quality of public schools is an equal contributor to the school-to-prison pipeline. Schools that are underfunded and have inexperienced teachers and administrators, tend to have higher rates of exclusionary discipline (ACLU; Noltemeyer et. al., 2010). Teachers' experience and skill in classroom management seem to dictate the number of disciplinary referrals (Skiba et. al., 2012). Likewise, Principals who experienced are more likely to try alternative disciplinary

tactics, rather than resorting to exclusionary discipline (Christie et. al., 2004; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Additionally, those schools that combine under-qualified teachers, overcrowding, out dated or too few textbooks, and lack of special education services, are often unable to meet the educational needs of students (ACLU). Students may be uninterested in, or unable to connect with the curriculum, which is associated with disengagement and misbehavior (ACLU; Losen & Martinez, 2008).

Failing public schools do not have adequate resources to provide individualized education and behavior plans for students with disabilities. Currently, 13% of students are classified as special-needs and require special educational services (Hing, 2014). Of those students, roughly 1 out of 5 are suspended each year (Losen & Martinez, 2013). These high suspension rates are likely due to teachers not having sufficient training, overcrowded or non-existent special-needs classrooms, and a large number of students who lack the financial resources to have their disabilities diagnosed and treated (ACLU; Hing, 2014). Because these students' educational needs are not being met, they tend to act out (ACLU). Numerous behaviors that can be typical of a pupil's disability (e.g. hitting, yelling, defiance, etc.) are frequently dealt with inappropriately. In turn, special-needs students have disproportionately high rates of suspension and expulsion, and are most likely to be victimized by the school-to-prison pipeline (Hing, 2014). Students who act out as a result of their disability should not be punished, but should be given individual attention by personnel trained to work with special needs students. A multilevel approach to assessing a special needs child disciplinary action report should certainly be used for proper assessment of any situation requiring a teacher, principal or SRO intervention.

## **Many Children Left Behind**

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) has proved harmful to students, particularly those who at risk. Schools with Title 1<sup>2</sup> status are expected to meet specific achievement levels, measured by standardized tests. Funds allocated to schools are directly tied to students' test scores and improvement. Consequently, these standards force teachers and administrators to work towards one educational goal: to pass the test. In turn, a hostile and restricted academic culture can develop, thereby fostering a restrictive and prison-like environment (ACLU; Rethinking Schools, 2013). More specifically, when teachers are solely focused on instruction designed to improve standardized test scores (and are being held accountable for those test scores), there is little time to devote to other activities that enrich the overall development of students (e.g., academic clubs which allow students to develop leadership skills, cultural clubs and field trips, athletics, and college planning).

**Curriculum.** An education that does not emphasize risk taking, creativity, and out-of-the box thinking does not adequately prepare students for college or a career. Learning opportunities that encourage creativity and self-actualization are vital for the development of strong cognitive and problem solving skills (Burlinson, 2005; Iselin, 2010). According to Maslow's theory of human needs, self-actualization is key in reaching one's full potential. A self-actualized person is able to meet challenges with confidence, they accept others and themselves, they are inquisitive, and motivated to grow (Maslow, 1943). Through providing creative learning opportunities, encouraging risk taking, and allowing for failure, students can reach self-actualization. This increases a student's ability to reach high achievement socially, psychologically, and

---

<sup>2</sup> Title 1 is an amendment to NCLB that provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers of students in poverty to help all students meet the state academic standards (U.S. Dept. of Education)

academically (Burleson, 2005). Apart from the goal of self-actualization, in order to fully understand any one given concept, students need to be able to explore multiple perspectives and approaches to a problem (Burleson, 2005). However, when the goal of educators is to prepare students to pass a standardized exam, the opportunities to be creative and and take risks are diminished greatly. Rather than encouraging students to self-motivate, explore, and think freely, teachers rely upon memorization exercises and extensive test practice in order to prepare students, and ultimately, to fight to keep their jobs (FairTest, 2012).

With inflexible and uninteresting curriculum, students become increasingly disengaged, fueling additional behavior problems (ACLU). In fact, researchers (2005) found that creative teachers who employ a variety of instructional methods have lower suspension rates (Cristle et. al., 2005). Classes with high variance in educational activities (that cater to different learning styles), frequent individual student-teacher interaction, and high levels of active student engagement tend to have lower rates of behavioral problems (Christle et. al., 2005). Moreover, classes in which teachers set high, but achievable academic standards, and actively work on helping students reach those standards, have better overall behavior outcomes (Christle et. al., 2005).

**Winnowing in Schools.** The pressure to meet national standards increases the likelihood that administrators will find ways to disenfranchise low performing students in order to achieve higher standardized scores, connected with Title 1 funding (Rethinking Schools, 2012). The purpose of Title 1 is to financially assist schools serving the most at-risk populations. To qualify for Title 1, at least 35% of students must be from a disadvantaged socioeconomic status (SES) background. With this funding, schools are expected to meet certain improvement benchmarks, determined by standardized testing. If a school does not meet these benchmark standards, it is at

risk of having to "restructure", which means replacing the majority of the staff, including administration (GreatSchools.org). Suspending low-performing students during testing periods is a tactic used to "push out" students and (artificially) improve scores (Advancement Project, 2010). The New York Times quoted a teacher in a recent article, "Sometimes getting rid of these kids can help you do better on the metrics that you're evaluated on...If the kid is causing trouble, that's probably not a kid who is testing well..." (Rich, 2014). Not only are there little incentives to keep problem kids in school, there are benefits (in the form of higher test scores) to getting rid of them, at least temporarily.

In Florida, low-performing students are suspended for twice as long as their higher performing peers for the same or similar infractions (Rethinking Schools, 2012). Economist David Figlio has examined the phenomenon of suspending low-performing students in Florida extensively. Of the 41,803 behavioral incidents in which suspensions were issued, Figlio focused his analyses on the 60% of suspensions where students received different consequences for the same act. After controlling for students' previous behavior and patterning, Figlio found that the average rate of suspension was longer for low-performing students (2.35 days) and shorter for higher performing students (1.91 days). He also found that though behavior patterns did not change during testing periods the amount of suspensions for low-performing students increased, while the amount of suspensions for high-performing students decreased (Figlio, 2006). While suspending lower-achieving students is morally deplorable, when schools' funding and teachers' jobs and salaries rely on students' scores, it is understandable. The policy and measures that dictate fund allocations, teachers' and administrations' effectiveness, and if schools are permitted to remain open or not, force these inhumane practices, resulting in the perpetuation of lower achievement and the school-to-prison pipeline.

## **Problems With Exclusionary Discipline**

Although suspensions and expulsions are still the most common mechanism for dealing with behavioral issues, the research is fairly clear in that these practices are deleterious to students. Suspension, like other policies, is employed allegedly to ensure school safety and to correct problematic behaviors. However, it typically does just the opposite. The consequences to pupils and schools caused by the overuse of suspension are significant. According to Balfanz (2013), when a student is suspended one time during the ninth grade, their likelihood of dropping out of school doubles - from 16% to 32%. Moreover, the chances of dropping out steadily increase for students who are suspended more than once, while the graduation rate and chances of enrolling in post-secondary education decrease (Balfanz, 2013). Though this is not a causal relationship, it is an interesting and troubling correlation, especially in school systems that issue out-of-school suspensions often. The seemingly isolated event of a suspension can in fact have lasting consequences on a student's future academic achievement (Balfanz, 2013).

There are several direct consequences of out-of-school suspension that can contribute to an individual's decision to drop out. An initial consequence is a result of lost instruction time. Ranging from 0-10 days, many suspensions make up the majority of the suspended students' total absences for the year (Balfanz, 2013). Students who miss class for an extended period of time fall behind their peers in classwork. When the student returns to school, it is often embarrassing or too difficult for the student to catch up academically. This can lead to a significant, and immediate disengagement from academics, thus contributing to an eventual decision to dropout (Gee, 2013).

Additionally, during the time that the pupil is suspended, which is most likely spent at home, children and teens are often unsupervised and are more likely to engage in risky behaviors

such as drinking, smoking, and other illegal activity, which increases their risk of getting into additional and more severe trouble (AAP, 2003). Suspended students often lack supervision because the majority of students who receive suspensions are from low SES and single parent<sup>3</sup> homes, where it is less likely that an adult can stay at home with the suspended student during the day and supervise their activity (AAP, 2003; Iselin, 2010). Furthermore, suspending or expelling a student increases the likelihood that he or she will associate with other delinquent children or teens who are also not in school. This promotes the culture of disengagement from school and allows for additional misbehavior (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Despite the research that clearly indicates that out-of-school suspension tends to do more harm than good - socially and academically, the rates of suspensions and expulsions have continued to rise over the past 30 years (Kasprisin, 2013). Additionally, the kinds of behaviors that warrant suspensions or expulsions have changed as well. Initially, suspensions or expulsions were reserved for the most severe behavior problems (e.g. violence, weapons, drugs, alcohol). Currently, they are often used to punish students for tardiness, disrespectful language, cell phone use, clothing choices, or cutting class (Losen and Martinez, 2013). Suspension (or expulsion) for these minor, non-violent offenses is excessively punitive and does not improve the school or classroom culture (Losen & Martinez, 2013). In fact, schools with high rates of suspension and expulsion tend to have less satisfactory ratings of school culture or climate, spend a disproportionate amount of time on disciplinary affairs, and lower academic achievement (APA, 2008). Not unexpectedly, when children and adolescents are treated unfairly, they develop mistrust of authority and a skewed perception of justice, which is highly detrimental to their social and psychological development (Opportunities Suspended).

---

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, the term parent will refer to any biological, adoptive, and foster parents, or any other figure serving as a child's guardian.

Evidence indicates that suspension and expulsion rates are *not* determined by student behavior, number of students enrolled, or student-teacher ratio (Iselin, 2010). Rather, school characteristics predict suspension rates. Schools with strict rules and more hostile student-to-student relationships have higher rates of suspension (Iselin, 2010). Ultimately, there are three main school personnel characteristics associated with high suspension rates: (1) administrators who have positive views towards suspension, (2) hostile student-staff relationships, and (3) administrators who express a need to lower the suspension rate and who desire more parental involvement resources (Iselin, 2010). Thus, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that suspension rates have more to do with administrators' beliefs and behaviors than student behaviors.

### **Racial Disparities**

For all disciplinary infractions, there is a clear racial disparity in the frequency and severity of discipline that is not limited to, but includes suspensions and expulsions. One study found that after controlling for over 80 variables, including the number of violations, African-American students have a 31% higher chance of being subjected to a school discretionary<sup>4</sup> action than white students (Fabelo, et. al., 2011). The reason behind the disparity seems to be institutional and implicit racism. Currently, our nation, and our schools tend to criminalize blackness. Society tends to interpret common African-American behavior as more disruptive or problematic; when in reality, it is not (Smith, 2013). For example, it is common for African-American youth to be highly vocal and active, which can be misinterpreted as threatening or out of control, thus resulting in unjust disciplinary action (Cosineau, 2010). According to the current research, the racial disparity is most likely of the result of a multitude of factors that operate at

---

<sup>4</sup> "Discretionary" refers to any discipline decision for infractions that do not have mandated consequences by the school or the state (Fabelo, et.al., 2011).

student, teacher, administration, community, and cultural levels (Iselin, 2010). The disparity in rates and harshness of discipline widens the achievement gap between African-American and white students, while perpetuating institutional racism and feeding the school-to-prison pipeline (Balfanz et. al., 2012; NAACP, 2014).

### **Suspension Rates**

The national secondary school suspension rate is approximately 11% according to a 2009-2010 study (Losen & Martinez, 2010). Indeed, the national rate is problematic, yet there are numerous districts and schools across the nation that have particularly high suspension rates. As a result, these districts have students and schools that are in serious jeopardy. According to a 2013 follow-up study, in 323 school districts (out of 6,000) the suspension risk for middle and high school students was 25% or higher (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Nationally, 2,624 secondary schools suspended over 25% of their student body. Of these, 519 schools suspended over 50% of their students during the school year (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Additionally, individual school districts were examined and "hotspot" schools were identified. A "hotspot" school is any school that suspends at least 25% of any subgroup<sup>5</sup> each year (Losen & Martinez, 2013). The five cities that have the highest number of "hotspot" schools are listed in order and followed by the number of "hotspot" schools that exist in each city: Chicago, IL (82 out of 122, 67.2%); Memphis, TN (68 out of 90, 75.5%); Clark County, NV (65 out of 112, 58.0%); Los Angeles Unified, CA (54 out of 215, 25.1%); and Houston, TX (53 out of 106, 50.0%) (Losen & Martinez, 2013). These national data illustrate the extent to which suspension is a serious problem facing many urban school districts in the U.S. There are, however, plenty of schools in urban areas with low suspension rates, namely, any school with suspension rates under 10% for any subgroup<sup>5</sup> with at

---

<sup>5</sup> Subgroups are divided by race and gender

least 10 students. The top five cities with the most schools that fall into this category are as follows: Los Angeles Unified, CA (81 out of 215); San Diego Unified, CA (39 out of 71); Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC (36 out of 65); Philadelphia City School District, PA (35 out of 89); Montgomery County Public Schools, MD (33 out of 67) (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Los Angeles Unified school district is on both lists, which may indicate that there are already some successful, alternative discipline models in place that result in vastly lower suspension rates within the same district (Losen & Martinez, 2013). However, it could also be that the difference reflects the diverse LA population. It is possible that LA schools with similar demographics to the city of Memphis (primarily students of color, and students in poverty) have high suspension rates, and the schools with demographics like the outlying suburbs of Memphis (economically privileged, and white), are the schools that report lower suspension rates.

While the school-to-prison pipeline and the overuse of suspension is a major national problem, the focus of this paper is the policies and practices in Memphis, TN. Out of the five previously mentioned districts that have exorbitant minority suspension rates, Memphis City Schools (pre-merger) has the highest percentage of "hotspot" schools (75.5%). Subsequently, Memphis has one of the highest rates of suspension (for secondary school students) in the country. Looking back to the Losen and Martinez (2010) report, 20 of the largest school districts in the nation were examined separately. Out of those 20 districts, Memphis City Schools had the highest rate of secondary school suspensions (40.2%). Though the suspension data in this report is now four years old, the same trend (in Memphis) has continued, and the rate has actually increased (TN State Report Card, 2013). Combined with the tremendously high suspension rate, MCS had a myriad of other problems to face.

Three years ago the Memphis City School (MCS) began the largest school district merger in American history. MCS relinquished their charter and merged into the smaller Shelby County Schools (SCS) district. Prior to the merger, MCS served 106,991 students in 213 schools, whereas SCS served 46,601 students in 52 schools. Most of the students in the MCS system were African-American (81.7%), and most received free or reduced lunch (84.3%). Students in the SCS schools were mostly white (50.5%) and lived in the suburbs. The percentage of SCS students receiving free or reduced lunches was 36.9%. For the past three decades, the academic reputation of MCS schools has been declining, as have the achievement measures of MCS students. For example, only 5.8% of MCS students are college ready based on ACT scores. The students in SCS have fared somewhat better with 23% being college ready.

The merger of Memphis City Schools and Shelby County Schools sent both systems into disarray. Now however, the systems are reorganizing again, and have to develop policies that serve the entire unified district. When determining these new policies, it will be important review the previous policies and practices that have contributed to low graduation rates and the overwhelming number of students who are not career and college ready. Obviously, the disciplinary policies are going to require close examination. Specifically, SCS administrators and policy makers need to draft policy that will reduce current suspension and expulsion rates in many of the SCS<sup>6</sup> schools, and by extension, reduce the number of students in the school-to-prison pipeline.

As previously mentioned, Memphis, TN has the second highest raw number, and *the* highest percentage of secondary schools in the nation that suspend over 25% of a single subgroup (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Even more troubling though, is the district wide averages,

---

<sup>6</sup> The new unified school district is referred to as Shelby County Schools (SCS).

also previously mentioned. The Tennessee State Report Card (2013)<sup>7</sup>, which provides comprehensive data for all Tennessee public schools, reports that the average rate of suspension for Memphis City Schools (pre-merger) is 23.0%. However, because this average is for pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, this number is diluted. Elementary school students have much lower rates of suspensions. In Memphis City Schools, the Pre-K through sixth grade average suspension rate<sup>8</sup> is just over 15%. However the average rate for middle and high schools is over 42% (TN State Report Card, 2013). The absence of an elementary and secondary school breakdown for disciplinary rates is misleading and hides the severity of the problem at hand. However, each school's individual suspension and expulsion rates are available online via the Tennessee State Report Card. These rates range from very low, to extremely high. Like the Los Angeles Unified School district, SCS has schools that are employing different approaches to suspension that do in fact result in lower rates, and better student outcomes. Figure 1 below highlights the six traditional high schools<sup>9</sup> that have the lowest, and highest suspension rates in the (previously) MCS district, and each of these school's graduation rates.

<b>School</b>	<b>Suspension Rate %</b>	<b>Graduation Rate %</b>
<b>White Station High School</b>	17.1	78.0
<b>Cordova High School</b>	22.8	77.0
<b>Manassas High School</b>	26.7	68.2
<b>Hillcrest High School</b>	66.5	64.7
<b>Northside High School</b>	60.9	60.2
<b>Carver High School</b>	60.1	59.0

Figure 1: Data was retrieved from the 2013 Tennessee State Report Card

<sup>7</sup> 2012-2013 pre-merger data is used because 2013-2014 data is not yet available.

<sup>8</sup> The suspension rate is the number of suspensions in a given school year.

<sup>9</sup> This excludes charter, and other alternative schools.

As indicated above, the schools with lowest suspension rates also have higher graduation rates. Though there is not a large margin between the graduation rates, the three schools with the lowest suspension rates have above average<sup>10</sup> graduation rates, and the schools with the highest suspension rates have below average graduation rates. This supports the correlation between lower suspension and higher graduation (or more positive student outcomes). Likewise, if SCS has a goal to increase graduation rates, actively lowering suspension rates should be a priority.

While White Station High School, Cordova High School, and Manassas High School are doing well when compared with other Shelby County Schools, these schools are still suspending students at rates significantly higher than the national average. Nearly 6,000 school districts' suspension rates were evaluated in a Losen & Martinez comprehensive report. The national secondary school average suspension rate is 11.3%. In 2012-2013, the MCS (pre-merger) average secondary school suspension rate was roughly 30% higher than the national average. With this, some Memphis schools' suspension rates are roughly 50% higher than the national average. Even more troubling is that the high school with the lowest rate (17.1%), suspends students approximately 6% more frequently than the national average (Losen and Martinez, 2013; TN State Report Card, 2013). District wide efforts must be made in order to align Memphis with the rest of the nation.

Memphis City School students are primarily African American (81.7%) and are disadvantaged socio-economically (84.3%) (TN State Report Card, 2013). These students are currently being removed from classrooms at one of the highest rates in the nation (Losen & Martinez, 2013; TN State Report Card, 2013). SCS students are already more at risk to become

---

<sup>10</sup> The average graduation rate for MCS is 67.6% (2012-2013)

teenage parents, be incarcerated, and become involved in gangs, are also being kicked out of school (Rethinking Schools, 2012; CDC, 2011). As previously mentioned, when students are removed from classrooms they are put at a disadvantage academically. For Memphis students who are already disadvantaged, suspending them further diminishes their chances of success (Losen & Martinez, 2010).

## **Expulsion**

Like suspension, expulsion is another problematic piece of the national, state, and local educational landscape. Expulsion is any period lasting longer than ten days that a student is not allowed to return to school. The national rate of expulsion is not available, so this paper will compare Memphis City Schools to Davidson County Schools (which includes Nashville, another large metropolitan area in Tennessee), and the state average. In 2012 Tennessee's expulsion count was 5,696 students, with a rate of 0.6% (TN State Report Card, 2013). Of these students, the overwhelming majority were African-American (4,747). Davidson County School's expulsion count is 707 students and the rate 0.9% for all students, which is higher than the state average (TN State Report Card, 2013). Memphis City School's expulsion rate count is 4,093, with a rate of 3.8% (TN State Report Card, 2013). The overwhelming majority (71.8%) of expulsions in the state of Tennessee happen in Memphis.

The reasons for why students are expelled are numerous. A good number of expulsions though, are from zero-tolerance policies. Zero-tolerance policies, implemented in the mid-nineties, were put in place in efforts to stop gun violence in schools (ACLU). The policy was intended to ensure school safety by issuing swift and unwavering consequences when a student brought a weapon to school (Losen & Martinez, 2010). However, since the initial implementation of this policy, the scope of zero-tolerance offenses has expanded vastly. Today,

zero-tolerance offenses include, but are not limited to, possession of drugs (street, prescription, or over-the-counter), possession of alcohol, fighting, injuring school personnel, and possession of weapons (gun, knife, or anything else that could potentially cause bodily harm) (Losen & Martinez, 2010; Shelby County Schools Student-Parent Handbook 2013-2014). Because these policies result in immediate consequences regardless of the circumstances surrounding a particular act, many students have been expelled (nationally) for unintentional, or accidental misbehaviors (ACLU).

For example, a student in Louisiana was expelled for accidentally leaving sparklers in her backpack and bringing them to school (Opportunities Suspended, 2000). This kind of behavior should not be criminalized through expelling the student. However, with zero-tolerance, there is no flexibility or common sense when it comes to "violations" (Opportunities Suspended, 2000). Thus, suspension and expulsion rates have skyrocketed since the advent of zero-tolerance discipline.

Expulsions also can result from two or more less-serious infractions like threatening school personnel, disrespectful language, disobedience, the use or possession of tobacco products, and more (Shelby County Schools Student-Parent Handbook, 2013-2014). These infractions leave room for interpretation by school personnel, which in turn, allows for implicit racism. It is not uncommon for teachers to report African-American boys as being "threatening" due to physical appearance, vocal patterns, or other (minority) culturally normative behaviors. "Threatening" behavior can, and has resulted in expulsion, especially when school personnel are not aware of, or does not recognize certain cultural behavioral patterns as "school-appropriate" (Cohen, 2013; Cosineau, 2010; Rios, 2011).

## **Alternative Schools**

In Memphis, once a student is expelled, they are sent to an alternative school. These schools group all misbehaving students together and do not provide effective rehabilitation, character development, or therapeutic intervention. Placement in alternative schools increases the likelihood that students will continue maladaptive behaviors, and decreases the likelihood of returning to a traditional school environment (personal communication, July 16, 2014). Furthermore, these schools operate differently than traditional schools. In Memphis, students in alternative schools do schoolwork on a computer and are supervised by an employee (not always a teacher) (personal communication, July 16, 2014). Nationwide, alternative schools operate subpar to traditional schools, and do not academically or socially prepare expelled students to enter back into traditional school (ACLU). This explains the exceptionally high dropout rates for Memphis' alternative schools. Students who are unprepared to assimilate back into traditional school often will just drop out of school all together (personal contact, July 16, 2014) The four Prep Academies in Memphis, which is where students go who have been expelled from high school, have an average cohort dropout rate<sup>11</sup> of 34.8% (TN State Report Card, 2013). When students are expelled, they should be rehabilitated, individually counseled, and most importantly, educated. This is not happening, and is contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline (ACLU).

In addition to the startling rate of dropout, the four Memphis Prep Academies have some of the highest suspension and expulsion rates in the district. Figure 3 depicts the 2012-2013 suspension and expulsion rates for each of these schools.

---

<sup>11</sup> Cohort dropout rate is the amount of students who enter in 9th grade and dropout by 12th grade.

<b>School</b>	<b>Suspension %</b>	<b>Expulsion %</b>
MCS Prep Northeast	102.2 <sup>12</sup>	31.7
MCS Prep Northwest	89.0	25.1
MCS Prep Southeast	86.1	18.0
MCS Prep Southwest	70.6	8.6

Figure 3: Data was retrieved from 2013 Tennessee State Report Card

Through the combination of suspensions, expulsions, and dropout rates, Memphis City Schools' Prep alternative schools are pushing the majority of their students out of class. These are (arguably)<sup>13</sup> the most at-risk students in Memphis, and are not given equal opportunities to succeed. When alternative school students are suspended or expelled, they either go home (in the event of suspension), or are "encouraged" to enroll in a GED program or homeschool. In the event that law-breaking behavior occurred, the student will face the justice system (personal contact, July 22, 2014)

### **Causes of Memphis' Exclusionary Discipline Rates**

There are many opinions and hypotheses as to why Memphis' students are being suspended and expelled at these numbers. However, the mounting evidence seems to point to negative school cultures and the attitudes and beliefs of administrators. In conjunction with other's research and some additional local observation and interviewing, a negative or hostile school culture is associated with higher rates of disciplinary referrals, an uninviting and unsupportive academic environment, and infrequent or negative personnel-student interactions,

---

<sup>12</sup> While rates cannot be above 100%, the TN State Report Card reports this rate. A possible explanation is that perhaps more suspensions occurred than there were students (at the time of the count) because numerous students come in and dropout of these Prep Academies, as it is a school where students go in the event of expulsion, and has a cohort dropout rate of approximately 35%.

<sup>13</sup> Prep School students have already been expelled from traditional school, are primarily African American, and economically disadvantaged (TN State Report Card, 2013).

which are all associated with higher rates of suspension and expulsion (personal contact, July 8, 2014; Iselin, 2010). Administrators' philosophies of behavior and discipline (among other things) also drive rates of expulsion and suspension (Iselin, 2010).

## **Factors Impacting School and Student Success**

### **School Culture**

"Culture" is an abstract and fairly broad term. However, culture can be construed as the rules, relationships, rituals, and beliefs that exist within an environment. Based on previous research and interviews with school personnel, interpersonal relationships, a principal's philosophies and goals, and the availability of extra-curricular activities are three of the top influences on school culture. Good student-teacher relationships and availability of extracurricular activities increases student engagement, which boosts success. The principal's philosophies and goals for the school affect how the school is run (personal contact, July 16, 2014).

**Relationships.** As stated earlier, positive teacher-student relationships are associated with lower suspension rates and also serve to promote a more positive school culture. (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Teachers who control their classrooms by forming positive, close relationships with their students have more positive academic and social outcomes (Iselin, 2010; personal communication, July 8, 2014). According Rimm-Kaufman (2014), a positive teacher-student relationship is cultivated in two main ways.

1. Personal connection- this is a result of frequent, positive communication between teacher and student.
2. Frequent guidance and affirmation and less negative criticism.

Successful use of these strategies results in trusting and constructive relationships between the teachers and students. When students trust their teachers, they will be more engaged and have better classroom behavior (Rimm-Kaufman, 2014). There are multiple other student outcomes that come from positive teacher-student relationships. These include having more positive attitudes towards school, feeling less lonely, being more self-directed and motivated, and being more cooperative (Rimm-Kaufman, 2014).

Teachers who recognize individual learning styles and know their students' strengths and weaknesses are more successful in the classroom (Personal Contact, July 8, 2014). Furthermore, if a teacher has a caring, personal relationship with a student, he or she is more inclined to attempt several different disciplinary methods before sending a student to the principal (personal contact, July 8, 2014). A myriad of positive educational and behavioral outcomes stem from good teacher-student relationships.

**Effective Principals.** The principal's role in creating and maintaining a positive school culture is crucial. He or she dictates how the school operates on a day-to-day basis by supporting teachers, leading by example, and by determining how the school will interpret the district-wide policies (i.e., strict or loose interpretation of the policy). While principals do not directly affect student's outcomes, they do influence the staff and school climate, which in turn, affects students (MacNeil et. al., 2009).

In order for principals to be effective, they must first understand the student body's culture and historical context. When making alterations to a school, the principal must take into account the existing structures, interpersonal relationships, and the current school culture, that is the values, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of the students. Through this understanding, principals can make more effective changes by capitalizing on schools' established strengths, and

working to adapt ineffective or problematic aspects of the school culture to better suit the structural goals (MacNeil et. al., 2009). Principals are responsible for defining clear educational and social goals for the school. To achieve aforementioned goals, they must be accepted and reinforced by the teachers (MacNeil et. al., 2009). For example, if a principal wants to improve the student body's overall reading competency, teachers must work with their students, employ different educational methods, and change aspects about their curriculum in order to achieve this goal. Likewise, if a principal sets a behaviorally focused goal, such as reducing tardiness, understanding the student body is key. If students have transportation related issues, have to take care of family members in the morning, take the bus, or any number of barriers that could inhibit their ability to arrive to school on time, it must be realized by the principal. Otherwise, the principal will likely grow frustrated, discipline tardy students (probably more harshly than before), and the goal will remain unmet. On the other hand, if the principal were to understand students' social circumstances, he or she would be more inclined to be flexible towards students with mitigating circumstances. Such flexibility and understanding promotes a healthy school culture, improves students' attitudes towards school, and allows for a more productive learning environment (personal contact, July 8, 2014).

No one doubts that SCS principals have their work cut out for them. However, the current atmosphere in a number of schools across the district is not working. For example, many principals require students to walk down the hallways (during class changes, lunch, etc.) in straight lines, without speaking (observation 2012-2014; personal contact, July 8, 2014). This is commonly referred to as "platooning". The use of platooning (after elementary school) manifests in prison-like, or militaristic schools with limited student freedom. This rule takes away students'

opportunity for normal, healthy socialization, thereby increasing the chances that students will get into trouble for talking in the hallway or in the classroom (personal contact, July 8, 2014).

**Extracurricular Activities**<sup>14</sup>. The importance of extracurricular activities for children and teens is undeniable (Massoni, 2011). A student's involvement in extracurricular activities can have substantial, positive impacts on his or her schooling and life. Some of the benefits of extracurricular activities include, but are not limited to: better grades, good behavior, and completing school (Massoni, 2011). Students who participate in extracurricular activities and receive said benefits, contribute to a more positive school culture. The opportunity for extracurricular activity also gives students the chance to develop leadership skills and apply knowledge that they have learned in class (Massoni, 2011). The more students that participate in and subsequently profit from extracurricular activities, the greater the (school) cultural benefits.

Unfortunately in Memphis City Schools, there are limited extracurricular activities in most schools. Due to limited budgets and a lack of personnel who are willing to supervise clubs and activities, the options are very limited. Most schools have a couple of sports teams, a smattering of academic clubs, and a few other miscellaneous groups (SCS school websites). This creates a culture of apathy within the school and increases students' likelihood of getting into trouble. Studies show that the most dangerous time for children (12-17 years old) is during the unsupervised hours right after school, from approximately 3pm-7pm (Missoni, 2011;Holloway, J. H., 2002; Howie et al. 2010, 120). Children begin making independent decisions and learn to control their behavior from ages nine to seventeen. During these highly formative years, a safe and constructive after-school environment, such as a club or sports team, prevent children from

---

<sup>14</sup> Extracurricular activities are any school activity that is not within the traditional curriculum (i.e. sports, drama clubs, debate, religious clubs, band, and more).

delinquent behavior, particularly gang involvement, drugs, alcohol, and violence (Holloway, J. H., 2002; Howie et al. 2010, 120).

On the other hand, some of MCS schools do have a large variety of extracurricular activities and it is positively affecting students. In particular, White Station High School offers 27 sports teams, band, ROTC, and over 35 academic and non-academic clubs (scsk12.org.) Though all students will not participate in extracurricular activities, students at least have the opportunity to explore these clubs, teams, and organizations. A school with a lot of student and teacher involvement in non-classroom activities impacts the culture by changing students' attitudes towards school. Students who feel positively towards school are less disruptive, have better attendance, and perform better academically than students who feel negatively (Missoni, 2011). Additionally, students who participate in extracurricular activities generally have higher self-esteem, are viewed more positively by school personnel, and more likely to have positive relationships with teachers and administration (Missoni, 2011). With numerous students holistically benefitting from extracurricular activities, the school culture is one of positivity, community, and achievement.

### **Relationships between Students and Personnel**

Another problem facing Memphis school culture is the disconnection between students and school personnel. As previously stated, the majority of (pre-merger) MCS students live in economically disadvantaged homes (TN State Report Card, 2013). However, the teachers and administrators are, more than likely, middle class<sup>15</sup> (TEA). The SES difference between students and teachers proves to be problematic in numerous ways. Although, one of the most severe problems is the way in which teachers perceive students' behaviors (when a SES difference is

---

<sup>15</sup> Public School teacher's salaries range from \$38,000-54,000.

present). Students who are experiencing poverty related issues (hunger, homelessness, poor housing conditions, etc.) can act out- for attention, for help, because they are frustrated or upset, etc. Teachers who are unaware of, or do not understand, students' lives outside of school, are likely to respond to students who act out in inappropriate and ineffective ways (Cosineau, 2010). While this is just one example, there are many more ways that SES differences between students and teachers can be problematic for students, especially in discipline-related issues (Cosineau, 2010). In order to serve and effectively educate Memphis students, efforts must be made to understand students and treat them appropriately within the context of their culture or background.

**Cultural Competence Training.** Cultural Competency is defined as, "the ability to successfully teach students who come from a culture or cultures other than our own." (National Education Association). Cultural competency is a skill set derived from one's education, experiences, and more. It involves valuing diversity through accepting and appreciating different backgrounds, values, traditions, modes of communicating, etc. (National Education Association). When school personnel are culturally competent, curriculum, classroom operation and activities, discipline strategies and more, can be more appropriate for students, and in turn serve students more effectively. Teachers should first try to understand student's behavior within cultural contexts before judging a student. For example, if a student is in poverty and does not receive breakfast at home, he or she may be disengaged or disruptive in the classroom. Hypothetically, this student is misbehaving out of physical hunger and emotional stress or desperation. If this student's teacher was unaware of the child's social and cultural circumstances, the teacher would most likely discipline the child. However, if this student's teacher was culturally competent and was aware of the issues facing his or her students, he or she would be

more likely to try and understand why the student is misbehaving, rather than passing judgment and issuing consequences. Remaining open-minded, sensitive, and willing to reflect and shift one's own beliefs and practices is key to developing cultural competence, and creating a fair and sensitive school culture (Cosineau, 2010).

Through successful cultural competence training, Memphis teachers would be far more adept at both navigating the school's social landscape, and instructing their students. Teachers would be less likely to misinterpret behaviors as threatening or out of control (two common reasons for disciplinary referrals)<sup>16</sup> if they were aware of the cultural and social circumstances driving their students' behaviors (Cosineau, 2010). School-wide cultural competency (for personnel) could have considerable positive effects on school culture and subsequent student outcomes. Cultural competency could reduce the frequency of disciplinary referrals, improve student-teacher interactions, increase student engagement, and more; which in turn, could reduce the amount of students who fall into the school-to-prison pipeline.

### **Behavior Reform**

With the growing number of suspensions and expulsions in Memphis, the disciplinary policies and practices need to be evaluated. Growing numbers of students are being kicked out of school and sent down the school-to-prison pipeline. Our current models are not working. Exclusionary discipline is harmful, and ineffective. However, there are more successful disciplinary techniques available. Three of these alternative behavior models are discussed below.

**Restorative Justice** involves both the student offender, and every other student or faculty that the offender has negatively impacted. The students and faculty talk about why this behavior was

---

<sup>16</sup> This information was retrieved through personal contact on July 8, 2014 and July 16, 2014.

problematic/offensive/bothersome/etc. and the student offender is held accountable for his or her actions. The group then decides what punishment is appropriate. Because the student is informed of *why* the behavior was bad, and how it affected other people, rather than simply being issued a consequence with little or no discussion of the behavior, positive behavior change is more likely (Cosineau, 2010). Schools that utilize Restorative Justice have proven successful. One California school that utilized Restorative Justice reduced suspensions by 75% during the first year. Similarly, Denver Public Schools restructured their district-wide disciplinary policy, and incorporated Restorative Justice into the new model. The district saw a 40% reduction in out-of-school suspension rates (Fix School Discipline, 2014).

**No Nonsense Nurture** refers to a set of guidelines for teachers that enables them to create and maintain a calm, orderly, and productive learning environment. There are five main qualities of a "no nonsense nurturer". A "no nonsense nurturer" does not make excuses for students engaging in disruptive behavior, maintains high academic achievement standards for all students, does not tolerate "nonsense" in front of the class, nurtures students 1-1 or in small groups, and finally, is culturally responsive (Prada & Loving, 2012). The no nonsense plan emphasizes positive reinforcement, encourages teachers to cultivate close relationships with students and their families, and expects hard work and good behavior out of every student. By setting and maintaining consistent and reasonable rules, while praising and instilling confidence in students, the classroom and school culture benefits. A failing public school in Harlem began using the No Nonsense Nurture program in order to raise student engagement and achievement. Reports indicate that after applying the No Nonsense program, on task student behavior increased by 55%, and test scores significantly improved (Prada & Loving, 2012). Resultantly, a more

positive school culture was developed due to increased student engagement and behavior (Prada & Loving, 2012).

**Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)**- is a framework for school operation that focuses on teaching and encouraging positive behavior rather than punishing negative behavior. In order to do this, school personnel designs a unique behavioral mantra that suits the needs of the school. This mantra is a clear and concise set of principles that specific rules are based upon. For example, one school uses the mantra "Respect others, respect yourself, respect property". This is a memorable and understandable outline for how students should behave (PBIS.org). In addition, each category has specific expectations attached. For instance, under "respect property" specific guidelines might be: throw away garbage, keep your area clean and orderly, keep your hands and feet where they belong, etc. (PBIS.org). A school's specific mantra, and subsequent rules are taught school-wide through student assemblies, in classrooms, and through behavior workshops (conducted at the beginning of the school year). In each of these settings, the rules are conveyed differently. For instance in an assembly, the general guidelines would be highlighted. However, in a classroom setting, behavioral expectations can be taught alongside, and in conjunction with the core-curriculum. This is a setting in which more place-specific rules may be taught. Lastly, many PBIS schools utilize the behavior workshop model to teach students good behavior. Hands-on activities and visual examples, such as: throwing away garbage in the restroom, being respectful of classmates in gym class, etc., give a more holistic picture of what good behavior looks like (PBIS.org). This is particularly helpful for elementary school students, as younger children are in earlier stages of learning self-control, good conduct, etc. Once PBIS is implemented, teachers and administration keep data on students' behavior in order to track what is working and what needs improvement. As previously mentioned, creating and maintaining a

positive school culture is crucial to successfully educate students. Through, PBIS, school personnel make a conscious effort to understand the school culture. Thus, personnel can capitalize on what is positively contributing to the school culture, and to identify and remedy what is detrimental.

Another important aspect of PBIS is consistency of expectations. Students are expected to behave by the guidelines indicated in the mantra in all parts of the school. Though, this is not to say that rules are exactly the same in every setting. For instance, talking may not be allowed in a classroom, but most likely, will not be outlawed in the cafeteria. However, by creating site-specific<sup>17</sup> rules centered around consistent, principle or value oriented guidelines (i.e. respect, responsibility, etc.), rather than numerous clear-cut rules, there is room for flexibility. Additionally, PBIS encourages character development through teaching values, rather than asking students to blindly follow rules.

In those few cases<sup>18</sup> in which students either will not or cannot comply with the rules, parents, teachers, and administrators come together to decide a plan of action for the student. This intervention-based approach identifies problem students and provides them with resources such as: testing, guidance, individualized education plans (IEP's), and more (PBIS.org). Unlike a zero-tolerance policy or exclusionary discipline, this provides students with assistance and encouragement to improve their behavior. With the large amount of resources this sort of intervention would require, many underfunded schools may initially not have the time or funding in order to meet each problematic student's needs. However, if PBIS is fully implemented and working successfully, there will be far less disciplinary referrals for the remainder of the school's

---

<sup>17</sup> Site-specific refers to the different rules that are appropriate for different areas within the school (i.e., classroom versus gym class)

<sup>18</sup> For most schools this percentage of students is approximately 10-15% (PBIS.org)

population. In turn, fewer referrals would alleviate much of the work administrators have to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

A consistent model of encouragement, positive reinforcement, and guidance provides children with the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and improve. Schools that have used PBIS have fewer office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions and more positive school cultures or climates (personal contact, July 8, 2014).

### **Moving Forward: Conclusions and Recommendations**

Memphis public education is in need of holistic reform. Victor Hugo once said, "He who opens a school door, closes a prison". This is simply not the case in Memphis. Memphis public schools are not closing prisons, but filling them. Students are being kicked out classrooms at exorbitant rates through the overuse of exclusionary discipline tactics. As previously stated, over 40% of MCS secondary school students are suspended one or more times per year. After being suspended, students are likely to be suspended again or expelled, which increases the chances that they will have interactions with police and the juvenile justice system, the last stop on the school-to-prison pipeline.

The current behavior policy in Memphis is not effective or appropriate. Issuing suspensions for "discretionary offenses," non-violent disruptions, and other minor or unclear infractions is excessively punitive (in that it affects student's academic outcomes in the long-term) and does not aid in behavior improvement. Students' perceptions of suspensions are that they are an "official school-sanctioned holiday" and that suspensions are handed out too liberally and unjustly (Iselin, 2010). If this is true for Memphis students, suspensions are doing little to no

good. Based on the evidence, it is most likely that suspensions perpetuate negative behaviors. This being said, alternatives to suspension need to be explored and implemented.

Suspension and expulsion rates could be reduced greatly through intentional acts of administrators and principals to cultivate more positive school climates. School should be a place of community, engagement, academic and extracurricular exploration, mental stimulation, and more. When schools are encouraging, warm, interesting places, students will want to be there and will have little reason to misbehave. Furthermore, schools with good teacher-student relationships, effective principals, and enjoyable "extras," are better equipped to deal with problematic behavior when or if it does occur.

The use of a positive behavior plan such as No Nonsense Nurture or PBIS would benefit SCS. Currently, the behavior policies are not effective for preventing or dealing with student misconduct. A new plan cannot take effect though without principals' efforts and supports. Principals should first reevaluate their interpretation of district policy. Markedly strict interpretation of policy does not generate a suitable learning environment. It disproportionately marginalizes at-risk students, therefore filling the school-to-prison pipeline. Secondly, principals should consider incorporating an alternative behavioral model to improve students' behavior and attitudes, while cultivating a positive school environment.

Additionally, the curriculum is in need of some modification. As discussed earlier, teaching to a national test is academically and behaviorally challenging. Memorization and test practice is both uninteresting and ineffective in preparing students for higher education or a career. Alternatives to this approach should be explored. Similarly, the books students read should be updated and tailored to the population that is reading them. Providing books that are

interesting, relatable, and accessible (monetarily and intellectually)<sup>19</sup> is crucial. Since books are not cheap, perhaps an examination of fund allocation should be evaluated.

Lastly, the school-to-prison pipeline and the negative effects of exclusionary discipline should be publicized. Teachers and administrators should know the negative psychological, academic, and social effects that over-disciplining, zero-tolerance policies, and exclusionary discipline can have on students. By raising public awareness of this social injustice and civil rights issue, perhaps change would be more swift and effectual. Since the roots of the school-to-prison pipeline are embedded in the deep racial and social injustices in Memphis, these issues must continue to be advocated for and publicized as well. Incorporating education about racial disparities, social justice, and the school-to-prison pipeline<sup>20</sup> into public school curriculum could raise awareness among students, teachers, and parents.

Reforming education and eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline could have countless benefits for the city. If students were allowed to stay in school, even after their transgressions, perhaps more of them would be college and career ready. The benefits for Memphis would be immense; the economy would improve, employment rates would go up, and incarceration rates and crime rates would go down. Government continues to treat the problem of crime and poverty by spending hundreds of thousands of tax dollars on welfare, food stamps, and prison upkeep, which all simply treat the problem. Instead, students should be positively, holistically, and

---

<sup>19</sup>High school English students in Memphis are often below basic in reading proficiency (21%-43% of students are below basic depending on grade level). Additionally, students may or may not be able to afford books, have the transportation to get to a bookstore, or any number of other inhibitors that impact a student's ability to purchase a book. This is a main concern with summer reading lists as the students are expected to provide the book for themselves (personal contact, July 16, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> White Station High School has begun a Social Justice Curriculum that is proving to be very successful and well-received (personal contact, July 16, 2014)

successfully educated, so that it prevents the chances of them going to prison or becoming impoverished in the first place.

Suspending nearly half of MCS students is a civil rights issue, perhaps one of the most troubling of the current generation. By denying (racial) minority and impoverished students the constitutional right to an education through excessively punitive exclusionary discipline, these students are systematically suppressed. These most at-risk youth are denied the opportunity to become educated, self-sufficient, contributing members of society. Thus, the cycles of poverty, incarceration, and a myriad of other social problems are perpetuated. Until the injustice of the school-to-prison pipeline is addressed and dismantled, sustainable positive social and economic change in Memphis cannot happen.

## References

- Addressing Barriers to Learning*. Wellington, N.Z.: Education Review Office, 1996. Losen & Martinez. Web. 20 July 2014.
- Advancement Project. "Test, Punish, and Push Out: How "Zero-Tolerance" and High Stakes Testing Funnel Youth into the School-to-Prison Pipeline". March 2010.
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on School Health, "Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion," *PEDIATRICS* (Vol. 112 No. 5, Nov. 2003)
- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). "The School-To-Prison Pipeline" <<https://www.aclu.org/school-prison-pipeline>> Web. 25 July 2014
- American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. " Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective In Schools?" *American Psychologist* (Vol. 63, No. 9, 852-862) December 2008.
- Arcia, E. (2006). Achievement and enrollment status of suspended students: Outcomes in a large, multicultural school district. *Education and Urban Society*, 38(3), 359- 369.
- Balfanz, Robert, Vaughan Byrnes, and Joanna Fox. "Sent Home and Put Off-Track: The Antecedents, Disproportionalities, and Consequences of Being Suspended in the Ninth Grade." (2012): 1-18. *Everyone Graduates Center, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University*. Web. <Sent Home and Put Off-Track: The Antecedents, Disproportionalities, and Consequences of Being Suspended in the Ninth Grade>.
- Balfanz, Robert, Cheryl Almedia, Janet Santos, and Joanna H. Fox. "Graduating America: Meeting the Challenge of Low Graduation Rate High Schools." *Jobs for the Future* (2009) Web. 18 Mar. 2014.
- Brownstein, Rhonda. "Pushed Out." *Teaching Tolerance*. N.p., Fall 2009. Web. 26 June 2014.

Burleson, Winslow. "Developing creativity, motivation, and self-actualization with learning systems." *Int. J. Human-Computer Studies* 63 (2005) 436–451

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "About Teen Pregnancy" (2011).  
<[www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/aboutteenpreg.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/aboutteenpreg.htm)

Christle, C., Nelson, C. M., & Jolivette, K. (2004). School characteristics related to the use of suspension. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 27(4), 509-526.

Chute, Eleanor. "Schools finding suspensions ineffective for changing student behavior." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Sep 3, 2013. Web. 23 July 2014.

"Classroom Management: The No-Nonsense Nurturer." *Center for Transformative Teacher Training. Classroom Management: The No-Nonsense Nurturer* (n.d.): n. pag. Print.

Cousineau, Madeleine. (2013) "Institutional Racism and the School-to-Prison Pipeline." (n.d.): n. pag. *Suspension Stories*. Web. 20 July 2014.

Cohen, Rebecca W. "Reframing the Problem: New Institutionalism and Exclusionary Discipline in Schools" University of Texas at Austin. *Journal of Educational Controversy* (2013).

Dahlberg, Robin L. "Arrested Futures: The Criminalization of School Discipline in Massachusetts' Three Largest School Districts" (2012). ACLU, Citizens for Juvenile Justice. <[https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/maarrest\\_reportweb.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/maarrest_reportweb.pdf)>

"Editorial Stop the School-to-Prison Pipeline." *Rethinking Schools. Editorial Stop the School-to-Prison Pipeline* Web. 20 July 2014. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/26\\_02/edit262.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/26_02/edit262.shtml)

Elias, Marilyn. "The School-to-Prison Pipeline." *Teaching Tolerance*. N.p., Spring 2013. Web. 20 July 2014.

Fabelo, Tony et al., The Council of State Governments Justice Center, Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement. July 2011. Web. 20 July 2014.

FairTest. "How Standardized Testing Damages Education (2012). The National Center for Fair and Open Testing. < <http://fairtest.org/how-standardized-testing-damages-education-pdf>>

Figlio, David N. "Testing, Crime, and Punishment." (2003): n. pag. University of Florida and NBER. Web. 20 July 2014

Fix School Discipline, "Restorative Justice or Restorative Practices" (2014). A Project of the Public Counsel. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/toolkit/educators/restorative/>

Gee, Robyn. "The Link Between Suspension and Dropout." *Edutopia*. N.p., 12 July 2013. Web. 22 Oct. 2013. <<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/link-between-suspension-and-dropout-robyn-gee>>.

GreatSchools. "No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Requirements for Schools". Retrieved July 20, 2014, from GreatSchools website: <<http://www.greatschools.org/definitions/nclb/nclb.html>>

Hastings, Deborah. "Boy, Suspended for Chewing Pop-Tart into Shape of Gun, Gets Lifetime NRA Membership ." NY Daily News. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2014.

Hing, Julianne. "Race, Disability and the School-to-Prison Pipeline." (2014, May). ColorLines: News For Action. Retrieved July 21, 2014, from ColorLines Website: <[http://colorlines.com/archives/2014/05/race\\_disability\\_and\\_the\\_school\\_to\\_prison\\_pipeline.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2014/05/race_disability_and_the_school_to_prison_pipeline.html)>

- Holloway, J. H. (2002, September). "Extracurricular activities and student motivation. Retrieved July 23, 2014, from ASCD website:  
<http://www.ascd.org/leadership////Extracurricular-Activities-and-Student-Motivation.aspx>.
- Howie, L. D., Lukacs, S. L., Pastor, P. N., Reuben, C. A., & Mendola P. (2010, March). Participation in activities outside of school hours in relation to problem behavior and social skills in middle childhood. *School Health*, v80n3, p199-125.
- "How Standardized Testing Damages Education (Updated July 2012)." *The National Center for Fair & Open Testing*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 July 2014.
- Iselin, Anne-Marie. *Research on School Suspension*. Rep. Durham, NC: Center for Child and Family Policy, 2010. Print.
- Kasprisin, Lorraine. "The School-to-Prison Pipeline: A Civil Rights and a Civil Liberty Issue." *Journal of Educational Controversy - Editorial: The School-to-Prison Pipeline*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2014.
- Losen, Daniel J., and Tia E. Martinez. "Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools." *The Civil Rights Project at Losen & Martinez*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2014.
- Losen, Daniel J., and Russell Skiba. "Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis". Southern Poverty Law Center. 2010. Web. 20 July 2014.
- MacNeil, Angus J., Doris L. Prater, Steve Busch. "The effects of school culture and climate on educational achievement" *International Journal of Leadership in Education* Vol. 12, Iss. 1, 2009
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-96.

Massoni, Erin "Positive Effects of Extra Curricular Activities on Students," ESSAI: Vol. 9, Article 27. 2011.

NAACP, Legal Defense Fund. "The School to Prison Pipeline" (2014). Retrieved on July 15, 2014 from NAACP website:< <http://www.naacpldf.org/case/school-prison-pipeline>>

National Education Association. "Diversity Toolkit: Cultural Competence for Educators" Retrieved from: <http://www.nea.org/tools/30402.htm>

Noltemeyer, Amity, and Caven S. Mcloughlin. "Patterns of Exclusionary Discipline by School Typology, Ethnicity, and Their Interaction." *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education* 7.1 (2010): 27-40.

"Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline." (2000): n. pag. Civil Rights Project Losen & Martinez. Web. 20 July 2014.

Out of School & Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools. The Losen & Martinez Center for Civil Rights Remedies at The Civil Rights Project. April, 2013. Web. 22 Oct. 2013

"Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports - OSEP." *School*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2014.

PBIS. "What is School-wide PBIS?" Retrieved from: <http://www.pbis.org/school>

PBIS. "Tertiary FAQ's" Retrieved from: <http://www.pbis.org/school/tertiary-level/tertiary-faqs>

Prada, Michael & Danique Loving. "Real Time Teacher Coaching" (2012) Center for Transformative Teacher Training. Retrieved from:

[http://conference.publiccharters.org/uploads/NCSC2013/HANDOUTS/KEY\\_15257714/2013\\_NCSC\\_Presentation.pdf](http://conference.publiccharters.org/uploads/NCSC2013/HANDOUTS/KEY_15257714/2013_NCSC_Presentation.pdf)

"Race, Disability and the School-to-Prison Pipeline." RSS. ColorLines, n.d. Web. 20 July 2014.

Rich, Motoko. "Crucible of Change in State Takes on Failing Schools". *The New York Times* (2013). Web. 18 Mar. 2014.

Rimm-Kaufman, Sara. "Improving Students' Relationships with Teachers to Provide Essential Supports for Learning" (2014). American Psychological Association. Retrieved from APA website:<http://www.apa.org/education/k12/relationships.aspx>

Rios, Victor M. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: New York UP, 2011. Print.

"Salary Data." TEA Teachers. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2014.

Shelby County Schools Student-Parent Handbook (2013-2014). <[www.scsk12.org](http://www.scsk12.org)>

Skiba, Russell & Jeffrey Sprague. "Safety without Suspensions," (2008). *Educational Leadership: The Positive Classroom* Vol 66, No. 1, pg 38-43.

Skiba, R. J., Trachok, M., Chung, C., Baker, T., & Hughes, R. (2012, April). Parsing disciplinary disproportionality: Contributions of behavior, student, and school characteristics to suspension and expulsion. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Vancouver, BC.

"School to Prison Pipeline." *NAACP Legal Defense Fund : Defend, Educate, Empower*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2014.

Smith, Mychal. "On the Routine Criminalization of America's Black and Brown Youth" (2013). *The Nation*. Retrieved July 23, 2014 from The Nation website:

<<file:///Users/owner/Desktop/smith,%202013.webarchive>>

"Stop The School-to-Prison Pipeline." *Smart City Memphis*. Smart City Memphis, 19 Jan. 2012. Web. 20 July 2014.

"The Impact of School Suspensions, and a Demand for Passage of the Student Safety Act." *NYCLU*. NYCLU, n.d. Web.

"Title I, Part A Program." US Department of Education. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2014.

Tennessee Department of Education. (2013). The annual report card. Retrieved from [http://www.tn.gov/education/data/report\\_card/2013.shtml](http://www.tn.gov/education/data/report_card/2013.shtml)

"What Is The School-to-Prison Pipeline?" *Aclu.org*. ACLU, n.d. Web. 20 July 2014.