A Seamless Web of Support

Effective Strategies for Redirecting the School-to-Prison Pipeline

A CHHIRJ Research Brief

by Linda DeLauri

July 2010

Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race & Justice
Harvard Law School

FOREWORD

July 21, 2010

On June 4, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson stood at a podium at Howard University to deliver the commencement address at the historically black college. It was one year after he had signed the Civil Rights Act and two months before he would sign the Voting Rights Act. Johnson that day called for a public effort that would widen opportunities for African Americans. The root causes of inequality, he said, are "complex and subtle." A child's chances to prosper and fulfill his potential, Johnson said, depend not merely upon his attributes and perseverance but upon the social conditions in the society. He characterized sources of racial inequality as "a seamless web…They cause each other. They result from each other. They reinforce each other." Johnson elaborated: *"Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in– by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man."*[1]

The view that poor life chances result from a combination of invisible, past and present day negative forces that we have a collective obligation to reverse is neither a new nor a radical proposition. This idea has run through the American consciousness and been consistently confirmed by scholarly research for at least several generations. In recent years, though, the nation seems to have strayed from this simple understanding. Wealth and wage gaps are growing. Poverty is on the rise. We imprison a larger share of our residents than any other nation in the world. This report considers and offers ways to reverse a related, confounded trend: The well-documented, much-lamented rise in exclusionary school discipline, which increases the likelihood of dropping out, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of involvement in the juvenile justice system and even incarceration.

About 7 percent of all public schoolchildren were suspended from school in 2006,[2] more than double the rate suspended in the 1970s.[3] Fifteen percent of all black children, 7 percent of Latino children and 5 percent of white children were suspended in 2006. Since the late 1990s, public tax dollars bought unprecedented amounts of surveillance apparatus—metal detectors, Tasers, spy cameras, canine units and biometric hand readers—and put them in classrooms, corridors and playgrounds.[4] It is, too, more common these days for police to roam the halls of our public schools and arrest students there.[5] Los Angeles, New York and many other cities have their own school police departments.[6] According to the National Association of School Resource Officers, the professional association of police officers who work in schools, school-based policing is the "fastest growing area of law enforcement."[7]

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[1] Johnson (1965, June 4)
[2] National Center for Education Statistics (2009); Fenning & Rose (2007)
[3] National Center for Education Statistics (2009); Fenning & Rose (2007)
[4] Beger (2002)
[5] Wald & Thurau (2010) As Wald and Thurau note, data on school-based arrests are difficult to find. Several advocates and researchers, in recent years, have documented increases in school-based arrests in specific schools and districts. In 2005, the Advancement Project's report, *Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track*, examined the role of school police in Denver, Chicago, and Palm Beach County. The report concluded "schools are overreaching by inappropriately adopting law enforcement strategies that are leading students unnecessarily into the juvenile or criminal justice system."
[6] Advancement Project (2005); New York Civil Liberties Union (2007); National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University (1999)
[7] NASRO (n.d.)

Decrying an escalation in harsh, exclusionary school discipline and its ensuing "school to prison pipeline," educators, civil rights lawyers, civil libertarians, parents and students, have, in the last decade, successfully moved "zero-tolerance" to the center of educational policy discussions. It is obvious that suspension and expulsion rob students of instructional time and endanger their academic performance in the short term. But well-controlled research studies demonstrate a strong association between suspension/expulsion and dropping out of school.[8] It is well established that dropping out is strongly associated with involvement in the criminal justice system and incarceration.[9] Some studies suggest a direct association between suspension/expulsion and incarceration,[10] however, the direct link between suspension/expulsion and dropping out is better established. One study in Texas, for example, found students with a history of school discipline 23 percent more likely than students without such a history to get caught up in the criminal justice system. Suspension and expulsion were the strongest predictors of future involvement in the criminal justice system.[11]

In the last several years, something rare to social policy has emerged: a consensus. Even the notably neutral American Psychological Association (APA) has weighed in. In 2008, a task-force of APA-appointed researchers published a review of school discipline research and concluded that so-termed "zero-tolerance" punishments such as expulsion and suspension have achieved the opposite of their purported intent. "School suspension in general," the APA study read, "appears to predict higher future rates of misbehavior and suspension among those students who are suspended"[12] and does not make schools any safer. And while it might seem logical that more police and security gadgetry will make a building safer and make students feel safer, research indicates that the opposite is true. Researchers found that relying on metal detectors, surveillance cameras and locker searches increased the risk of disorder within a school. The APA task force concluded that the mere existence of zero tolerance policies contributes to incarceration by encouraging educators to turn to the juvenile justice system to settle minor disciplinary matters. It is African American males who are most likely to be ensnared in the zero tolerance net, just as it is African American men most likely to populate our prisons. The APA noted not just racial disparities, but stressed, too, the inclination of educators to punish students of color, particularly African American males, more harshly than whites for similar offenses. "African American students may be disciplined more severely for less serious or more subjective reasons," the task force wrote.[13]

Racial disparities in school discipline mirror disparities in the juvenile justice system. Nationally, in 2003, youth of color made up 38 percent of the U.S. youth population, yet they represented 65 percent of the youth in secure detention facilities.[14] In California, in 2007, for example, 25 percent of incarcerated juveniles were African American, though only 7 percent of the state's youth population was African American.[15] In New York, in 2000, African Americans made up 18 percent of the youth population and 60 percent of incarcerated youth. In Texas, in 2007, African Americans made up 14 percent of the youth population but 28 percent of incarcerated youth.[16]

The overall increase in the use of exclusionary discipline and the racial disparities in suspension and expulsion both reflect unequal conditions in the larger society and fuel more inequality. Thankfully, research and experience during the more than four decades since Lyndon Johnson's speech demonstrate more precisely the manner by which these social disadvantages collide and converge to diminish life chances. Economic instability, exposure to violence, and lack of control over one's environment, we now understand, create chronic stress, which creates trauma which, in turn, spurs disruptive behavior that spills into classrooms. Meanwhile, dramatic progress in the scientific community—among neuroscientists and biologists and public health experts—improves our understanding of the ways conditions in the social environment alter the developing brain. More optimistically, experience on the ground, coupled with research, leads us to workable solutions that might reverse these conditions.

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[8] Tobin, Sugai & Colvin (1996)
[9] Lochner & Moretti (2004)
[10] Skiba, Simmons, Staudinger & Rausch (2003); Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock (1986)
[11] Charmichael, Whitten & Voloudakis (2005)
[12] American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) at 854
[13] Ibid.
[14] W. Haywood Burns Institute (2007)
[15] W. Haywood Burns Institute (n.d.)
[16] Ibid.

To that end, this report considers the most robust and recent research from heretofore separated knowledge sectors so we might untangle the complex web of interrelated forces that combine to constrict opportunity for poor children of color in the United States. We translate and apply this growing knowledge and offer concrete recommendations to educators, litigators and the wide range of advocates and professionals working with youth and their families.

Sincerely,

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A Seamless Web of Support: Effective Strategies for Redirecting the School to Prison Pipeline

By Linda DeLauri

Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice • Research Brief • July 2010

The School to Prison Pipeline: A Well-Worn Path from Suspension and Expulsion to Dropping out to Incarceration

The phrase "school to prison pipeline" has emerged as shorthand for three phenomena. One, the increasing use of "zero tolerance" discipline policies that establish mandatory or predetermined punishments for certain behaviors. Such policies intend, at least in part, not only to punish the misbehaving student but also to deter all students from similar behavior. These policies have led to increased use of expulsion and suspension as routine disciplinary actions—actions which deny children opportunities to learn by pushing them out of the classroom. The body of educational research that strongly links suspension and expulsion to dropping out is unequivocal,[1] as is the research that links dropping out to incarceration.[2] Two, we use the term school to prison pipeline to describe the practice in which educators refer students to the criminal justice system for relatively minor infractions that should more appropriately be handled within the school. Here, racial disparities are particularly striking. And three, we use school to prison pipeline to describe the proliferation of a criminal justice culture, apparatus and architecture in places of learning.[3]

Zero Tolerance: The Rise of Suspension and Expulsion as Routine Discipline Actions

The term zero tolerance arose in the elementary and secondary school context in the early 1990s to define disciplinary policies that triggered automatic punishments for certain offenses. Like "mandatory minimums" in the criminal justice context, these policies required schools to mete out suspensions and expulsions for certain disciplinary code violations, regardless of the circumstances or context. Initially, such sanctions were reserved for possession of weapons in school, largely in response to highly publicized incidents of school violence. Then, they were expanded to include the use of drugs or alcohol in school, and eventually, the zero tolerance net was widened to encompass a host of student behaviors that included "insubordination," "disrespect," "disrupting a school assembly," and even truancy and tardiness. As a result, the numbers of students suspended and expelled from school each year rose dramatically—from approximately 1.7 million in 1974 to more than 3.4 million in 2006.[4] Disparities are particularly striking upon closer examination of the race-based differences in punishments for similar offenses. In the study, "*The Color of Justice: Understanding and Addressing Racial Inequity in School Punishment*," Skiba, et al. reviewed disciplinary data from all middle school students (11,001) in a large Midwestern urban school district. They found that African American students are referred to the office for less serious and more subjective reasons than white students, and generally received harsher punishments than white students accused of similar offenses. They concluded that "these results argue that disproportionate representation of African Americans in office referrals, suspension and expulsion is evidence of a pervasive and systematic bias that may well be inherent in the use of exclusionary discipline."[5]

There is considerable disagreement over the reasons and causes for racial disparities in school exclusion rates. Some argue that they stem from racially different rates of "misbehaviors," others from both explicit and implicit racial bias on the part of educators and school resource officers, and others from cultural miscommunications and miscues between children of color, most dramatically African American boys, and their mostly white and/or middle class teachers, administrators, and school-based police officers. The pros and cons of these arguments are beyond the scope of this policy brief. What is irrefutable, however, is that these high rates of school exclusions—along with the troubling racial disparities that characterize them—are part of a negative, life-altering journey through the school to prison pipeline. For the sake of the children who travel this pipeline and for the health of our families, communities, economy and vibrancy of our democracy, we must change its course.

Criminal Justice Presence in the Schools

Courts at both the state and federal levels have increasingly deferred to the power of school officials to regulate student conduct. Professor Randall Beger of the University of

[1] Rafaele, Mendes (2003)
[2] Haney (2003)
[3] Organizations and institutions differ on the meaning of the "school to prison pipeline." The American Psychological Association, for example, uses it more exclusively to refer to educator referrals to the criminal justice system for relatively minor infractions. The Children's Defense Fund defines it more broadly as a "cradle to prison pipeline" that is associated with being born into poverty.

[4] National Center for Education Statistics (2009a)
[5] Ibid.

Wisconsin argues that just at the time courts dispensed with constitutional safeguards protecting students, schools stepped up intrusive surveillance tactics.[6]

Various law enforcement agencies have increased the use of criminal justice apparatus in schools, often in a well-meaning attempt to make schools safer. This includes metal detectors, Tasers, surveillance cameras, canine units and biometric hand readers.[7] Generally, educators have increased the presence of the police force in public schools. Los Angeles, New York and many other cities have their own school police agencies.

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) provided $753 million to more than 3,000 police departments to fund school-based police officers through the COPS in Schools Program (CIS), and more than $10 million to hire school-based officers through the Safe Schools/Healthy Students program.[8]

According to the National Association of School Resource Officers, there are an estimated 17,000 to 20,000 school resource officers in schools nationwide and school-based policing is the "fastest growing area of law enforcement."[9]

From Analysis to Action: Strategies to Engage Schools and Communities to Better Support Children & Families

> *"Zero tolerance policies. . . are basically pushing the debt forward. We need to be more sophisticated."*[10]
>
> Dr. Robert Sege
> Lead Author
> American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement
> [on] Role of the Pediatrician in Youth Violence Prevention

The positive news is that a national scan of promising practices and proven interventions that either directly address or indirectly affect the share of school suspensions and expulsions—a key predictor of academic failure, school dropout, and subsequent entry into the juvenile justice system—reveals myriad programs, services, and strategic approaches. To their credit, superintendents, principals, school board members, district attorneys, police chiefs, juvenile judges, children's advocates and parent groups across the country are recognizing the devastating consequences of high rates of school suspensions and expulsions and taking steps to reduce these. Their efforts include national and state education and juvenile justice reform initiatives, district efforts to revise school discipline codes, in-school character education and social justice curricula, out-of-school arts and recreation programs, school-university academic partnerships, preventive health and mental health programs, youth-led advocacy and education campaigns, faith-based programs, legal advocacy, community-policing focused events, and many others.

It is heartening to see such a wide range of groups and professional sectors working to improve life chances of at-risk youth. Unfortunately, many of these efforts have limited capacity and face challenges of "scaling up" or replication. Some also lack sufficiently hard data about their effectiveness to satisfy policymakers and funders. Another challenge is that many programs are designed and implemented in isolation. Practitioners are often unaware of other organizations with similar missions and programs that might become partners, thus improving delivery and reaching more children.

Here, our key recommendations emphasize two interrelated strategies. One focuses upon finding a common language and framework so that diverse groups can work across traditional boundaries. Second, we seek to employ preventative measures that arise from a variety of fields and research bases, and that have demonstrated potential to make a direct, immediate impact upon school disciplinary practices and student behavior and engagement in school.

More specifically, our recommendations focus on strategies that together help weave a seamless web of support for students and families.

Recommendations

1. Change children's environments by creating positive school climates and engaging the larger community in positive youth development.

2. Support the delivery of an affordable, accessible, high quality continuum of health care, social services, and other family supports through investment and long term commitment in full service community schools.

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[6] Beger (2003)
[7] Brown (2003)
[8] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (n.d.)
[9] NASRO (n.d.). School-based police officers are often called "School Safety Officers" or 'School Resource Officers" (SROs).
[10] As quoted in Klass, P. (2009, June 9). At Last Facing Down Bullies (and Their Enablers). *The New York Times.*

3. Provide families the tools and resources necessary to become equal partners and allies in their children's education.

These recommendations arise from research—in public health, education, housing, geography and other disciplines—that compels us to focus particular attention on children who attend schools and live in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage. After all, these are the children who are disproportionately suspended, expelled, banished to inadequate alternative schools, pushed out of school, arrested, and, ultimately, incarcerated, either as juveniles or as adults.

Recommendation #1

Change children's environments by creating positive school climates and engaging the larger community in positive youth development.

Creating positive differences in school climate[11] directly affects the lives of all students because, as children, they have little choice but to enter their school environments every day. For some, school is a safe haven that promotes learning and self-fulfillment. For others it is a place of conflict, frustration, failure, punishment, and, at times, cultural miscommunication that leads to disaffection, banishment, exclusion and, increasingly, entanglement in the juvenile justice system.

School climate influences behaviors of teachers, students, administrators, school resource officers and parents alike. It is defined both by the physical environment and by daily human interactions that reflect the shared ideas that shape a particular school's identity and standards for expected behaviors. These shared ideas include educational philosophy, assumptions, values, beliefs, and attitudes. By observing and understanding school climate, we can implicitly answer such vital questions as: Is diversity valued and respected? Do adults feel an obligation to create a caring environment? Do they treat students with respect and dignity? Are parents full partners in resolving behavioral problems? School climate reflects the "personality of the learning environment"[12] and is often defined and defended as just "the way we do things here."[13] It communicates to parents and students whether they are welcome and supported. It influences teacher morale and job satisfaction. It affects how students feel about coming to school, their motivation and openness to learning and intellectual risk-taking, and whether or not they feel physically and emotionally safe. Above all, it often determines whether discipline policies are punitive or prosocial. Prosocial policies are proactive efforts to teach, model and reward good behavior and positive social skills (e.g., caring, respect, courtesy, patience) rather than reactive responses to bad behavior.

Few schools explicitly define and manage school climate. Yet a significant body of research shows that poor school climate negatively affects a child's ability to learn and increases the likelihood for truancy, misbehavior, and disciplinary challenges. In healthy school climates, students do better academically and their social and emotional well-being improves.

How students feel about the climate in their school is the subject of *Where We Learn*,[14] a nationwide survey of some 32,000 students in 108 urban schools conducted by the Council of Urban Boards of Education. While the results are promising in that students were hopeful for the future and generally felt good about themselves, their schools, and their teachers, several areas of concern emerged.

Trust and respect between teachers and students influence academic achievement and are imperative in maintaining an effective learning environment. Ideally, students will trust their teachers and teachers will respect students. Yet,

- 34.6 percent of respondents do not believe that teachers treat everyone fairly and 40.1 percent are not sure they can trust their teachers.

- One-fifth (20.8 percent) of students say they do not believe teachers respect the students in their school. Broken down by race, 31.5 percent of African American students feel that students are disrespected, compared with 17.5 percent of white students, 14 percent of Hispanic students, and 12.4 percent of Asian students.

- Significant percentages of students of all races (37 percent African American, 31.7 percent white, 41.5 percent Asian) believe some races of children are smarter than other races of children.

Students are sensitive to their classmates' behavior problems. Students perceive the school's safety and their

[11] While some researchers and educators define school climate, school culture, and learning environment as distinct concepts, the terms are often used interchangeably. National School Climate Center (2008)
[12] Perkins (2008)
[13] Townley (1999)

[14] Perkins (2008); National School Climate Center (2008); Tableman (2004)

willingness to learn in relation to the number of disruptive classmates. Yet,

- 24 percent of all respondents are uncertain about their safety.
- More than 50 percent of survey respondents witnessed an episode of bullying at least once a month.
- Sixty percent of 7th and 8th graders agreed that students fight a lot in their school.

Mutual Respect and an Ethos of Caring: Pillars of a Positive School Climate

Schools with positive school climates do not always look alike. Administrative structures, personnel, educational philosophies, resources, and even the location and arrangement of the physical plant all influence school climate. But most school climate researchers agree that healthy school climates make explicit commitments to be *safe* and *caring.*[15] In positive school climates, safe schools are orderly; they have clear rules—or a set of values—to guide conduct; they have disciplinary practices that are both fair and consistently applied; and student-teacher, teacher-parent, and all personnel interactions within the school are based on mutual respect.[16]

Caring schools evoke a strong sense of "connectedness,"[17] i.e., how connected the school is to the community and how connected teachers, students, and parents are to one another. Research strongly suggests that students who feel a strong bond to at least one caring and responsible adult at school do better academically and are less likely to engage in risk taking behavior, such as premature sex, violence, and drug use.[18] Families who participate in their child's schooling and develop relationships with faculty and staff and with other families are better positioned to be an integral part of decision-making on issues affecting their children's education. Schools contribute to the personal growth of families by sharing knowledge of child development and supporting parental engagement and the development of parenting skills that support and reinforce the value of academic achievement and behavioral expectations.

[15] Ibid.
[16] Sandler, Wong, Morales & Patel (2000); Perkins (2008); Tableman (2004)
[17] McNeely, C., Nonnemaker, J., & Blum, R. (2002)
[18] National School Climate Center (2008)

The School Climate Challenge: Two Promising Approaches– School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Developmental Assets

Positive school climates do not arise without concerted effort and financial costs. Students, parents, and school personnel—teachers, administrative and building staff, school-based mental health professionals, school safety/resource officers—must work together to actively create and sustain a positive school climate.[19] In order to ensure that schools make school climate a priority, policies, legislation, and funding must exist to support multi-year efforts to transform school cultures and to sustain positive climates.[20]

According to the American Educational Research Association, while there is a general consensus on the elements that comprise school climate and culture, more than 50 school climate inventories or approaches exist. Each has a slight variation in definition, measurement instruments, and design and implementation strategies. Educational researchers have deemed several school climate change strategies to be effective, evidence-based practice. These include Caring Schools Communities™, Communities that Care, and the Center for Social and Emotional Education's Five Stage Approach.

Only School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and The Search Institute's Developmental Assets are highlighted here. We highlight these approaches, in part, because they have strong national support and a solid foothold in the education communities of several states. Also, the programs share a commitment to parent engagement and the establishment of strong links between school personnel and community-based systems of care for children and youth with socio-emotional-behavioral and socio-economic challenges. While both include strategies to create positive school climates, the two differ in their primary locus for action, research basis, and preferred target age group. School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is centered in the school, grounded in applied behavior research and is most effective at the Pre-K-elementary level. The Developmental Assets approach is centered in the home and community, grounded in child development and resilience research, and focuses primarily on adolescents and teens.

[19] Ibid.
[20] Perkins (2008); National School Climate Center (2008); Sandler, Wong, Morales & Patel (2000)

School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports[21]

The University of Oregon, in partnership with the University of Connecticut, is home to the federally-funded National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports (www.pbis.org). The Center provides capacity-building information and technical support about behavioral systems to assist states and districts in the design of effective schools. It is the hub for the PBIS Network. The PBIS Network includes researchers and implementation specialists at eight universities and four educational resource centers that work with individual schools, school districts, and state education agencies to provide ongoing training and technical assistance to introduce and sustain the PBIS approach in educational settings through School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

As of July 2008, 7,660 schools in 46 states have defined PBIS teams, and initiated the PBIS training process with support from PBIS Network partners.[22] Thirty-six states have state-level initiatives that support PBIS initiatives in public schools.[23] Three states—Michigan, Maryland, and Illinois—have instituted statutes that either recommend or require PBIS in public schools.

School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (School-wide PBIS) is a direct response to what many educators view as failed exclusionary practices (i.e., suspension, expulsion, substantially separate special education settings) that have neither stopped behaviors such as aggression and defiance that disrupt classrooms nor met the mental health needs of students.[24] The School-wide PBIS approach seeks to "prevent the development and intensifying of problem behaviors and maximize academic success for all students," according to the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports.[25]

School-wide PBIS emphasizes successful learning and social development of all students through structured implementation of discipline and proactive positive behavioral support systems. This "systems approach"[26] is not a packaged curriculum. Rather, it is a comprehensive strategy that selects, implements, and evaluates the effectiveness of interventions designed to promote and support positive behavior that contributes to a school climate conducive to learning.

> School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports has gained momentum nationally as a leading strategy to improve overall student behavior and to identify and provide support services to children with family dysfunction and mental health issues.
>
> Selected Endorsements
> – Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act
> – American Association of School Psychologists
> – Southern Poverty Law Center
> – Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
> – Dignity in Schools Campaign

Strong Evidence of Effectiveness

The PBIS model emerged from extensive research in special education and educational psychology conducted at the University of Oregon with support from the U.S. Public Health Service and the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Special Education Programs (OSEP). School-wide PBIS is an increasing focus of research literature in the educational, juvenile justice, and children's mental health fields. This expanding body of research[27] documents that schools that employ School-wide PBIS experience:

- Significant decreases in disciplinary referrals
- Reduction in numbers of suspensions, with some studies pointing to reductions of 50 percent or more
- Fewer incidences of student physical and verbal assaults
- Improved student perceptions of school safety
- Lower truancy and dropout rates
- Increased and enhanced teaching time
- Improved academic achievement

The core elements of the School-wide PBIS approach are:

- Commitment to proactive prevention of problem behavior
- A three-tiered student support model
- Robust information systems and data-driven decision-making

[21] Research literature and education, mental health, and juvenile justice practitioner publications use Positive Behavioral Support(s) (PBS), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support(s) (PBIS) and School-wide Positive Behavioral Support(s) (SWPBS) interchangeably.
[22] Rob Horner, personal communication (August 3, 2008)
[23] Campbell & Horner (2007)
[24] Horner, Sugai & Vincent (2005)
[25] National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Supports (n.d.)
[26] Sugai & Horner (2007)
[27] Washburn, Stow, Cole, & Robinson (2007); Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, (2006); Warren, et al., (2003)

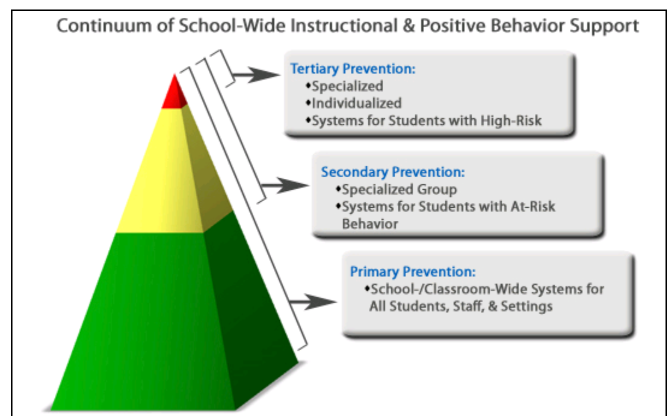
- School-wide leadership teams to guide PBS implementation
- Ongoing technical assistance and coaching to ensure fidelity to the School-wide PBIS approach

Proactive prevention measures include clearly defined school-wide behavioral expectations and a graduated system of discipline in which consequences for behavioral infractions are communicated to all students and consistently applied. Consequences are not punitive. Rather, the actions in response to inappropriate behavior are intended to help decrease inappropriate behaviors. Actions might include peer mentoring, conflict resolution training, a student-teacher behavioral contract, or other strategies to help the student manage his or her own behavior. This discipline system is balanced with a system of rewards (e.g., praise, privileges, prizes) for "good" behavior that enables a smoothly-functioning educational environment. Teachers and other school personnel explicitly assume responsibility for teaching, modeling, and rewarding positive behavior. Desirable student behavior becomes a "skill to be learned and taught in much the same manner as academic skills."[28]

When successfully implemented, school-wide PBIS establishes "a positive school climate in which behavioral expectations for students are highly predictable, directly taught, consistently acknowledged, and actively monitored."[29] Monitoring includes ongoing systematic assessment of the nature, prevalence, and effects of antisocial behavior on students and school personnel. The school-wide PBS team reviews office disciplinary referrals, observations and records of student interactions in classroom and common areas, and other data. This allows them to make informed decisions about strategy adjustments, deployment of resources, and identifying students for group or individual support.

Three Tiers of Support–A Public Health Model

The three-tiered School-wide PBIS approach draws from the public health field. Each tier of prevention and support is increasingly focused and intensive, responding to students with various degrees of behavioral problems.



Available at: http://www.pbis.org/school/what_is_swpbs.aspx

The primary—*universal*—tier applies to all students in the school. At the primary tier, school-wide PBIS often serves as a platform for related programs that promote socio-emotional learning and youth development. At many schools, these include the *Olweus™ Bullying Prevention Program*, *Second Step* or other evidence-based character education or social skills training curricula.

The secondary—*selected*—tier applies to "at-risk" students whose problem behaviors are habitual. These students receive targeted interventions in groups with students with similar behavior problems or behaviors that seem to occur for the same reasons (e.g., truancy, fighting) and/or across similar settings (e.g., hallway class transitions). Many schools employ conflict resolution or restorative practices as secondary interventions.

The tertiary—*indicated*—tier focuses on "high risk" students whose needs have not been met through tier one and tier two interventions. These students require more intensive interventions that engage mental health and child services agencies to work with the child and his or her family. Tertiary supports usually integrate functional behavioral assessments in which families and mental health practitioners explore underlying reasons for misbehavior. The child and his or her family receive wraparound services, a family-centered, service integration model. In this model, a collaborative team of service providers works with students, families, and teachers to tailor community services and supports for the child.

[28] Colvin (2007, p. 9)
[29] Sprague & Horner (in press)

OLWEUS™ BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM: HELPING VICTIMS, VICTIMIZERS, AND BYSTANDERS

In response to the increased incidence and documented negative health effects of bullying and cyber-bullying among school-age children, the American Academy of Pediatrics devoted a new section of its official policy statement on youth violence prevention to the problem and recommends schools adopt the Olweus™ Bullying Prevention Program.[1] Developed by Dan Olweus, a research psychologist and pioneer in bullying research, the program draws from more than 35 years of research, implementation, and evaluation in Europe and the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than 30 percent of students aged 12–18 reported being bullied or cyber-bullied in school with little variation across gender or race.[2] Unchecked, bullying negatively affects the learning environment for all students—those who are bullied, the bullies themselves and those who witness the acts of aggression—and may lead to lifelong physical, emotional and mental health issues. The Olweus™ Bullying Prevention Program is a whole-school change program with community, school-wide, classroom and individual level interventions that emphasize improved peer relations and positive and safe school climates.

⇨ **To Learn more about the Olweus™ Bullying Prevention Program, go to: www.olweus.org**

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1 (Committee on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention, (2009)
2 (NCES, 2009)

The PBIS research base indicates that about 80 percent of students respond successfully to primary behavioral supports. Secondary supports work for about 15 percent and 1 to 5 percent require intensive individual tertiary interventions.[30] Recent research in urban schools indicates the percentages of students in the secondary and tertiary tiers may be higher, in part because of the stress of extreme poverty and community violence.[31]

School-wide PBIS in Action

PBIS initiatives are in place in schools, juvenile justice, and mental health facilities nationwide. The approach has "spread across the country like wildfire" according to one proponent.[32]

In California, researchers in the PBIS Network work directly with 95 schools in Orange County and the Campbell School District. In 2007, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUD), the nation's second largest school district, mandated school-wide PBIS for all schools as part of a revised district-wide Discipline Foundation Policy.[33] The LAUD policy grew out of a three-year effort of planning, piloting, and training as well as student, parent and community engagement in the planning process and determination of the guiding principles for the community.[34]

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: MOVING FROM CONFLICT TO COOPERATION, CONNECTION AND A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Restorative practices are grounded in a simple premise, according to the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), "Human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them…Punitive and authoritarian *to* mode and the permissive and paternalistic *for* mode are not as effective as the restorative, participatory, engaging *with* mode." The overly harsh, authoritarian, and often arbitrary punishments of zero tolerance policies alienate children and their families and lead to disconnection from school. Yet, students who misbehave must be held accountable. Restorative practices, which include informal interactions and formal processes such as peer mediation and family group conferencing, actively engage misbehaving students in identifying those who may have been harmed by their actions, accepting responsibility, and negotiating an agreement on how to repair the harm. It is important for those who have been harmed to have an opportunity to express their feelings to the offenders. Restorative actions might range from personal or public apologies, to financial remuneration, to community service.

⇨ **To learn more about restorative practices, See Safer Saner Schools, a program of the International Institute for Restorative Practices Training and Consulting Division at www.safersanerschools.org.**

State-led PBIS Efforts

Maryland and Illinois are the leaders in statewide implementation of school-wide PBIS. Strong leadership and funding from national and state education and health and human services agencies have allowed these states to both build extensive PBIS technical assistance and support networks and commit to full integration of school-based mental health services.

PBIS Maryland (www.pbismaryland.org) has supported implementation of school-wide PBIS in more than 500

30 Hill, Ramsey & Greshman (2003-2004)
31 Warren, et al. (2003)
32 Lester (2008)
33 Los Angeles Unified School District (2007)
34 Zeff (2008)

schools as of 2008. PBIS Maryland projects more than 700 PBIS Maryland schools by 2010. The comprehensive effort is coordinated by a state leadership team, which includes the Maryland Department of Education; the Sheppard Pratt Mental Health System, a private, non-profit behavioral health organization; Johns Hopkins Center for the Study for Youth Violence; the Department of Juvenile Services Mental Health Administration; and 24 school district leaders. Johns Hopkins began a longitudinal evaluation in 2002 to assess the quality of training at schools, the fidelity of implementation, and the effects on student behavior and academic achievement. Based on initial data, office referrals declined by 42 percent in middle schools. This translates to a recovery of 40 days of school administrator time and 119 days of student instructional time.[35]

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health jointly fund the PBIS Maryland evaluation. The rigorous randomized effectiveness trial compares 21 PBIS schools and 16 "Focus/Comparison" schools for the period baseline plus 4 years (Spring 2002 - Spring 2007) in which data were collected on 29,423 students and 3,563 staff. In April 2008, Johns Hopkins reported the following preliminary findings:[36]

- PBIS schools reached and sustained high fidelity.
- All aspects of organizational health increased in PBIS schools.
- The number of students with one or more Office Disciplinary Referrals (both major and minor infractions) lowered in PBIS schools.
- Suspensions dropped by 25 percent in PBIS schools.
- The percentage of students scoring in advanced and proficient range of state achievement test trended upwards in PBIS schools.

In the next phase, Johns Hopkins researchers will analyze individual student change and explore what role gender, race, socioeconomic status, or special education classification might play in the effects of the program.

PBIS Maryland views advancement of school-mental health system integration as a key goal and has rallied strong support for children's mental health and school mental health among state policy leaders. A new state grant program will support integration of schools and mental health systems and provide funds to increase student access to high-quality mental health care by developing innovative approaches that link school systems with the local mental health system.

The Illinois State Board of Education funded the Illinois PBIS Network to "build capacity of schools, families, and communities to promote social and academic success of all students, including those with emotional/behavioral and other disabilities." At the close of fiscal year 2007, 654 schools in 170 Illinois districts were implementing some level of PBIS, representing 16 percent of schools and approximately 20 percent of districts statewide. By fiscal year 2011, the Illinois PBIS Network targets an increase to 1,200 schools. In Illinois, some schools have not fully implemented the three tier PBIS model. A comparison of suspension rates per 100 students between partially and fully implemented schools revealed that fully implemented PBIS schools had demonstrated fewer suspensions and were able to devote more resources to tier three interventions. Students in tier three were most often at risk of removal from home, school and/or community placement. Illinois PBIS tracked a small cohort of eight students for six months while receiving wraparound services. All demonstrated positive and statistically significant decreases in risk.[37]

Challenges to School-wide PBIS

It is important to note that implementation fidelity is a major theme in the PBIS literature. In other words, adoption of school-wide PBIS requires strict adherence to the implementation model that has been tested and proven effective in order to achieve similar results. This requires a sustained commitment of school and district leadership, "buy in" from all stakeholders, high quality data collection methods, ongoing coaching and technical assistance, and access to high quality community-based systems of care. Without such elements, which often require state and district-level policy changes and additional financial and human resources, the success rates of PBIS are unlikely to be replicated.

Moreover, since PBIS is a strategy rather than a prescribed program, each school develops its own discipline system of behavioral expectations and consequences based on its own culture. In some schools, the commitment to being a "caring" or "trauma sensitive" school community may be absent. Other schools may continue to include definitions of "willful defiance" that are open to cross-cultural misinterpretation as well as exclusionary practices such as out-of-school suspensions for truancy, and stress-inducing

[35] Alexander, Barrett & Leaf (2007)
[36] Bradshaw & Leaf (2008)
[37] Illinois PBIS Network (2007)

prevention measures such as random weapons searches with metal detectors.[38]

The key to student success is a commitment to the PBIS response that augments discipline with behavioral supports and fully engages students and families in the process of examining and correcting behavior that interferes with school climate and student success. Some critics caution that some schools may adopt school-wide PBIS too narrowly. In order to effectively meet the needs of all students, and in particular, those most in need of support, schools must commit to the three-tiered model—and not be tempted to adopt "PBIS Lite." Schools must actively integrate mental health services and systems of care and commit to PBIS for all children across the three tiers of PBIS intervention.[39]

Some PBIS researchers also advise that school-wide PBIS is most effective at the Pre-K and elementary levels. It is imperative that intervention start early, since antisocial behavior driven by severe emotional or behavioral disturbance becomes less responsive to intervention by adolescence.[40]

The Developmental Assets Approach

For the past 50 years, the Minneapolis-based non-profit research organization, Search Institute (www.search-institute.org), has advanced its mission to provide "leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities."[41] In 1990, Search published *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th – 12th Grade Youth*, which introduced its signature approach, "Developmental Assets." Grounded in a meta-analysis of scientific research on child and adolescent development, risk prevention, and resiliency, the thesis is that certain developmental assets are necessary building blocks of positive youth development. This includes positive experiences, relationships, opportunities, and personal qualities that young people need to grow up healthy, caring and responsible. These assets both help prevent high-risk behavior and promote school success.

The Search framework divides forty "Developmental Assets" equally between *external* and *internal* assets. External assets emphasize the role of families, neighborhoods, schools, and religious organizations in providing support, empowerment, constructive use of time, as well as boundaries and expectations. Among the 20 external assets are parental involvement in schooling, a caring and encouraging school climate, clearly defined rules and consequences for school behavior, opportunities to serve the community, and availability of youth programs and activities. Internal assets support a commitment to learning, instill positive values, develop social competencies, and promote a positive identity, including achievement motivation, a sense of personal responsibility, conflict resolution skills, and a positive view of one's personal future.

Search's Developmental Assets Approach is associated with improved school climate, more engaged parents, and stronger community-based youth development programs.

<u>Selected Endorsements</u>

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- America's Promise Alliance
- YMCA of USA
- Faith and Service Technical Education Network (FASTEN)
- Ohio Summit on Children – Promising and Proven Approach designation
- California Adolescent Health Collaborative

Evidence for the Developmental Assets Approach[42] [43]

The Developmental Assets Survey consists of 156 questions covering adult and peer relationships, youth behaviors and attitudes towards their school, family, and community. The survey measures the 40 Developmental Assets, 24 risk behaviors, 10 high-risk behavior patterns, and 8 thriving indicators. More than 2 million 6th- to 12th-grade youth in communities across the United States and Canada have completed the survey.[44]

Search Institute, in partnership with the Children First initiative in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, launched a multiyear study of Developmental Assets among 6th-12th grade youth. This study measured Developmental Assets longitudinally (1997, 1998, 2001) and links young people's asset profiles to their actual school records. This evaluative study, conducted by the Minnesota Institute of Public Health, offers insights into the patterns of Developmental Assets through adolescence. It also examines of the power of Developmental Assets over time. The evaluation found that students in the 9th grade program demonstrated fewer risk behaviors (e.g., drug, alcohol and tobacco use) and

[38] As examples, see Zeff (2008) and Lester (2008)
[39] Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law (2006)
[40] Hill, Ramsey & Greshman (2003-2004)
[41] Search Institute (n.d.)
[42] Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Sesma (2006); Sesma & Roehlkepartain (2003)
[43] Search Institute (n.d.)
[44] Marc Mannes (personal communication, August 7, 2008)

showed increased commitment to school as measured by attendance and improved academic performance.[45]

Recent analyses of Search Institute's aggregate dataset of 217,277 6th- to 12th-graders (including 69,731 youth of color) surveyed in 318 U.S. communities during the 1999–2000 school year found the following:

- African American, American Indian, Asian American, Latino/a, white, and multiracial youth benefit similarly from experiencing more of the 40 developmental assets in their lives, regardless of their socioeconomic status.
- Developmental assets protect youth from all racial/ethnic groups from engaging in 10 different high-risk behaviors, including violence, alcohol use, and illicit drug use.
- Students from all racial/ethnic backgrounds with high levels of assets (31–40) are about five to 12 times as likely as those with few assets (0–10) to be successful in school.
- The importance of particular categories of assets varies by race/ethnicity, suggesting the need for focused, ongoing dialogue within communities of color about their strengths and opportunities for nurturing healthy children and youth.

Engaged Communities

The Search approach to youth development rests on the premise that an "engaged community" of individuals, schools, and organizations must recognize its responsibility to ensure that young people have the resources, opportunities, and strengths to succeed. Search encourages and supports families, communities, schools, youth development, and faith-based organizations in "intentional asset building" that is based upon an asset inventory of their own youth and student populations. Armed with youth survey and school and community resource data, communities and schools must develop and implement a "strategic prevention framework" that targets both the development of specific assets and an overall increase in the total assets in the youth population.

A critical goal of the asset-building approach is to create a new cultural norm among adults whereby they accept and act upon a social responsibility to contribute to healthy development of young people—not only their own children but also the children of their neighbors and members of the larger community. The strength of the assets approach is that it provides a common language and framework for diverse groups working across traditional boundaries to improve the life chances of young people. An emphasis on parent/adult education and engagement programs contributes to the success of the approach.

PARENTS AS ASSET BUILDERS

California-based Family Leadership Connection (FLC) employs the Search asset building model. FLC serves as Search Institute's training resource for parent engagement in the United States and Canada. In California, FLC founders Patty and David Bunker have trained more than 10,000 parents and guardians in asset building through "Parenting Partners," a seven-week set of classes for increasing parenting skills and involving low income parents and guardians in their children's school success. The Family Leadership Connection is a faith-based ministry that emphasizes equipping churches to lead parent outreach teams. Elementary, middle and high schools throughout California have welcomed teams from area churches to lead parenting classes on the school campus.

⇨ **For more information, go to: The Family Leadership Connection website at www.familyleadershipconnection.org.**

Developmental Assets in Action

Search's Developmental Assets Approach has been widely disseminated with broad-based applications in youth development organizations, schools, parent education programs, and juvenile justice entities. Most notably, Search Institute partnered with YMCA-USA and YMCA-Canada to form the Abundant Assets Alliance (www.abundantassets.org), which has three long-term goals:

- To support the transformation of local YMCAs to be asset-rich resources
- To equip local YMCAs to be catalysts and partners for community transformation
- To join with other organizations across North America to influence social norms and policies

San Jose-based Project Cornerstone

Project Cornerstone (www.projectcornerstone.org) is an example of Abundant Assets in action. The YMCA of Santa Clara Valley serves as the parent organization, and was a founding member of the Youth Alliance that launched Project Cornerstone in 1998. As of 2008, the Project Cornerstone collaborative includes more than 70

[45] Ibid.

organizations such as community-based youth and family serving organizations, city and county offices and agencies, businesses and corporations, foundations and community groups, as well as the County Office of Education, and more than 130 schools. America's Promise recently named San Jose one of the "100 Best Communities for Young People" citing Project Cornerstone as a key reason for the designation.[46]

Project Cornerstone seeks to "build a web of support around every young person in its community."[47] The web includes families, schools, community centers, juvenile justice entities, mental health providers, faith communities, and local businesses. Project Cornerstone recognizes that these resources—parts of the web—are often disconnected from one another and not linked to children and youth themselves. Project Cornerstone actively facilitates connection and communication to ensure that young people can count on individuals and organizations working together to provide them with consistent support and guidance.

Project Cornerstone's strategies directly respond to voices of local youth. In 1999, Cornerstone partnered with nine school districts and the County Office of Education to conduct Search Institute's Developmental Assets survey to seven thousand 7th- to 12th-graders throughout the county. In 2005, 15,000 students in grades 4 through 11 throughout the county completed the survey. According to Project Cornerstone executive director Anne Ehresman, the results of the youth survey catalyzed the community. The asset inventory of the county's youth served as a "wake up call" and united school district and community-based leaders in asset building efforts.

The San Jose Unified School District and the Morgan Hill Unified District adopted the assets approach by engaging students, staff, and teachers in promoting caring school climates and using annual school climate data as part of performance evaluations for principals.

Fifty-three elementary, middle and high schools have student, parent and/or staff leadership teams implementing asset-building action plans to promote safe, caring school climates and reduce bullying/peer abuse. Initial results include:

- Referrals for behavior problems at a partner middle school dropped by nearly 99 percent in just 3 months for 22 students who became tutors for younger children. The students who were failing academically had 257 referrals from September through March but only one referral from April through June, usually a time of increased referrals. The students and their teachers reported improvements in their motivation, confidence, and effort in their schoolwork.

- Caring school climate indicators increased by 12 percent and high-risk behaviors consistently decreased following asset-building efforts at another partner middle school.

- 89 percent of students surveyed said they feel their schools are safer for all students after educators implemented asset-building action plans.

Project Cornerstone demonstrates the effectiveness of strategies that focus on 1) finding a common language and framework for diverse groups to work across traditional boundaries and improve the life chances of young people; and 2) preventive measures with potential for direct, immediate impact.

In Santa Clara County, Project Cornerstone's efforts are "woven seamlessly" into schools that have also adopted school-wide PBIS, according to Ehresman.

Intrinsic to both the School-wide PBIS and Developmental Assets approaches is recognition that for some children neither prosocial discipline nor positive youth development through intentional asset building will overcome the effects of physical and mental health issues based in childhood trauma and extreme poverty. Successful implementation of either strategy is predicated on solid systems of care and access to high quality, affordable, community-based mental health and other support services for all children and families.

Recommendation #2

Support the delivery of an affordable, accessible, high quality continuum of health care, social services, and other family supports through the development and support of full service community schools.

"Doris and I talk a lot about the backpack—the things these kids have to bring to school in their backpacks, all problems they have. Unlike teachers and other adults, who have other outlets and resources to deal with it;

[46] Project Cornerstone (n.d.)
[47] Ibid.

they can lay on the couch for therapy, take time off. The kids can't do that. They can't say, 'I can't deal with this. I am going to take vacation or go here.' How can we hold them responsible for their actions and attitudes, if we do not give them the same resources that we now demand in our workplace?"[48]

Doris and Jesse Willard
Parent Advocates
Modesto City, California

In July 2008, Randi Weingarten, the newly elected president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the nation's largest teachers union, called on municipal leaders and school districts nationwide to create full service community schools.[49] [50] The demand for coordinated and/or co-located services that integrate education, public health, mental health, social services, transportation, childcare, recreation, enrichment and other community-based resources has been echoing in the U.S. for more than a decade since Joy Dryfoos' seminal 1994 publication, *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families*, but has still not been implemented to scale.

More recent attention to the alarming numbers of young people either dropping out or being pushed out of school through exclusionary practices creates new impetus for the promising model of integrated, community-based service delivery. An extensive body of research documents the impact of undetected and untreated socio-emotional-behavioral problems, basic health problems (i.e., dental, vision, hearing, malnutrition), and parental engagement on school success. Researchers, practitioners, and advocates also highlight the continuing challenge of making quality basic health services affordable and accessible to all children and families in need—particularly children who live in areas of concentrated disadvantage. Effective systems of care must be grounded in the community, thereby removing "barriers of time and distance"[51] that hamper effective communication and cooperation between service providers, educators, and parents and guardians.

The high profile call by the AFT president is echoed by others vested in improving the quality of our nation's schools and improving academic outcomes and life chances for children of color.[52] Among them are Grantmakers for Education, one of the largest philanthropic affinity groups, and a newly formed coalition of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers who advocate for a *Broader Bolder Approach to Education* (www.boldapproach.org). The foundation for the "broader, bolder approach" is the undeniable heft of educational, public health, and socio-economic research that documents the potent impact that factors outside of the traditional school mission and setting have upon education. Parenting, health, and poverty together with cognitive, cultural, and character development are powerful factors in children's ability to overcome socio-economic disadvantage and achieve academic success.

School-based Mental Health Services

Advocates have been more successful in garnering support for policies that expand the availability of school-based mental health services, with several acts pending in Congress and in state legislatures. The narrow focus on school-based mental health is warranted. According to research compiled by the Center for Health and Health Care in Schools, 75 percent of children in need of mental health services do not get the help they need.[53]

Children of color not only have less access to mental health services and are less likely to receive needed care, but they often receive a poorer quality of mental health care. Research suggests that schools may function as the "de facto mental health system"[54] for children and adolescents. Of those children fortunate enough to receive care, 70 to 80 percent receive it in a school setting. Yet, school-based health programs represent a wide range—from part-time basic care provided by an unlicensed aide to a full-time comprehensive health clinic that offers preventive and treatment services. Only about 60 percent of the nation's 1,500 school-based health centers have mental health professionals on staff. Research suggests that the most effective approaches to helping children at-risk for or experiencing socio-emotional difficulties are wraparound services and multi-systemic therapy. Both are systematic approaches centered in the family but that actively engage key players such as the child's peers, school and community. The aim is to build a supportive network of extended family, friends and neighbors and other caring adults to help the child and the child's family make and maintain positive changes.

[48] Jesse and Doris Willard, personal communication (June 27, 2008)
[49] The terms "full service schools" and "community schools" are some sometimes used synonymously but "full service" conveys a commitment to health services.
[50] Dillon (2008)
[51] Ouellette, Briscoe & Tyson (2004, p. 307)
[52] Bazelon (2006); Warren, et al. (2003); Lawson and Sailor (2000); The Forum for Education (2008); Grantmakers for Education (2006)
[53] Center for Health Care and Health Care in Schools (n.d.)
[54] Ibid., p 2

Nearly ten years ago, in *Problem Behavior Prevention and School-Based Health Centers: Programs and Prospects*, researchers from the Urban Institute pointed to school-based health centers as a "sorely underutilized"[55] resource that should be the focal or primary point of attack for the delivery of prevention intervention services.[56] The researchers noted that despite the many strengths of the school-based health centers—including popularity with families and students, ability to provide care for students without access to regular providers, and capacity to provide a wide range of services in a convenient setting—lack of a reliable funding base posed a significant challenge that had to be addressed for school-based health services to achieve their full potential in addressing the mental and physical health care needs of disadvantaged youth.

The YMCA Community Schools approach is similar to the Abundant Assets approach described above as it focuses on bringing "the assets of an entire community to bear in preparing children and families for success."[57] More than 100 YMCA community schools now dot the country. While YMCAs support many more schools in communities throughout the United States, the goal of a YMCA Community School is to "form a deep, truly seamless relationship between the school and the YMCA…where communication is open and there is a clear understanding of roles and mutual respect for expertise at the table" according to Mary Blank of the Coalition of Community Schools. Blank sees the YMCA as the "best equipped organization to help the community school effort" and her organization has partnered with the YMCA to increase the number of YMCA Community Schools. A hallmark of the YMCA Community Schools is the strong emphasis on families and breaking down barriers to parent engagement in schools.

Recommendation #3

Support local advocacy efforts by providing parents and guardians with tools and resources necessary to become equal partners and allies in the education and academic success of their children.

Two forces fuel the effort to organize parent involvement in schools. First, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) defines parental involvement as regular, two-way, and meaningful communication between families and teachers regarding student academic learning and other school activities. This definition comes from the National PTA's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.[58] Successful parent involvement strategies vary among states, districts, and individual schools and focus on structured programs that provide parents and guardians resources to actively support their children's academic achievement. This includes such things as family literacy, parenting classes, and college and career planning programs. Many schools engage service organizations such as the Family Leadership Connection, described above, or Los Angeles-based Families in Schools (www.familiesinschools.org) to deliver parent and family involvement programs. Investing in community schools would strengthen the ability of schools to engage parents as active partners in learning.

The second driving force for parent involvement comes from parents, guardians, and community members who advocate for improved school performance or changes to school policies or practice. Persistent racial achievement gaps, drop out/push out issues, and zero tolerance discipline policies that disproportionately punish minority youth are rallying issues. Many parents and guardians confront these challenges for the first time when they attempt to advocate for their children and find themselves met with resistance until they join forces with others and form grassroots advocacy groups.

The second scenario transformed Jesse and Doris Willard into lifelong parent advocates. The Willards advise action groups nationwide and also served on the National Education Association's task force on suspensions. The Willards' story is instructive. Five years ago, the Modesto City High School in Modesto, California, suspended their teenage son after he fought with a classmate. Concerned about the lack of due process—and what they felt was "disrespectful treatment" from school personnel when they tried to investigate the facts of the incident—they decided to take action. They placed an ad in a local paper asking parents with similar experiences to call them. Some 30 people attended their first meeting. The parents shared concerns about the disproportionate numbers of African Americans and Latinos who were receiving suspensions. The group brought in the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California's Racial Justice Project for consultation.

With the support and expertise of the ACLU, the Modesto parent group gathered data, reported their findings to the school board, and spoke out against discrimination. According to Jesse Willard, "We really just started getting involved in taking them [Modesto High School] to task on

[55] Eisen, M., Pallitto, C. & Bradner, C. (1999), online chapter 1, paragraph 10
[56] Ibid.
[57] Robertson (2008)
[58] Parent Teacher Association (n.d.)

their disciplinary due process…Our goal was to hold them accountable to our children as they hold our children accountable for everything." Ultimately, the Modesto City School District appointed a community affairs officer and overhauled its discipline policy after input from the parent advocate group.[59]

Investing in Parents and Guardians as Advocates

Grantmakers for Education, the Association of Small Foundations, and the Social Venture Partners fund advocacy efforts as one of seven critical needs for education philanthropy investment.[60] Communities and parents must be able to marshal information, access legal services and communicate effectively not only to advocate for individual student and school-level changes, but also to influence state and federal policies that affect their local schools.

Parent, student and community engagement plays an "essential role in making schools more responsive and holding schools accountable for serving low income communities of color,"[61] according to Harvard sociologist Mark R. Warren, whose research focuses on community organizing in low income communities of color. Warren argues that building a political constituency for public schools is essential to addressing inequalities embedded into American public education. Parents, according to Warren, must be viewed "not as recipients of services, but as public actors and change agents, people capable of being leaders in their community."[62] Community organizing that fosters the leadership development and empowerment of parents builds the social capital of the community and shifts the relational power to create more cooperative and productive parent and school relationships.

Conclusion

The phrase "the school to prison pipeline" offers a visual image of the pivotal developmental period—usually in middle and high school—when so many children of color, particularly children who live in areas of concentrated disadvantage, make fateful and irreversible turns away from school toward dropping out, delinquency, and, ultimately, prison. It is a tragic and all too common trajectory that begins in challenged neighborhoods and rapidly accelerates during the school years. Yet, it is a journey that is eminently preventable. As President Johnson understood so well almost half a century ago, the actions that lead to school exclusion and dropping out represent the culmination of "a hundred unseen forces." In our efforts to redirect the pipeline back toward opportunity and high school completion, it is critical that these unseen forces be identified, and brought out into the open. For that is where the most durable and effective solutions lie—in the partnerships forged between the schools, the communities, and the parents in order to lift up and reclaim our children.

This report is by no means meant to be exhaustive. Across the country, schools are working collaboratively with law enforcement, with community and recreational agencies, with parents, with legal advocates, with area researchers, with businesses and with health and mental health professionals to craft innovative and creative new programs designed to engage young people at risk of dropping out and court involvement. Many of these are successful and deserve to be replicated. In this brief, we have concentrated on those programs that are based in sound research, already demonstrate a track record of success, are being widely replicated, and seek to create the "web of support" that we believe all young people need and deserve in order to succeed and thrive.

About the Author

Linda DeLauri is a CHHIRJ research associate. Her work focuses upon identifying and finding alternatives to policies and practices that perpetuate poverty.

Special Thanks

To the California Endowment, the Open Society Institute and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation for their support of this publication.

[59] Jesse and Doris Willard, personal communication (June 27, 2008)
[60] Grantmakers for Education (2006)
[61] Warren (2005) p. 2 of web print version; Mediratta and Fruchter (2001)
[62] Warren (2005) p. 22 of web print version

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