

Texas' School-to-Prison Pipeline: Dropout to Incarceration

How school discipline policies impact future involvement in the criminal justice system.



School-to-Prison Pipeline Link

- *"The single greatest predictor of future incarceration in the juvenile justice system is a history of disciplinary referrals at school."*

Public Policy Research Institute, Texas A&M
(2005)

What Does This Mean?

- Holding all other risk factors statistically constant, students involved in one or more disciplinary incidents were *23.4 percent more likely* to encounter a referral to the juvenile justice system.
- Each additional disciplinary infraction increased the likelihood by a maximum of 1.5 percent
- Each day a student was suspended from school elevated the probability up to 0.1%

School-to-Prison Pipeline Link

- More than 80 percent of Texas prison inmates are high school dropouts.
- One in three juveniles sent to the Texas Youth Commission are school dropouts.

Students are more likely to drop out if:

- They have been suspended repeatedly.
- They have been expelled for any period of time.
- They have been retained in a grade below their age level peers.

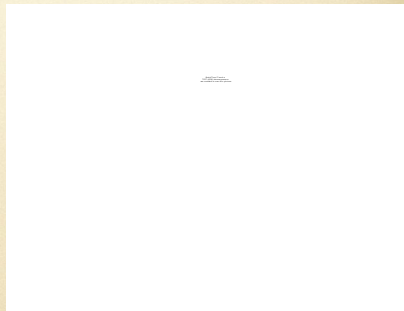
The more days a student misses, the more likely they are to drop out of school.

School-to-Prison Pipeline Link

- More than a third of Texas public school students dropped out in 2005-06; the peak dropout year - 9th grade - corresponds to the largest number of DAEP referrals.

School-to-Prison Pipeline Link

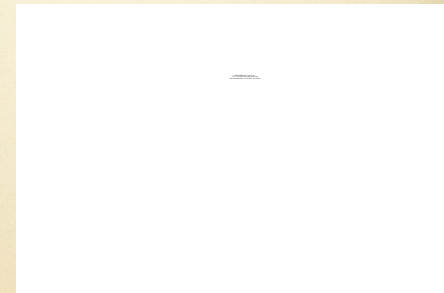
- More than 100,000 students are sent to Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs annually; nearly two-thirds are sent for discretionary, non-violent offenses.
- DAEPs have more than twice the dropout rate of mainstream schools.



School-to-Prison Pipeline Link

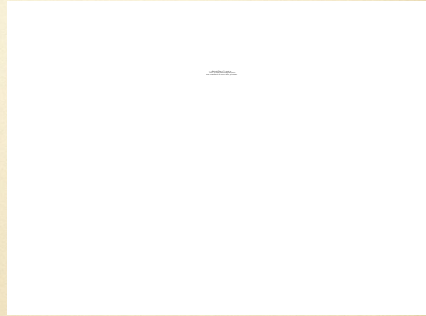
- The statewide average overall referral rate to a DAEP is 2% a year, however 167 school districts referred students at two to six times the state average for one or more years between 2001-2006.

Analysis of data self-reported by school districts to Texas Education Agency



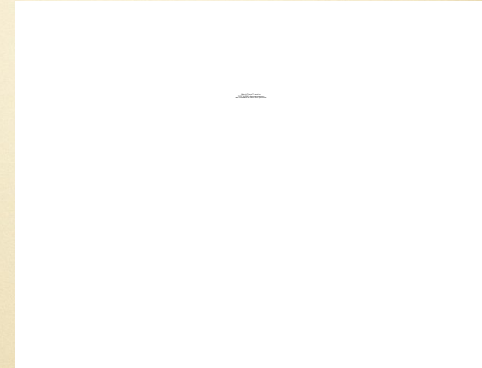
Major Findings

- African American students - and to a lesser extent, Hispanic students - are significantly over represented in discretionary suspensions and DAEP referrals for nonviolent offenses.



Major Findings

- Special education students are significantly over represented in discretionary referrals for non-violent behaviors compared to their percentage in the overall school population.



Major Findings

- High recidivism and dropout rates underscore the failure of DAEPs to meet the needs of a large number of students - a problem compounded by the lack of oversight.

Recidivism rate of 30% between 2005-2006

Major Findings

- Where a child attends school - and not the nature of the offense - is the greater predictor of the likelihood of a student's receiving a disciplinary referral.

Major Findings

- Texas school districts referred about 500 pre-K and K students and more than 2,500 1st graders to DAEPs between 2001-2006 - even though Texas law restricts referral of children under age 6 to those who bring a gun to school.

Qualitative Findings

- Nearly all school districts stated some additional factors should be considered before imposing punishment.

“When zero tolerance is applied, a school does not rely on its resources, and it does not address the context or other circumstances surrounding the behavior.” A DEAP Counselor

Qualitative Findings

- Many parents and students are critical of the disciplinary referral process and zero tolerance policies.
- Many counselors and DAEP principals indicated referrals were made without addressing the reasons for the behavior.

Qualitative Findings

- While many administrators and teachers denied any bias in connection with referral to DAEPs, some acknowledge that the statistical data shows an overrepresentation of certain groups in DAEPs.

Qualitative Findings

- School prevention programs should pay special attention to students at risk of referrals for reason relating to poverty, language difficulties, and other extenuating factors.

"...[students] mindsets are out of the environment they live in. They are told they can't achieve anything, and they believe it."
A middle school principal

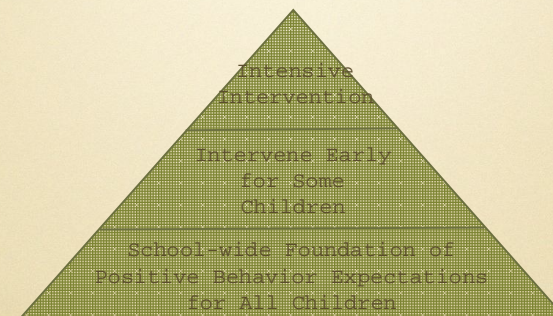
Qualitative Findings

- Students who attend DAEPs may be at greater risk for academic problems.
- Some interviewees suggested students referred to DAEPs are more likely to skip school or drop out than most students.

Best Practice Models

- Effective programs:
 - *Target all students
 - *Use coordinated, effective, research-based methods
 - *Implement positive behavioral school-wide
 - *Provide adequate training and ongoing support
 - *Involve school administration & staff and parents along with members of community
 - *Regular, rigorous program evaluation

Best Practice Model



Policy Recommendations

- District and Campus:
 - * Research-based discipline strategies
 - * Positive behavior supports (PBS)
 - * Teacher/staff training
 - * Formalized plans to monitor at-risk students
 - * Transition planning
 - * Parent involvement
 - * Improve oversight of ISS academics

Policy Recommendations

- Statewide:
 - *Oversight of DAEPs
 - *Factor "intent" - HB 171, 81st Texas Legislature
 - *Place a cap on suspensions
 - *Compliance with Federal Laws
 - *Early parent notification requirements
 - *Improve DAEP academic standards and offerings
 - *Rights and responsibilities

Conclusions - First Report

- School discipline system marks the beginning of the school to prison pipeline.
- The system is failing all children involved, especially African American and special education students.
- Effective and appropriate practices exist that discipline students while keeping them in school.
- Propose to work at state and district level to improve the system.

Questions?

