Promoting Smart Decarceration: Beginning with the School to Prison Pipeline

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Background

- PhD Candidate – National Catholic School of Social Service
- Adjunct Professor – National Catholic School of Social Service
- LICSW, LCSW (Washington, DC & Virginia)
- School Social Worker District of Columbia Public Schools
- Special research interest (Students with disabilities and the school-to-prison pipeline)
Objectives

- Briefly explain the grand challenge of smart decarceration.
- Briefly explain and describe the history, current state and policies associated with the school to prison pipeline.
- Increase knowledge of evidence based practices that can reduce the risk of students with disabilities involvement in the school to prison.
- Advocate for effective discipline strategies within schools.
Grand Challenge: Smart Decarceration

- Stimulate applied policy and behavioral intervention research to reduce the incarcerated population in ways that are humane, socially just, and sustainable.
  - The incarcerated population in U.S. jails and prisons will be substantially lessened.
  - Existing racial and economic disparities among the incarcerated will be redressed.
  - Public safety and public health will be maximized.
Beginning with our YOUTH
What Do You Know?

- What is the school-to-prison pipeline?
- Based on your knowledge what are some of the contributors to the school-to-prison pipeline?
The SPP

Conceptualizes the phenomenon of educational systems funneling students from schools to incarceration.

Describes the pathways traveled by students from public education to incarceration in secure juvenile detention and correction programs due to classroom structures, inadequate education (low achievement standards, poorly trained staff, and limited academic resources) and strict discipline strategies. (Nelson, 2014).
Disproportionally affects:

- Male students of color
- Students with disabilities
- Students of lower SES
Who’s Who of the SPP

- Students with disabilities: 43%
- Students without disabilities: 22%
- African Americans: 32%
- Hispanic: 3%
- White: 3%
- Other: 3%

OJJDP, 2015
NCD, 2015
How did we get here?
1/5 students with disabilities receive out of school suspension (3x the rates of their peers)

In 2015 17.8 suspensions occurred for every 100 African American students, 5.2 for every 100 Hispanic students, and 4.4 suspensions for every 100 white students.

Students involved in one or more disciplinary incidents were 23.4 times more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system.

Over 50% of suspensions are a result of student defiance, and fighting.
“Even when suspension doesn’t work, at least they are out of classroom and not bothering anyone... Let the parent deal with them, it’s their problem really”
WHY SHOULD WE CARE?
POP QUIZ
Why is this important to the field of school social workers?

**Values and Ethics**

- **Competence:** Social workers practice within their areas of competence and personal expertise.
- **Dignity and Worth of the Person:** Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.
- **Social Justice:** Social workers challenge social injustice.
Competence

- Clear understanding and acknowledgement of:
  - Disabilities (behaviors related to students disability).
  - Student backgrounds and triggers.
  - Best practices and appropriate evidence based practices.
  - School and district wide disciplinary rules, regulations, and consequences.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADHD/ADD</th>
<th>Emotional Disturbance</th>
<th>Specific Learning Disorder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inattentiveness</td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>Academic problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Aggression</td>
<td>Short attention span</td>
<td>Disorders of attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsivity</td>
<td>Withdrawn</td>
<td>Poor motor abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Psychological process deficits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Excessive fear or anxiety</td>
<td>Limited or lack of cognitive strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Immaturity</td>
<td>Difficulty paying attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty Concentrating</td>
<td>Learning difficulties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moodiness</td>
<td>Poor coping skills</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Competence

- Evidence based practices for individuals and groups
  - Social skills (Child center play therapy, second step, etc.)
  - Coping and self regulation (Zones of regulation, CBT, etc.)
  - Trauma (CBITS (cognitive behavior intervention for trauma in schools), SPARKS, Bounce Back, etc.)
- PBIS (Positive behavior intervention and supports)
- RESTORATIVE JUSTICE
“He is not happy to see me”

According to research Restorative Justice is the most effective practice to decrease the risk of students being involved in the school to prison pipeline. (Hanover Research, 2012)

- Problem solving skills
- Personal responsibility
- Empowerment
- Positive relationships
- Voice to the harmed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td>Expulsion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary referrals</td>
<td>Focus on school rules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not This

• What was the rule? Who broke the rule?
• According to the rules what should be your punishment
• Administrator discipline decisions

But This

• What was the harm and who was affected?
• How do we fix this (repair the harm)
• Victim, offender, and community discipline decisions
Restorative Justice Skills

• Focus on practical consequences rather than rule book consequences
• Uses dialogue from everyone involved and affected in the conflict

Victim-offender mediation
Peer mediation
Mediation Circles
Peer Courts
In-kind restitution
Mediation Programs

Minnesota Department of Education, 2010
Does it work?

Minnesota
Oakland, California
Denver, Colorado
West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Chicago, Illinois
Palm Beach County, Florida
United Kingdom
Canada
Australia
Dignity and Worth of the Person

- Self-determination
- Student involved intervention plans
- Individualized response to behaviors
Social Justice

Social workers pursue social justice specifically on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people.

- Advocacy
  - Discipline policies

- Multidisciplinary team

- Family & community engagement
  - Community based organizations
  - School Resource Officer (SRO)

- Education
  - Increase staff awareness of student disabilities
Self Reflection

- Perceptions of students with disabilities.
- Your contribution to the SPP.
- Opinions on behavior management and control.
- What will you change.
Notable Books

• Christopher Mallet: The School to Prison Pipeline.
• Nancy A. Heitzeg: The School to Prison Pipeline Education, Discipline, and Racialized Double Standards.
• Rachel Currie-Rubin: Disrupting the School to Prison Pipeline.
• Priya Parmar and Anthony J. Nocella II: From Education to Incarceration: Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline.
References

Brown Center on Educational Policy at Brookings (2017, March). How well are American students learning: With sections on the latest international test scores, foreign exchange students, and school suspensions (Vol. 3). Washington DC: Tom Loveless


