

## School-to-Prison Pipeline and Academic Achievement: History, Impact, and Policy Interventions

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The school-to-prison pipeline is the phenomenon of pushing middle- and high-school students through harsh disciplinary practices that ultimately lead these adolescents into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. These practices disproportionately target marginalized youth, particularly racial and ethnic minority students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students. For this project, I focused on the following research questions, which are detailed in the full report.

- How did the school-to-prison pipeline develop in the United States? What policies perpetuate the pipeline today?
- Which student populations are most impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline?
- What policies and proposals have worked to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline? How effective are these practices? What are the benefits and shortcomings of these policies? Whom do they impact?
- How can Dane County incorporate these policies to create positive academic outcomes? If implemented, what would the magnitude of impact be on marginalized youth?

While these questions are too large to be answered in a policy brief, I conduct a brief analysis on the effectiveness of two of the policies for students of color. Each instance of out-of-school suspension decreases students' likelihood of graduating high school by 20% (Gregory and Fergus 2017). Furthermore, suspension is also often the initial point of entry into the school-to-prison pipeline. In Dane County, Wisconsin, African-American students are 15 times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts (Dane County, Wisconsin: Racial Equity Analysis

and Recommendations Report 2015). Thus, one of the most important interventions that simultaneously targets the school-to-prison pipeline and increases academic achievement for marginalized youth occurs in diverting youth away from suspension.

I examined the impact that two of the most seemingly effective policy interventions would have on racial disparities in the school-to-prison pipeline in Madison, WI. The first policy is a school arrest diversion program, which has been shown to substantially (although not statistically significantly) increase grade point average for 11% of participants and school attendance for 26% of participants (Fader et al. 2015). This also keeps students in school rather than placing them on out-of-school suspension, which, in Dane County, would have a significant impact on the graduation rates of students of color.

The second policy is a restorative intervention, which helps students problem-solve, self-reflect, and decompress in a safe, comfortable context rather than being suspended or arrested (Gregory and Fergus 2017). In other school districts, this policy reduced the number of suspensions for black students by 54% and for white students by 39% (Gregory and Fergus 2017). In Madison, I predict that the successful implementation of this policy would lead to a decrease in racial disparities such that black students would be 11 times more likely to be suspended than white students, rather than 15 times. While this gap is obviously still completely unacceptable, it is progress towards racial equality in school discipline practices and the school-to-prison pipeline.