RACIAL DISPARITIES IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

FACT SHEET

What we know:

- Criminal activity among youth has decreased in the past twenty years, as has overall crime. However, nine percent of male youth aged 10-17 years are arrested annually, and one quarter of those arrests occur at school.
- Children are much more likely today to be arrested at school than their parents were a generation ago.
- Increased presence of law enforcement in schools contributes to more juvenile arrests made at schools for infractions that, a generation ago, would have been handled by teachers or administrators.
- Exclusionary discipline practices include suspension from school, expulsion, or involuntary placement into a disciplinary alternative education program. Such practices increase a student’s likelihood to come into contact with the juvenile or adult justice systems.
- A pattern of racial disparity in school discipline has been well-documented over the past 35 years.

- In 2006, black students represented 17% of all public school students, but they accounted for 37.4% of all suspensions and 37.9% percent of all expulsions.
- Black students are twice as likely as white students to be educated in a more restrictive environment, such as an alternative education program.
- Minorities are more likely to be given extreme forms of punishment, despite not being involved in more serious acts.
- Harsher sanctions for minor behaviors such as tardiness, absences, noncompliance, and disrespect have cultivated a systematic way to push black students out of school.

- Arrest has a direct effect on high school dropout rates, especially among minority students
  - Arrest decreases the odds of high school graduation by over 70%.
  - School-based arrest can also result in devastating psychological effects, including public humiliation, diminished self-worth, distrust of law enforcement, distrust of the school personnel, and ultimately alienation from school.

What we recommend:

1) Schools and children’s advocates should address the school-to-prison link in elementary and intermediate grades.
2) Legislators, educational policy-makers, and educational institutions must take a holistic approach to eliminating race disparities in disciplinary action, and should adopt incentives that encourage fairness and educational success for all children.
3) Educational institutions should recognize the impact of outside factors on student behavior that may also lead to discipline disparities, including:
   a. Residential segregation and unequal housing which create isolated, poor schools;
   b. Extreme punitive approaches to misconduct in the criminal justice system;
   c. Existing incentives for school administrators to exclude students; and
   d. Perceptions of poor and minority students that encourage marginalization.

4) States should provide incentives to increase accountability in several areas, including:
   a. Operation of alternative education programs that provide quality education.
   b. Increasing graduation rates, beginning with incentives in intermediate grades.
   c. Elimination of zero-tolerance policies.
   d. Adoption of restorative justice and positive behavior support practices.
   e. Implementation of stringent due process procedures for school discipline matters.
   f. Quality cultural and diversity training for all school personnel who interact with students, including school resource officers.
   g. Promotion of respectful school climates.