



ENDING MASS INCARCERATION

PIPELINE TO POSSIBILITIES SERIES



SPRING SESSION 1

School Discipline Policies and the School-to-Prison Pipeline **TOOLKIT**

Pipeline to Possibilities: School-to-Prison Pipeline

VIRTUAL SESSION 1 TOOLKIT

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School-to-Prison Pipeline: Key Facts

School plays an instrumental role in the life outcomes of students, and over the course of history, policing of bodies has been used as a means of social control. The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to the widespread trend of schools adopting “zero tolerance” disciplinary practices—out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and arrests—that drive students from the education system into the juvenile justice system. In addition to funneling students into the system of mass incarceration, this also hurts their opportunities to learn and contributes to educational inequities, as almost 70% of those who are incarcerated never graduated high school. [EMI Resource Toolkit](#)

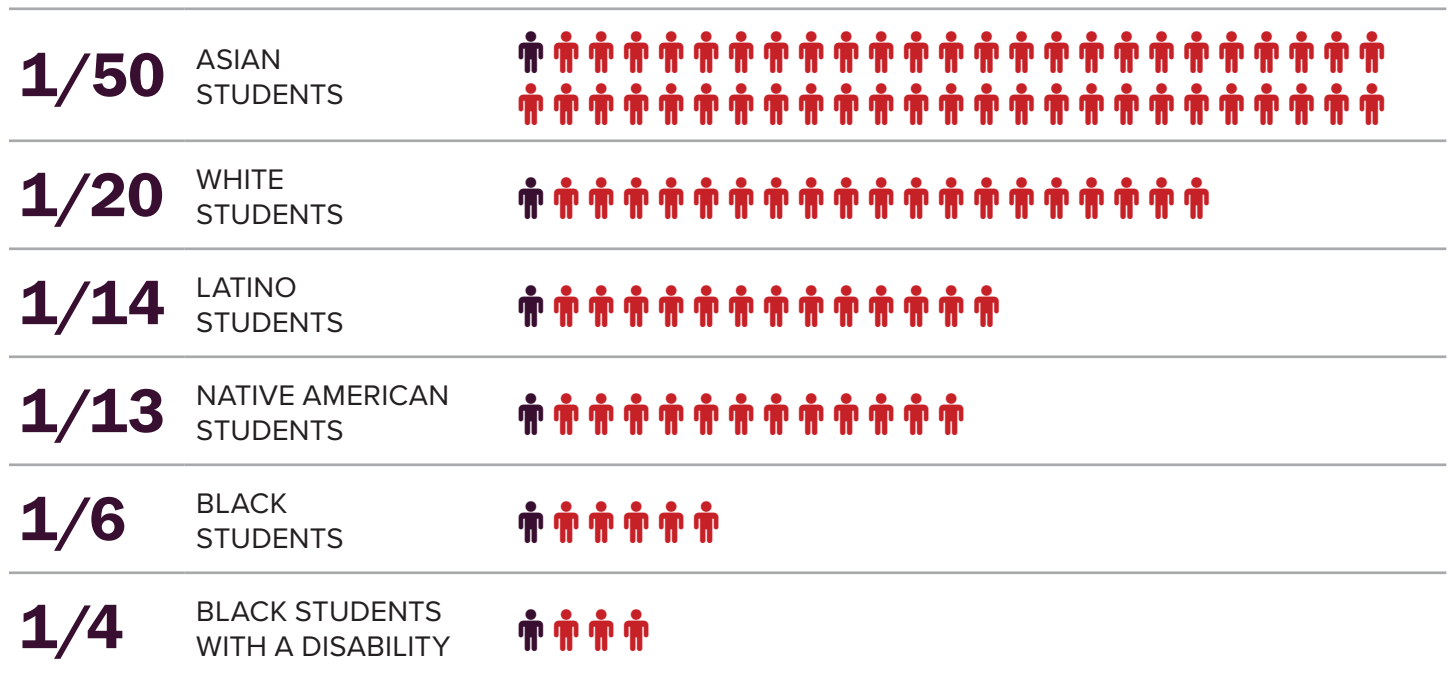
To advocate for change, we will focus on one of the key feeders to the **school-to-prison pipeline**: punitive school disciplinary practices and the role of the school resource officer.

What Policies Fuel the School-to-Prison Pipeline?

PUNITIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

Suspensions, Race & Disability: National suspension rates: 2009-10

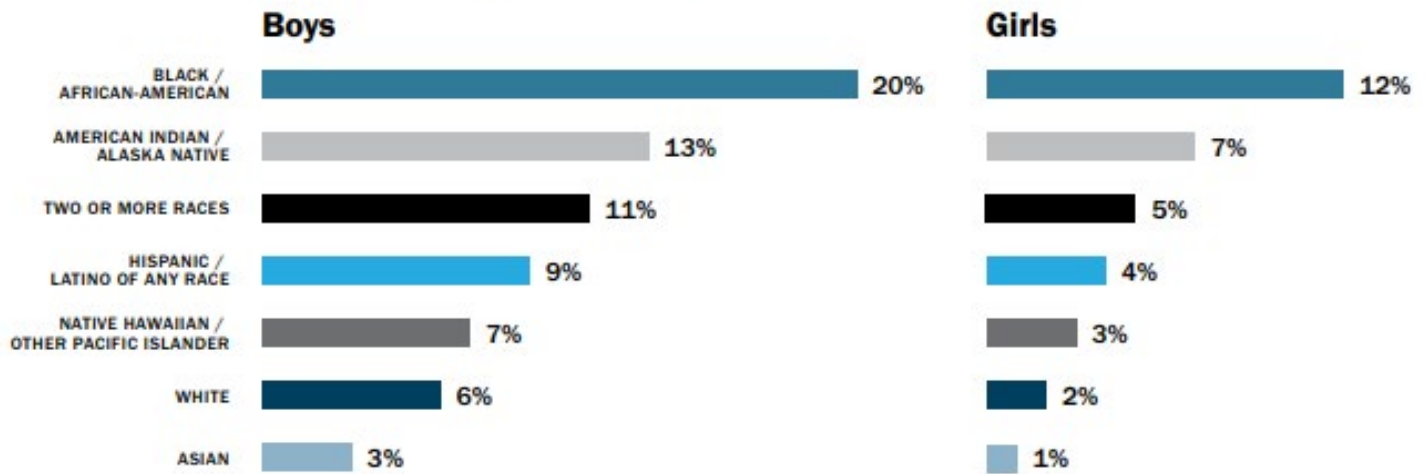
Likelihood of being suspended at least once



Source: *Opportunities Suspended*, by the [UCLA Civil Rights Project](#) report

Every year, 40% of students expelled from U.S. schools are Black. These trends are even more pronounced for male students. The below chart teases out the intersection of gender and race as it pertains to out-of-school suspensions – [EMI toolkit](#)

Students Receiving Out-of-School Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity and Gender



SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS, CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION, 2011-12. DATA COMPILED BY THE JUSTICE POLICY INSTITUTE

There is also a rise in suspension, expulsion, and criminalization of Black girls from schools, as documented in the book and documentary [Pushout](#) and by organizations like [Appleseed](#). Starting in preschool, Black girls make up 54% of all girls suspended while only representing 20% of enrolled students. – [2019 Press Release](#)

Each year 23% of students who were suspended ended up in contact with the juvenile justice system” – [EMI toolkit](#) The school-to-prison pipeline also perpetuates the **opportunity gap**, as students lose instructional time when they are suspended or expelled from school. Furthermore, “punitive discipline

can make students feel negative emotions that “shut down learning” like anger, embarrassment, etc.—and “there is no conclusive evidence” that punitive policies make schools safer. – [Discipline Revolution Project](#)

Being suspended from school increases the likelihood that students will not graduate and will drop out of school by about 30%. If students are suspended just once in the ninth grade, they are more likely to drop out, according to a 2012 study from the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University. Each additional time that students are suspended from school increases their risk of dropping out by about 10%. – [America’s Promise Alliance](#)



“Suspensions are associated with...lower academic performance, lower on-time graduation rates, higher dropout rates, decreased academic engagement, and future disciplinary exclusion. Dropping out of high school is associated with a nine-year dip in life expectancy, and even decades after release from prison, 75% of ex-inmates remain in the bottom 20% of income distribution.”
– [Discipline Revolution Project](#)

Students also experience a sort of double jeopardy if they are punished by the school through suspension or expulsion, and also arrested by the juvenile justice system for the same infraction.

Role of School Resource Officers (SROs)

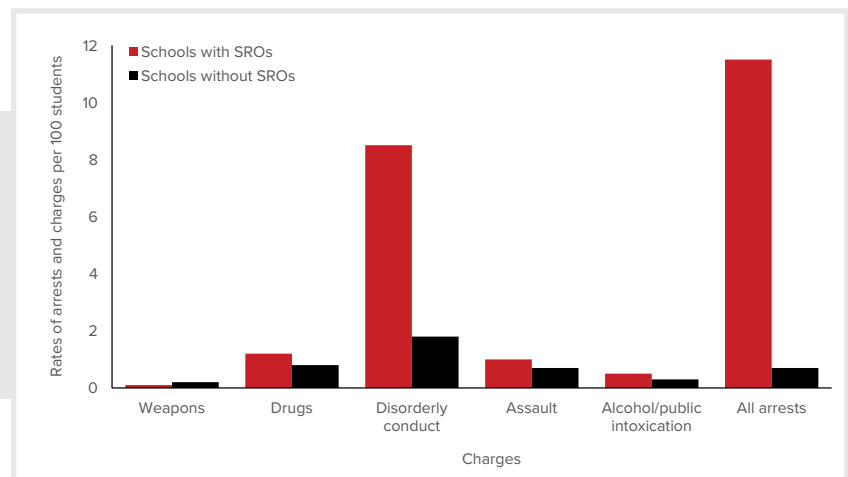
In the name of keeping students safer, some school districts have become increasingly militarized. One Texas school district spent over \$6 million on police expenses that includes 22 AR-15 weapons and camera systems for facial recognition. A Pennsylvania school resource officer was caught on video using a taser on a student while a school administrator held the student down. Across the country, school districts are being pushed by their communities to reconsider the use of facial recognition software in schools.

School Resource Officers (SROs) are Sworn Law Enforcement Officers (SLEOs) who are assigned to work in schools. Many students, particularly students of color, feel less safe with SROs in their schools and are more likely to be funneled into the prison system with an SRO on campus. According to the Justice Policy Institute, “schools with SROs were five times more likely to arrest students for discretionary offenses like ‘disorderly conduct’ or ‘insubordination’ than those without police.” – EMI toolkit

The biggest impact of police in schools? More “disorderly conduct” charges.

Rate of arrests and charges for surveyed schools with School Resource Officers (SROs) and schools without them, controlling for socioeconomic status.

Source: School resource officers and the criminalization of student behavior.

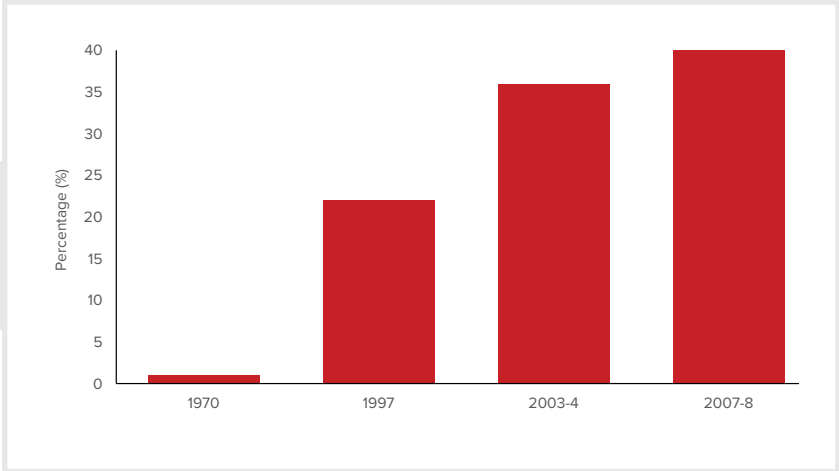


The proliferation of SROs has increased over the last few decades, mirroring the alarming growth of mass incarceration in the United States.



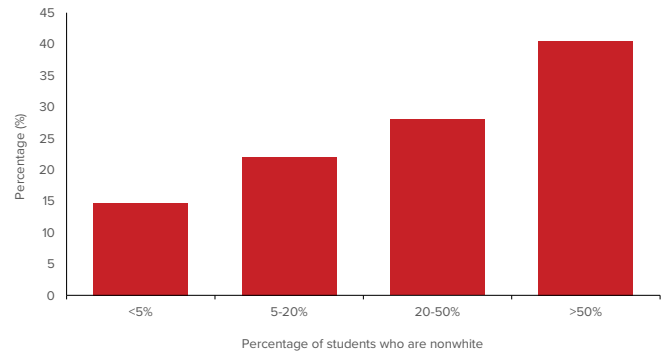
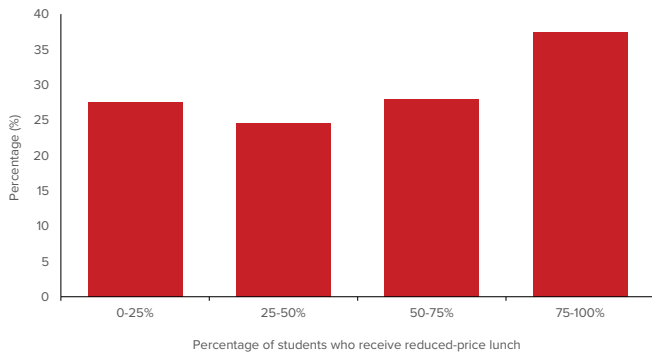
“Since the 1900s, U.S. public schools have employed a growing number of school resource officers (SROs) – defined here as sworn law enforcement officials. In 1975, only 1% of schools reported having police officers on site, but by 2018, approximately 58% of schools had at least one sworn law enforcement official present during the school week.[i] In response to school shootings in the 1990s, federal and state legislation spurred this rapid proliferation of SROs. Since 1998, the federal government has invested over \$1 billion to explicitly increase police presence in schools, and over \$14 billion to advance community policing, which can include SROs.[ii]” – The Prevalence and the Price of Police in Schools

Percentage of schools with law enforcement, as reported by schools and administrators



Source: Na, C., & Gottfredson, D. C. (2013). Police officers in schools: Effects on school crime and the processing of offending behaviors. *Justice Quarterly*,30(4), 619-650.

• A Brief History of School Law Enforcement



“About half of all public schools nationwide have police officers in schools, including large proportions of rural (44%), town (58%), suburban (49%) and city (45%) schools.” – 2020 article Upon digging into the data, students of color and students in poverty are more likely to attend with at least one SRO. – Vox

While dollars are allocated to police presence in schools that funnel students into the school-to-prison pipeline, many students in these schools have inadequate access to counselors, nurses, social workers, and mental health professionals.

- **1.7 million** students are in schools with police but no counselors
- **3 million** students are in schools with police but no nurses
- **6 million** students are in schools with police but no school psychologists
- **10 million** students are in schools with police but no social workers
- **14 million** students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker — Cops and No Counselors

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the recommended student to counselor ratio is 250:1. Most states do not meet this recommended ratio, and are closer to a 500:1 ratio (see map). Research links these recommended ratios in high-poverty schools to improved academic outcomes for students, including “attendance, fewer disciplinary incidents, and higher graduation rates.” – School Counselors Matter

With the increase of police officers in schools and large ratios of students to counselors, school incidents that school administrators would have dealt with in the past through a conversation with students are now often escalated to a suspension, expulsion, and/or referral to an SRO, pushing students into the school to prison pipeline. – EMI toolkit

What Can We Do to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline?

Preach, Teach: Ways Clergy can Support Their Congregations

- **Survey your congregants** about their experience with the school-to-prison pipeline, and needs for support.
- **Write an Op-Ed from your theological perspective**, like the example below. We hope you'll find these reflections helpful when crafting your own sermons and bulletins, newspaper articles and social media posts. It is going to take all of our voices of faith and moral courage to change the narrative about the school-to-prison pipeline, and to encourage those in our communities to mobilize and advocate for change.

While the Bible praises the merits of disciplining a child, the notion of putting juveniles behind bars, separated from their family and school, and separated from other forms of being engaged to become a contributing member of society, are an anathema from a religious perspective. Discipline in the Bible is understood to include love, care, and learning. This is in stark contrast to the heavy-handed and often heartless discipline dispensed to those children whom we deem expendable. All of this equates to a type of banishment from society, the scarring effects of which combine with so many other barriers they encounter to a life of success and the pursuit of happiness. The Bible reminds us time and time again: Teach (the Way) to your children. Children are our future; when we lock them up, we are telling generations of people that they are not worthy of investment, education, and care. We are cutting the legs out from under our future. But if we adhere to this theology, and learn to see ALL children as OUR children, taking the orientation and responsibility to teach instead of punish, we would break the school-to-prison pipeline and create a soil rich for their growth and success.

The widespread trend of schools adopting “zero tolerance” disciplinary practices — out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and arrests for first “offenses” — drive students from the education system into the juvenile justice system. This funnels students into the system of mass incarceration, also hurting their opportunities to learn and contributing to educational inequities — almost 70% of those who

are incarcerated never graduated high school. Being suspended from school increases the likelihood that students will not graduate and will drop out of school by about 30%. Research has shown that if students are suspended just once in the ninth grade, they are more likely to drop out. Each additional time students are suspended from school increases their risk of dropping out by about 10%.

To help disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, people of faith can engage in direct service and advocacy work. Here are some examples of work we can do in our community, in partnership with others:

1. Talk to your community to learn about the challenges they face around school discipline and school resource officers
2. Inquire about and advocate for school discipline data transparency in your state and local community, broken down by race and gender
3. Train or provide training resources to members of your congregation to participate in restorative justice support of students and families
4. Teach students about restorative practices like mindfulness that they can use in school and other settings
5. Partner with schools to provide an off-site alternative to suspension
6. Sign up to support federal policies that disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, like the below:
 - a. Counseling not Criminalization in Schools Act
 - b. The Crown Act
 - c. Ending PUSHOUT Act
 - d. Paths to Tutor Act

Act: Direct Service and Advocacy

DIRECT SERVICE AND PROGRAMMING

Places of worship and their members are in relationship with students and families in their membership, as well as in the larger community. See below for a few examples of direct service actions that you can take to support students and families.

Participatory research: survey students and families about the issue to hear more about the specific challenges they face, and what support they need. Sample survey questions are below:

- **Demographic information, student grade level**
- **Who answered the call – school administrator, police officer, etc?**
- **What happened?**
 - I went to a restorative justice practice.
 - I was disciplined at school – suspension or expulsion.
 - I was referred to the juvenile justice system.
- **Did you lose any instructional time at school?**
- **If you missed instructional time, did the school help you catch up? How?**
- **How could you envision this going differently? What do you wish happened instead?**

Learn how this affects your school districts, visit schools, and invite families from the community to talk with you about the challenges they face with you to inform your support.

Host a virtual or in-person event with students and families to illustrate what it would look like to be safe at school.

- **Here is an example of a poster creating night:**
[Night Out for Safety & Liberation](#)

ADVOCACY

Below are a few recommendations of what to advocate for in your community.

FEDERAL policies to support:

- [Counseling not Criminalization in Schools Act](#)
- [The Crown Act](#)
- [Ending PUSHOUT Act](#)
- [Paths to Tutor Act](#)

STATE policies to advocate for:

- **Advocate for data transparency** to evaluate disciplinary infractions and punishments disaggregated by race and gender

Train or provide training resources to members of your congregation to participate in restorative justice support of students and families.

Be in relationship with students to support the home-to-school connection, like some of the examples below.

- **Partner with schools to provide an [off-site alternative to suspension](#):** In a 15-day, counseling-based program, students were assessed and then instructed in core academic subjects, character education, positive leadership skills, positive peer and group interactions, decision-making skills, and other behavioral support. Successful completion of the program removed the original infraction from the student's record.

Advocate with the school district for students who are up for expulsion, to allow them to go back to school and participate in a restorative justice or counseling program through your organization.

Provide crisis management for students who become involved in altercations at school. Rather than sending a student into the juvenile justice program, allow them to participate in counseling or a restorative program through your organization.

- **Advocate for review of school discipline policies** and handbooks
- **Advocate to eliminate students being punished twice for the same infraction** – both the school system through suspension or expulsion, and by the police through arrest and entry into the juvenile justice system

SCHOOL DISTRICT changes to advocate for:

- **Provide comprehensive mental and emotional health services for students** and increase the number of counselors, nurses, mental health professionals, and social workers
 - [No Cops No Guns Brief](#): – The Advancement Project
- **Provide high-quality social-emotional learning for students**
 - [Impact of Enhancing Students’ SEL: A Meta-Analysis](#)
 - In a 2020 study of Chicago Public Schools, high schools “that focused on enhancing social well-being and promoting hard work enhanced students’ self-reported social-emotional development, resulting in fewer school-based arrests and better long-run educational attainment for students from those schools.”
 - [Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights](#)
- **Advocate for discipline reform and restorative justice practices in schools** that only use suspension, expulsion, or engagement with law enforcement as a rare, last resort. See examples below:
 - **Padres y Jóvenes Unidos collaborated with the Denver Public Schools system to reduce the exclusionary practices** in schools. As a result, expulsions decreased by nearly 50%, there were 2,600 fewer out-of-school suspensions over five years, arrests of students decreased, and attendance and graduation rates increased.
 - [The Advancement Project](#)
 - **Baltimore City Public Schools adjusted its Code of Conduct** to decrease the infractions leading to out-of-school suspensions and to shift towards intervention and prevention. This led to 5,000 fewer suspensions in three years, with students benefiting from about 100,000 additional days of instruction and higher graduation rates.
 - [The Advancement Project](#)
 - **California suspension rates for African-American students have dropped** with school discipline reform and a focus on restorative justice practices. – [EdSource](#)
- **Reduce the number of SROs in schools.**
 - For example, **Minneapolis Public School Board canceled their \$1.1 million contract with the Minneapolis Police Department in June 2020.**
- **Provide training for school-based staff:**
 - “**High-quality student-teacher relationships** are associated with less risky student behavior [and] schools that feel safer...” – [Discipline Revolution Project](#)
 - **Train teachers on race and bias** – [What’s Race Got to Do with It? Preservice Teachers and White Racial Identity](#)

References for Further Reading

There are a number of resources, organizations, and individuals working to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. Below are links to some additional readings and toolkits for further education, ideating, and collaborating on joining the fight to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

- [A Broken Windows Approach to Education](#)
- [Understanding the Broken Windows Approach to Education](#)
- [Ending Mass Incarceration toolkit from the Multifaith Initiative](#)
- [Appleseed Protecting Girls of Color from the School to Prison Pipeline](#)
- [Texas Appleseed When My Child is Disciplined at School: A Guide for Families](#)
- [Massachusetts Appleseed When My Child is Disciplined at School: A Guide for Massachusetts Families](#)
 - English ([online](#)) ([pdf](#))
 - Spanish ([online](#)) ([pdf](#))
 - Portuguese ([online](#)) ([pdf](#))
 - Haitian Creole ([online](#)) ([pdf](#))
- [The Advancement Project School to Prison Pipeline infographic](#)
- [Children's Defense Fund: Cradle to Prison Pipeline Fact Sheet](#)
- [Dept of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs](#)
- [Burns Institute Map of 2017 Detention Rates for youth of color \(data from OJJDP\)](#)
- [The Impact of School Resource Officers](#)
- [Stand for Children Position on Police-Free Schools](#)
- [Black Organizing Project Report The Impact of Policing Oakland Youth](#)
- [Discipline Revolution Project](#)
- [Schott Foundation Best Practices/Guide for teachers](#)
- [Every school needs a great counselor factsheet](#)
- [School Counselors Matter toolkit](#)
- [TNTP's blog with Marvine Pierre of 8 Million Stories](#)
- [Language Skills by age band](#) – the level of expression we can expect from youth
- [OdysseyImpact Films](#)



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Tia Martinez

Forward Change



Melanie Rush

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Protecting Girls of
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*Dallas Black Clergy
Dallas ISD campaign
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