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INTRODUCTION:

Research Question: How can we stop students from entering the school to prison pipeline?

I work as an after-school counselor helping out elementary grade students with their homework and giving them fun activities to do after. I've worked with the company for almost 3 years, and I've seen many of the students grow up. The job isn't easy as there are some students who misbehave and I have to deal with them, I remember being tired of it after each shift annoyed as to how they can be this mischievous. Until I had the chance to talk with each of them trying to see where they come from. Each of them had one thing in common, their home life was rough. One had a horrible role model, one was dealing with the stress of moving, and another had to go through a divorce. Of course, they went back to their antics after talking but at the end of the day they were still children, and no child should have to deal with those struggles. Luckily, they've gotten counseling from the school, and I've seen their behavior turn for the better throughout the years. However, there are 1.7 million students that aren't so lucky. These students go to a school with police presence but no counselor, and no safety net if things in life go harsh. This is the sad reality of schools in America as these students are met with the criminal justice system as young as 14 for misbehaving due to reasons no one will know; because they weren't given a second chance. As a person who deals with troubled children and the statistical age

group for this issue I was no stranger to this topic. Luckily, I had access to resources in my school that helped me when I would feel done with everything unfortunately, there are millions of students who don't have the same resources. In that injustice I found my reason to research this topic. I expect to find disheartening statistics but more importantly the root of the problem as to help me figure out ways to prevent it. Hopefully I'll come across already proven methods that combat against the school to prison pipeline as a result of it.

Citation #1: Billings, Stephen B., et al. "Proving the School-to-Prison Pipeline." *Education*

Next, 21 Dec. 2022, www.educationnext.org/proving-school-to-prison-pipeline-stricter-middle-schools-raise-risk-of-adult-arrests/.

Summary: They start by introducing the school-to-prison pipeline and note that black and Hispanic students are far more likely to be suspended or expelled than white students. In that fact, they infer that there is a link between experiencing strict school discipline as a student and getting incarcerated as an adult. To dig deeper they began their research and zoomed in on the Charlotte-Mecklenberg district as they had experienced a major student change and students going to schools with different suspension rates. They found that students who attend middle schools that are one deviation stricter are more likely to be arrested and drop out and the impacts are much larger for Black and Hispanic male students. They also find that principals are one of the biggest factors when it comes to the number of suspensions as their suspension rates follow them when they switch schools. Within that same district they looked at previous school years and compared those to current adult arrests and incarcerations and found that students who attend a stricter school are 20% more likely to be arrested. And the more interesting part is that these crimes were drug or theft related and not the more heinous crimes such as manslaughter or assault. They also found these effects to be more impactful on black and hispanic students.

Reflection: This source provides bountiful statistics and backs each of those statistics up with a breakdown of how they were attained. In their research they highlighted the fact that suspensions have an impact on students and their futures. They also found that suspensions negatively affect education attainment, to quote the article “A student attending a stricter school is 15% more likely to drop out and is 11% more likely to not attend college”. Overall, I agree with this article as suspensions are hard to come back from since you miss out on class and are one of the leading factors that push students into the school to prison pipeline. One other piece of information that the article brought up was how much principals affect the suspension rates. When principals switch to different schools they often have their suspension rates follow them which could be a start to figuring out where the pipeline beings. Ultimately it is up to the principals on how to deal with school issues and it starts with them.

Quotation: According to the article “We also find that principals, who have considerable discretion in meting out school discipline, are the major driver of differences in the number of suspensions” I agree with this because as stated earlier suspensions are a huge cause in student dropout rates if principals would resort to this drastic measure less frequently there’d be an increase in graduation rates or college attendance and more importantly creating a safety net for students who are just only 12-14 years old who don’t know any better.

Citation #2: Hewitt, Damon, et al. “Unlawful Discrimination.” *School-to-Prison Pipeline:*

Structuring Legal Reform, New York University Press, 2010, pp 32-35.

Summary: This chapter starts by talking about a great disparity in suspensions between certain subgroups of the youth. They believe this disparity is in part to schools having to take

accountability of student success and thus a need to push out lower-performing students. It then breaks down into a subsection focusing on discrimination for students of color and emphasizes that children of color are more likely to attend under resourced schools and talk about the suspension rate for these children of color rise. It then goes on to list more statistics of the disparity of school suspensions between children of color and white children.

Reflection: Although a short section it provides important information on who exactly is being affected by the school to prison pipeline and other underlying reasons for students being pushed into the school to prison pipeline. Many if not all of these students don't have the opportunity to decide where they want to attend to, so when they're automatically placed into a school that is underfunded they're mistreated. From the start these students are put into a place where they're not expected to perform well and when they're seen as a 'liability' to a school that's barely afloat they are put in a loop that doesn't end well for them. This and overall discrimination in schools as unfortunately sometimes students are targeted because of biases and straight up racism are also factors in the school to prison pipeline.

Quotation: According to the book "Notably, studies suggest that African American children are more likely than their white peers to be suspended, expelled, or arrested for the same kind of conduct at school"(35) This quote summarizes the discrimination and disparity between subgroups in the school to prison pipeline and calls for a bigger discussion to happen on how zero tolerance policies target minority groups

Citation #3: TEDxFoggyBottom "Disrupting the School to Prison Pipeline | Benjamin Williams |" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxUKU8Rtakw&t=570s&ab_channel=TEDxTalks

Summary: The principal of Ron Brown College Prep, Benjamin Williams, shares his experiences growing up in a struggling area and having family who weren't always there for them and the impact it had on his education. He emphasizes the importance of having a strong "why" which as he explains is your belief as to how you can help the world. Dr. Williams discusses the creation of the school and its focus on empowering young men of color, addressing the school-to-prison pipeline, and promoting an environment where students can thrive knowing they have the resources to help them. He highlights the struggles and successes of the school and the importance of giving students a voice and the skills to be productive citizens. Dr. Williams urges people to take bold and courageous action to bring about change in systems and inequalities in education. He ends with a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. and encourages everyone to cause a big reaction in the world.

Reflection: The ted talk brilliantly emphasizes the role of principals and shows how creating a space where students aren't met with a straight outcome of suspension but rather have multiple resources to rely on and help them to succeed and right their wrongs. In the video Dr. Benjamin Williams talks about an experience with a student named Jay. Jay is a 17 year old 9th grader and struggles with meeting his academic goals and credits but rather than being pushed out he is instead motivated and empowered to work hard and achieve his graduation requirements. This shows how important it is to give these students attention and understand where they come from.

Quotation: In the video Dr. Williams says, "We wanted to give them the skills to be productive citizens however they choose, not a statistic." I like this quote and choose it in particular because schools often time see their students as just statistics, a number that shows how good they are at their job. Instead if you focus on the fact that they're human too you could see the root of the

problem and work with them in order to better themselves and turn out to be a productive citizen rather than just someone who was failed by the school system and become a prison statistic.

Conclusion: In my research I looked for the root cause as to why students are being forced into the school to prison pipeline; I found that students are placed into schools where they don't have a safety net and as a result they act out of line which ends with them being suspended.

Suspensions have one of the greatest impacts on a student's education and just makes the student dig a deeper hole for themselves instead of learning from their mistakes and reaching out for help. Often times these punishments are the result of the principals handling of the situation and more often than not they would rather suspend the student rather than giving them the resources to help them with any issues. The reason I researched the root of the problem was to develop a bigger understanding on how we can stop students from entering the pipeline. Knowing where the problem began is an important step to figuring out ways to prevent students from getting into it in the first place. And on that note my hypothesis was right as in my research I came across a very powerful method that helps out these students and it begins with principals. When they make an environment that not only gives them a safe space to talk out their issues but also encourages them to become leaders and successful people it reduces the need for suspension as these students can talk out their issues with someone instead of having those emotions cooped up. This is important to know because many students across America are being placed into the criminal legal system each day. These are just teenagers trying to figure out where they are in the world but unfortunately they get turned away from it before they can even start their life. With that being said I wish for principals to view my research as they have all the power in choosing whether their school will allow students to be a statistic in the school to prison pipeline or allow their students to grow and mature.