



Decarcerate PA

Education Not Incarceration: Resisting the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the national trend of criminalizing, rather than educating, our nation's children. It designates those factors that frequently funnel young people, particularly youth of color and youth from low-wealth communities, from the school system into the prison system. The pipeline encompasses the growing use of zero-tolerance discipline, school-based arrests, disciplinary alternative schools, and secured detention to marginalize our most vulnerable youth and deny them access to education. Although by law racial segregation has been abolished, we know that in practice racial and class segregation still persist. This segregation can be most clearly perceived in the fact that race and class matter when it comes to determining who gets to go to quality schools where the love of knowledge is encouraged, and who gets to go to schools where the priority is what is called "safety and security."

Such so-called school "security" often takes the form of metal detectors instead of computers; armed guards (if not full-time police officers) patrolling the hallways instead of committed mentors; and enhanced preparation for juvenile detention, jails, and prisons, rather than universities. Further, as a result of test-based accountability regimes such as the No Child Left Behind Act, schools have a strong incentive to push out low-performing students to boost overall test scores. These public institutions increasingly devote huge chunks of their already tight budgets to law enforcement personnel and security infrastructure, while simultaneously directing ever-dwindling sums to the arts, music, languages, recreation, and afterschool programming.

Indeed, many argue that right now the single most "policed" group in the country – outside of prisoners themselves – is public school students. By way of providing a small window into what this state-wide prioritization of punishment and confinement, as opposed to education and rehabilitation, looks like:

In 2011, Governor Corbett slashed basic education funding by over \$550 million, and cut education funding in general by almost \$1 billion. In this same budget, the governor increased the Department of Corrections budget by 11 percent, or \$186 million.

This 11% increase in corrections spending was in addition to the \$685 million that has already been set aside to build two new state prisons and expand nine others. These expansions will add thousands of new beds to the PA prison system.

Since 1980, prison spending in Pennsylvania has grown by 1,882 percent, reaching nearly \$2 billion and rising six times faster than state spending on basic education.

The \$2 billion per year that Pennsylvania spends on incarceration is \$500 million more than it spends on universities.

The city of Philadelphia currently spends approximately \$150,000 to educate one child from kindergarten through senior year, while taxpayers would pay more than twice that amount - about \$330,000 - to incarcerate a person for 10 years.

In Pennsylvania, the number of school-based arrests almost tripled from 1999-2000 to 2006-2007, from 4,563 to 12,918. Just in the School District of Philadelphia, there were 4,361 individuals taken into police custody in 2007-08.

Of the Philadelphia's 35 lower performing schools, 23 (66 percent) are clustered in or very near neighborhoods with the highest rates of incarceration — where the biggest taxpayer investment is being made towards incarceration. By contrast, of Philadelphia's 28 higher performing schools, 21 (75 percent) are in neighborhoods with the lowest rates of incarceration.

The Governor's proposed Pennsylvania state budget for 2012 only exacerbates these trends, further depleting the resources of struggling public schools and essential social services. While funding for mental health care, drug treatment on demand, domestic violence prevention, youth programs, education, housing, welfare, and other social services is being cut, imprisoning people has become the main way that our state deals with the problems that result from these cuts. And this same pattern is repeated in state after state across the nation.

For those youth who are unfortunate enough to find themselves caught up within the prison system, the situation is even grimmer. Students confined in juvenile detention facilities have access to few, if any educational services. Once they enter the juvenile justice system, they face many barriers blocking their re-entry into traditional schools and can be haunted by their criminal records for the rest of their life. The vast majority of juvenile justice-involved students never graduate from high school, and may be denied student loans, public housing or occupational licenses because of their prior criminal records.

As a society, we are capable of doing both better and differently. We already know how this can be done - what we need is a genuine commitment to its implementation. If imprisonment is that set of conditions in which an individual's basic civil rights are taken away, we envision education as that process by which all people's human rights are instead re-invigorated and insisted upon. In the words of scholar Angela Davis, "Education plays a central role here - that is if we think about education not as the imposition of multitudinous facts about the world on supple minds, but rather as the ability to raise questions about those facts, to develop analyses, to ask why injustice still prevails, and to develop creative strategies to transform the universe."

This is the context within which we say "Education Not Incarceration."



Decarcerate PA is a coalition of organizations and individuals seeking an immediate and lasting moratorium on all new prisons and prison expansions, county jails, and immigrant detention facilities, and also seeking positive policy changes that will reduce Pennsylvania's prison population and reinvest money into our communities.

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