

# Racial inconsistencies in the missouri education system

[Education](#)



There is no dispute that racial inconsistencies in the Missouri education system have been a factor for many years. Far too many children in our communities have their futures completely shut off because they are not given equal disciplinary treatment therefore losing out on a quality education. Many Missouri schools introduced zero tolerance policies that were meant to discourage drug related crimes in schools, but has been used to punish students for even the most minor infractions resulting in a disproportionate impact on children of color especially African American males. Children of color are being subjected to harsh discipline at younger and younger ages for infractions that should be considered childhood behavior. For example, in September 2016 the ACLU filed a suit against the Kansas City Public Schools for handcuffing a seven year old African American male simply because he was crying out while being bullied. There's no disputing the psychological damage that is caused by the disruption in their education and the way they view the school system. It becomes difficult for an adolescent to feel regretful or sorry when they are dealing with the anger of feeling like they have been punished unfairly. These feeling can also lead to a distrust and the belief that the school system is not for them but against them. Consequently the impact on some of our most at risk youth has life long implications. Their desire and drive to succeed in the educational system erodes which has a direct affect on their ability to reach their full earning potential, therefore creating an adverse economic impact on their families and community. African American males are no longer on a track to college and gainful employment but straight to the criminal judicial system.

These policies feed into the fear and distrust African American males have for the policing institutions whose responsibility is to protect the community. Along with dealing with being traumatized at school, many of the black males who are subjected to unfair harsher punishment like suspensions or expulsions are quite possibly dealing with traumatic events in their homes and have little or no outlets to release the stress or tension they experience. So when confronted with issues at school they may be more likely to display disruptive behavior but far from criminal behavior. Most of the young black males come from low-income backgrounds and have little to no resources to help change the direction they are headed.

We have already lost generations of young black men who have been ushered into the criminal judicial system instead of growing and learning in what should be a nurturing and productive learning environment. The introduction of zero tolerance policies have made the issues for African American male students even more dire with suspensions or expulsions for infractions that were not addressed so harshly in the past. The school to prison pipeline policies have opened the door for a life destined for prison. The fact that zero tolerance doesn't take into consideration any of the facts of a situation, makes the most inconsequential infraction one that is now criminalized. No one disputes the need for disciplinary policies, the dispute is how they are handed out and the disparities between blacks and whites especially black males. The inequality in discipline starts as early as elementary schools. We have seen one too many times a young child being dealt with by a police officer for a school offense rather than a school official simply because they don't have the training or patience to handle the

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situation. Usually after a suspension students return academically behind their counterparts and this causes them to be discouraged about the learning process. As the students fall further and further behind teachers find it more difficult to bring them up and control the rest of their class and that proves troublesome for the teacher. This creates a cycle where the student's educational needs are not adequately addressed, thus leaving the student to create more problems, in turn receiving more suspensions. While serving their suspensions most students especially middle and high school students are left with little or no supervision because their parents are working. This is a time when students typically need more supervision than normal. This is a vicious cycle being played out in Missouri and across the country. The media helps to perpetuate the narrative of African American males as just criminals and not worthy of rehabilitation. Once someone is in the judicial system getting out is almost impossible. The imagery of African American males in the media contributes to the racial stereotyping and an accepted reality of black men as aggressive and violent.

We are bombarded with this image, the media reports a black crime of murder as just a murder with no reasoning, but when the assailant is white there is always a reason for committing the crime such as mental illness, excessive drug or alcohol abuse, or childhood abuse. This leads to the conclusion that whites can be rehabilitated but blacks cannot. We can reference this to the current opioid abuse and the abuse of crack cocaine of the 1990s. Opioids are primarily used by young white males and there is a push for rehabilitation, police are even carrying a remedy for overdose in their cars, but during the crack cocaine epidemic Congress passed laws which

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established harsher and longer prison sentences for users who were primarily black. There was no rehabilitation plan for those who used crack cocaine because they were considered criminals and not victims of an epidemic. This is a clear example of the disparities for blacks in the criminal justice system and shows a long and divisive history of the marginalization of African American males that starts with the unfair discipline school policies.

## Conclusion

Too many of our children especially African American males are being robbed of their future. Disciplinary discrimination is robbing them of the right to a chance at an equal education and better life opportunities. We have already lost thousand of young African American males to the judicial system. School to prison pipeline is real and it reinforces the historical racial disparities in Missouri while further threatening the potential of so many more. It is another form of Jim Crow laws which provided a legal way to discriminate against African Americans, in-particularly African American males. Black males who are still going through the justice system as adults will eventually lose the right to vote, without ever experiencing it. They will also find it difficult to find gainful employment because most employers will not hire someone with a criminal record. This becomes a vicious cycle. What is the rot cause of the problem? Is poverty really the problem or is it a perceived inability of African Americans to achieve? Could it just be that historical views have jaded the view of teachers and schools that, "black boys are inherently bad" which in turn causes them to be dealt with more harshly because there is no reforming them. Many schools systems in America along

with Missouri schools, have adopted the Zero Tolerance Policy. This policy delivers a pre-determined set of consequences without considering the offense or the actual circumstances of the situation. The evidence shows that zero tolerance policies, suspensions and expulsions are not the answer to improving student behavior. These policies are not conducive to helping children develop.

Schools are supposed to be a safe place for all students regardless of race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. The role of schools in pushing young people into the prison system is in direct opposition to the view that public educational place for youth to transform their life in American. Change must happen on many different fronts to attack this problem. Ongoing communications amongst students, parents and educators not only when there is a problem but to get a more comprehensive understanding can result in more affective responses to student misbehavior that supports their success in school.

In order to change the educational disparities change must be made to improve the discipline disparities. In my estimation this doesn't mean that white students should be punished harsher, it means that the punishment must equal the offense for all students. Schools must no longer be conduits for the prison system and the policing of schools must be rolled back in favor of teachers and administrators to maintain structure and discipline. Zero tolerance policies must be reserved for offenses that place students or staff in harms way and not for simple childhood misbehavior. The punishment should fit the offense. Teachers must have a greater understanding of the

community they teach. In order to implement these changes it will take greater teacher and administrator diversity training and policies that are geared to reconnect the black males that have been excluded and are at risk for future discipline problems. Parent must take an active involvement in their child's school and work with teachers and administration to divert youth toward education and away from collisions with the justice system. With sustained input from all parties a positive, nurturing and supportive school environment can be created in order for our young African American males to strive to their highest potential. Working together change can happen in Missouri schools.