

SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE: AN EVALUATION OF ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES AND THEIR ALTERNATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Although our country's education system historically focused on rehabilitative measures, concerns about school violence led to an increased use of punitive measures during the 1990s. Reliance on harsh penalties has grown over time, leading to the strengthening of the school-to-prison pipeline: a nationwide phenomenon that criminalizes student misbehaviors and then uses punitive consequences that tend to push children into the prison systems. Zero tolerance policies – regulations that require specific punishments for outlined student misbehaviors, many times without accounting for the unique circumstances of an incident – are one of the school-to-prison pipeline's main contributors. This Comment reviews the development of zero tolerance policies and evaluates their effectiveness. After concluding that due process requirements will not adequately safeguard children from these regulations, this Comment examines a range of alternatives, including joint efforts between key stakeholders, legislative reforms, and restorative justice practices. The conclusion of this Comment proposes alternative measures that can be used in lieu of zero tolerance policies, which are more effective in securing safe school environments and deterring students from future misconduct.

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