

What is School Pushout?

School pushout occurs from kindergarten through high school and results from numerous factors that prevent or discourage young people from remaining on track to complete their education.

1. Many schools over-rely on zero-tolerance practices and punitive measures such as suspensions and expulsions.

Increases Over Time in Suspensions and Expulsions

- Schools are suspending and expelling students at a rate more than double that of 1974. In 2006, more than 3.3 million students were suspended out-of-school at least once and 102,000 were expelled.¹
- Between 2002 and 2006, out of school suspensions increased by 250,000 and expulsions by 15 percent.²

Suspensions for Minor Misbehavior

- The majority of suspensions are for minor misbehavior, such as “disruptive behavior,” “insubordination,” or school fights, which can be interpreted in subjective and biased ways, even unintentionally.³
- Even the most severe disciplinary sanctions such as suspension for the remainder of the school year and transfer to a disciplinary alternative school are applied to minor incidents. During the 2007-2008 school year, the most common reason for serious disciplinary actions in U.S. schools was “insubordination” (43% of all actions).⁴
- Exclusionary practices even target our youngest students. In fact, the expulsion rate for preschool students is more than three times that for K-12 students.⁵

2. Too many schools cede disciplinary authority to law enforcement or security personnel and over-rely on law enforcement tactics to control school discipline.

- More and more school districts use police officers or “school resource officers” not trained for educational environments to patrol school campuses and discipline students.
- Between 1999 and 2005, the number of students reporting the presence of law enforcement officers in their school rose by 14 percent.⁶
- School-based arrests have also increased dramatically. The majority of arrests are for minor incidents such as “disturbance of the peace” or “disruptive conduct.” High school students have been arrested for food fights, writing on a desk or breaking a pencil. In the most extreme cases, five year olds have been handcuffed and arrested for throwing tantrums.⁷

3. Over-emphasis on high stakes testing creates incentives for schools to increase overall test scores by pushing out the lowest performing students.

- Low performing students may be suspended during testing days, transferred to alternative schools, enrolled in General Educational Development (GED) programs, or simply expelled.⁸

¹ Planty, M. et al (2009). The contexts of elementary and secondary education. *The Condition of Education 2009*.

² Advancement Project (2010). Test, punish, and push out: how ‘zero tolerance’ and high-stakes testing funnel youth into the School-to-Prison Pipeline, 6.

³ Skiba, R., et al (2006). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? A report by the American Psychological Association Task Force, 63.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1999–2000, 2003–04, 2005–06, and 2007–08 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2000, 2004, 2006, and 2008.

⁵ Advancement Project (2010). Test, punish, and push out: how ‘zero tolerance’ and high-stakes testing funnel youth into the School-to-Prison Pipeline, 14.

⁶ Ibid, 15.

⁷ Advancement Project (2010), Education on lockdown: the schoolhouse to jailhouse track, 14-15.

⁸ Figlio, D. (2006). Testing, crime and punishment. *Journal of Public Economics*, 90(4-5); Advancement Project (2010). Test, punish, and push out: how ‘zero tolerance’ and high-stakes testing funnel youth into the School-to-Prison Pipeline, 6.

Who is Impacted by Pushout?

Pushout impacts all students, but disproportionately impacts students of color, students with disabilities, and other historically disenfranchised youth.

- Students of color are suspended and expelled at disproportionately higher rates than their white peers, a “discipline gap” that has been growing since the 1970s.⁹
- African-American students are 3.5 times more likely, Latino students twice as likely and American Indian students 1.5 times more likely to be expelled than white students.¹⁰ In addition, African-American students are nearly 3 times more likely, Latino students 1.5 times more likely and American Indian students 1.1 times more likely to be suspended than white students.¹¹
- Students with disabilities are suspended and expelled at a rate twice that of their non-disabled peers.¹²
- Students in foster care are over three times as likely as their peers to be suspended or expelled.¹³ Studies show that between one- and two-thirds of foster care youth drop out or fail to graduate on time.¹⁴

Pushout has severe and lasting consequences for students, parents, schools and communities.

1. Exclusionary discipline practices and zero-tolerance policies have yet to demonstrate improvements in student behavior or increases in school safety.¹⁵

2. Instead, pushout results in the denial of access to education for vulnerable youth.

- Suspensions result in missed instructional time and increase the likelihood of poor academic performance. In fact, students who have been suspended in the past score three grades levels behind their peers in reading skills after one year, and almost five years behind after two years.¹⁶
- Suspension, expulsion and school based arrests are linked with an increased likelihood of school dropout or failure to graduate on time. Students suspended three or more times by the end of their sophomore year of high school are five times more likely to drop out than students who have not been suspended.¹⁷

3. Exclusionary discipline increases a child’s likelihood of involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system.

- Young people who drop out of high school, many of whom have experienced suspension or expulsion, are more than eight times as likely to be incarcerated as those who graduate.¹⁸
- One study found that 80 percent of youth incarcerated in a state facility had been suspended and 50 percent had been expelled from school prior to incarceration.¹⁹

4. Schools with high rates of exclusionary discipline have lower academic performance and school climate ratings.

- Schools with high suspension rates score lower on state accountability tests and rank lower in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) achievement rankings in mathematics, writing and reading than schools with lower suspension rates.²⁰
- According to surveys of students and staff, principals in schools with low suspension rates were perceived to be more visible and concerned with school climate than those in schools with high suspension rates.²¹

⁹ Losen, D. and Skiba, R. (2010). Suspended education: urban middle schools in crisis, 3.

¹⁰ US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2008). 2006 Data Collection, retrieved from ocrdata.ed.gov/ocr2006rv30; De Voe, J. and Darling-Churchill, K. (2008). Status and trends in the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives: 2008, 54.

¹¹ US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2008). 2006; De Voe, J. and Darling-Churchill, K. (2008), 54.

¹² Skiba, R., et al (2006), 63.

¹³ Scherr, T. (2007). Educational experiences of children in foster care: meta-analyses of special education, retention and discipline rates. *School Psychology International* 28, 429.

¹⁴ Leone, P., and Weinberg, L. (2010). Addressing the unmet educational needs of children and youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, 12.

¹⁵ Skiba, R., et al (2006), 63; Advancement Project (2010), 17.

¹⁶ Gregory, A. et al (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher*, 39(59), 60.

¹⁷ Advancement Project (2010), 17.

¹⁸ Ibid, 29.

¹⁹ Leone, P., and Weinberg, L. (2010). Addressing the unmet educational needs of children and youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, 11.

²⁰ Skiba, R. & Rausch, M., (2005). *Zero tolerance, suspension and expulsion: questions of equity and effectiveness*. In C.M. Everston & C.S.Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook Of Classroom Management: Research, Practices, And Contemporary Issues*.

²¹ Advancement Project, (2010), 17; Skiba, R., et al (2006), 44.