

CONNECTICUT
VOICES
FOR CHILDREN

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BEYOND EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE

RE-CONCEPTUALIZING CONNECTICUT'S
SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE TO ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES



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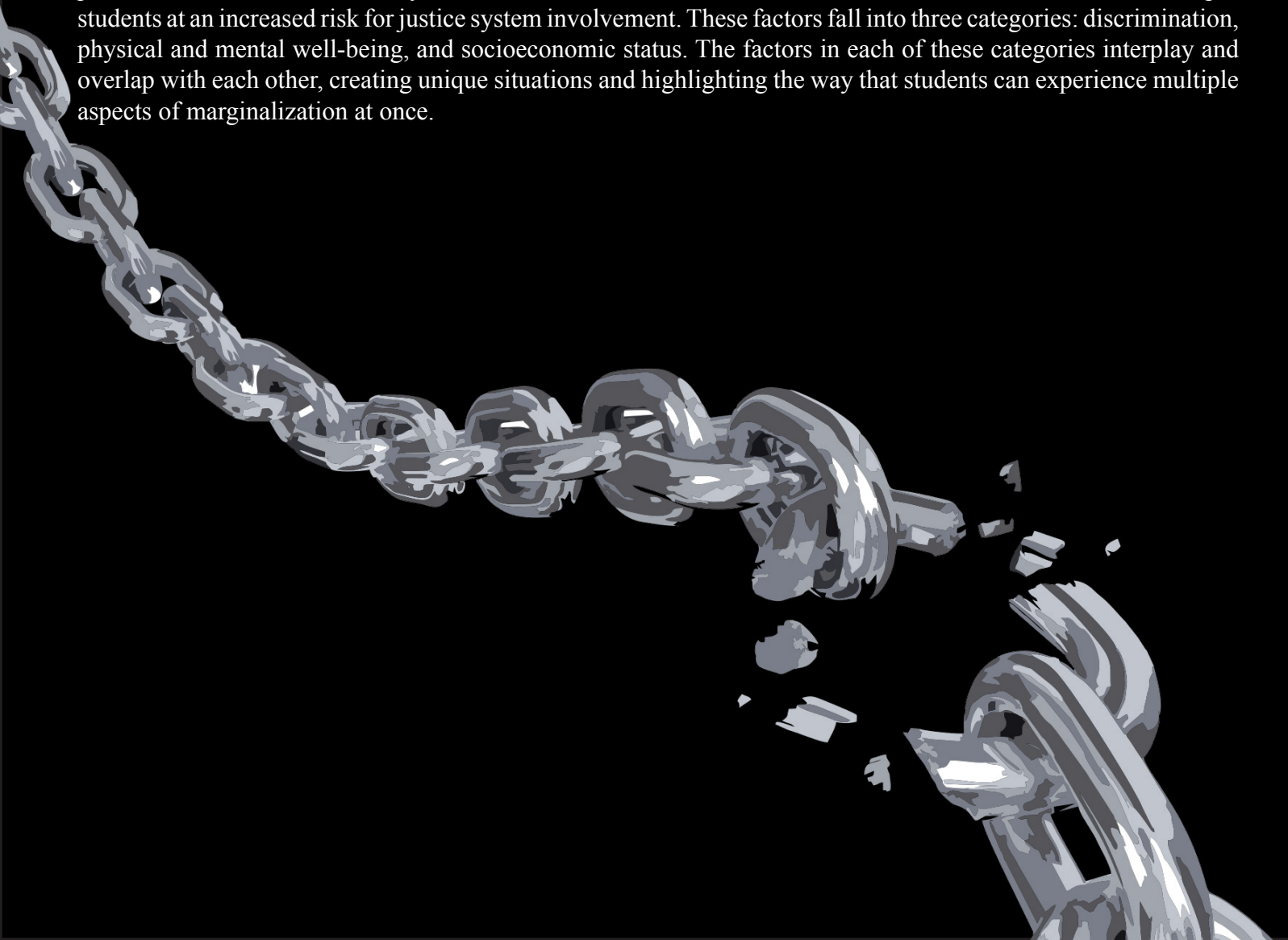
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Currently, much research about the school to prison pipeline focuses on school practices and policies, primarily the use of exclusionary discipline and in-school arrests, and the way that these policies disproportionately harm students of color. The State of Connecticut has made policy changes in an effort to decrease the rates of school arrest and exclusionary discipline. But, while overall arrest rates have fallen, racial disparities remain. From the 2010-2011 school year to the 2014-2015 school year, school arrest rates for white students decreased 47 percent; for Black students it decreased only 37 percent, and for Native American students it did not decrease at all.¹

When implementing policies and programs to reduce the school to prison pipeline, policymakers and schools often fail to consider and address larger issues such as income gaps between different communities and unconscious racial biases in the classroom. We aim to expand the understanding of the school to prison pipeline to call attention to the varied and complicated forces, largely outside of a child's or family's control, that can impact why a child may fail to graduate high school or have contact with the juvenile justice system. While families and children may not be able to control these factors, policymakers in schools, towns, and the state can take steps to dismantle the barriers that too many students face. The goal of this report is to spur new and holistic research about Connecticut's school to prison pipeline as well as to help schools and districts innovate the types of policies and programs they implement in order to decrease justice system contact among their students.

Through conducting a comprehensive literature review and data walks with groups impacted by school discipline policies, we have found a variety of factors that make it more difficult for students to achieve in school and put students at an increased risk for justice system involvement. These factors fall into three categories: discrimination, physical and mental well-being, and socioeconomic status. The factors in each of these categories interplay and overlap with each other, creating unique situations and highlighting the way that students can experience multiple aspects of marginalization at once.



DISCRIMINATION FROM TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND LAW ENFORCEMENT CAN RESULT IN UNWARRANTED DISCIPLINE, DEPRESSED GRADES, AND MORE FREQUENT ARRESTS FOR MARGINALIZED STUDENTS.

Race and Ethnicity

Stereotypes of Black, Latino, and Native American students as unruly or aggressive can affect how these students are disciplined in the classroom and how they are seen by administrators, teachers, and school resource officers. Students of color with darker skin tones, and/or Afrocentric features are more likely to be harmed by these negative stereotypes.²

Gender

Girls are more likely to be subject to discipline and juvenile justice measures that are designed to “protect” them or control their morality. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to be viewed as rambunctious and aggressive. At young ages, boys can be rewarded for demonstrating this behavior, while girls are rewarded for following the rules.³

LGBTQ+ Identity

Students with a marginalized gender identity or sexuality are at an increased risk to be disciplined and bullied in schools in comparison to their straight or cisgendered peers. These students also face the unique risk of being forced out of their homes due to their identity, which can lead to behavior that is illegal yet necessary for survival such as stealing food or trespassing for shelter.⁴

Intersectionality

These identity markers do not exist in a vacuum, and each person holds a variety of identities that impact their unique experience. The specific way that a student is discriminated against or stereotyped depends on their full identity. For example, a Black girl will have a different experience in school from both a Black boy and a white girl.⁵

HEALTH INEQUITIES AND LACK OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND DISABILITY RESOURCES IN SCHOOLS MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR SOME STUDENTS TO SUCCEED.

Physical and Mental Health

Health problems can make it difficult for students to attend or succeed in school. Students of color, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and students who have experienced trauma or violence are at an increased risk of acquiring chronic illnesses and mental health problems. Inequities in the health system can also make it more difficult for these populations to receive adequate care.⁶

Disability

Students who have disabilities are at an increased risk of experiencing exclusionary discipline in schools. This risk is heightened by the lack of proper training and support for teachers working with students who have disabilities.⁷

FAMILIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS WITH LIMITED SOCIOECONOMIC RESOURCES FACE BARRIERS TO PROVIDING THE RESOURCES STUDENTS NEED FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

Family

A family’s socioeconomic status (SES) impacts the resources available for the family to use to support a student’s education. High SES families are more likely to be able to afford experiences that support education such as tutoring, access to technology, and trips to museums. Low SES families may not be able to afford these things and are at an increased risk for experiencing problems such as housing instability, food insecurity, and high-stress levels, each of which can impact a child’s success in school.⁸

Neighborhood

Neighborhood SES determines what resources are available for a student in their community. The tax base of a community may limit the ability of the locality to provide sufficient public services including adequate funding for schools and libraries. This issue is exacerbated by SES segregation.⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the spring of 2020, CT Voices conducted a series of “data walks” to share the literature found in researching the school to prison pipeline coupled with data about achievement and discipline outcomes for Connecticut’s students and to gather ideas on where improvements could be made. We conducted the data walks with school administrators, teachers, workforce leaders, and service providers at the Connecticut College and Career Readiness Alliance (CCCRA) Convening, and with a group of youth and young adults from Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance’s Justice Advisors. Out of the anecdotes, insights, and suggestions collected at the data walks, we have developed the following recommendations:

WE RECOMMEND THAT CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS PROVIDE ADDITIONAL COUNSELORS, SOCIAL WORKERS, AND THERAPISTS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS.

- Participants stressed the importance of having enough school social workers and guidance counselors to develop personal relationships with students, provide therapeutic services, and comprehensive counseling for career and secondary education pathways.
- Connecticut currently has an inadequate ratio of counselors to students to fully support students.¹⁰

WE RECOMMEND THAT CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS HIRE TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS WHO HAVE BACKGROUNDS THAT ARE RELATABLE TO THE STUDENTS THEY SERVE.

- Participants identified the need to have educators that live in the same community they teach in, have grown up in similar socioeconomic backgrounds as their students, and/or share a racial or ethnic identity as their students.
- In the 2018-2019 school year, 10 percent of Connecticut’s teachers are non-white, compared to 49 percent of students.¹¹

WE RECOMMEND THAT CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS DRAMATICALLY LIMIT THE USE OF EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT IS SUPPORTIVE, NOT PUNITIVE.

- Data walk participants described a need to have schools that value providing students with support and security, and to have policies that represented these values.
- In the 2018-2019 school, seven percent of Connecticut students experienced at least one exclusionary disciplinary action; for Black students, the rate was 14 percent; for Latino students, it was 9.2 percent.¹²

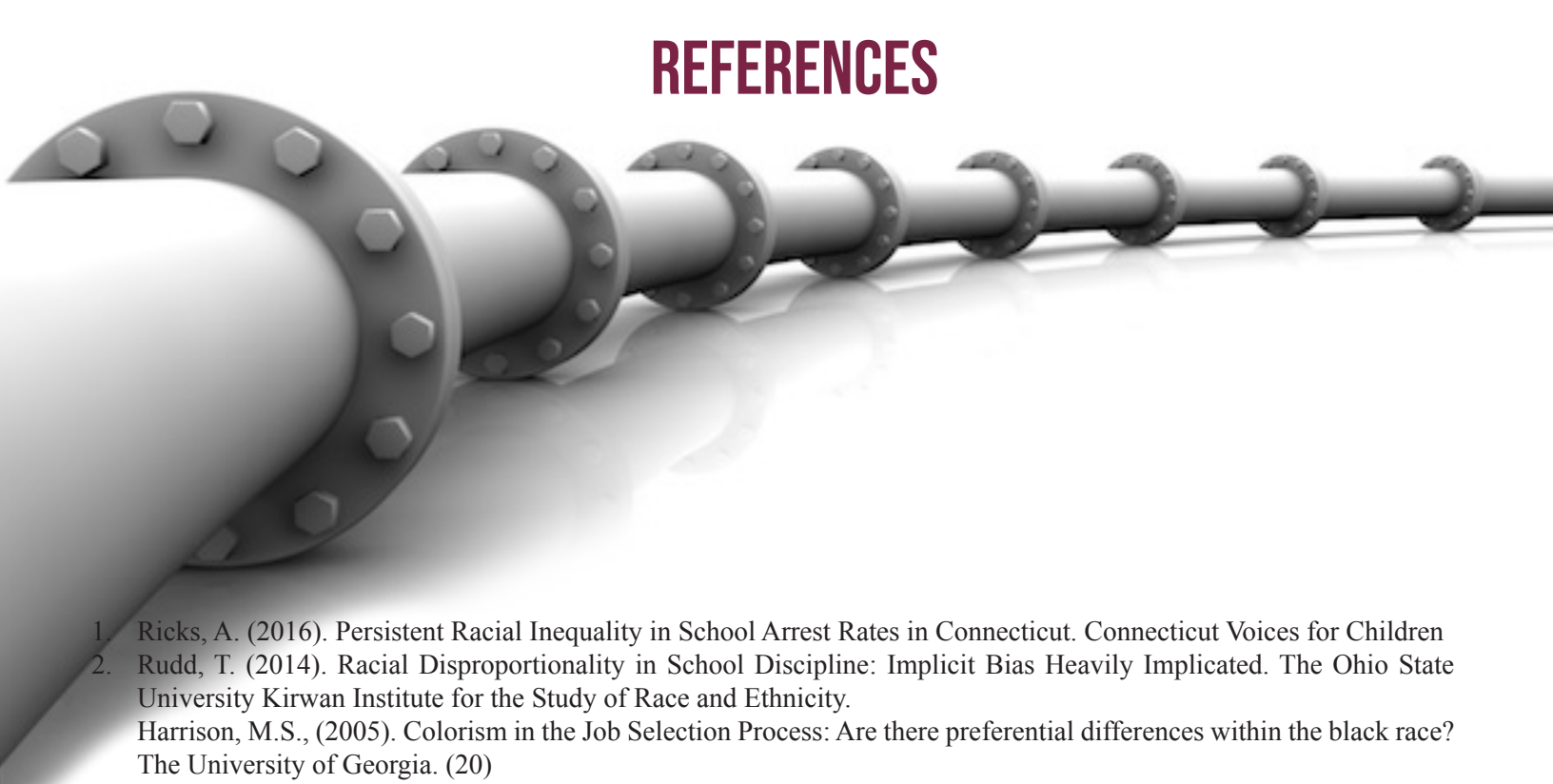
WE RECOMMEND THAT CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS PROVIDE TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS WITH ONGOING TRAINING AND SUPPORT ON ANTI-RACISM.

- Data walk participants discussed racism and implicit bias as pervasive issues that impact the experiences of students of color.
- Racial bias has contributed to significant disparities for students of color, including lower SAT scores and graduation rates.¹³

WE RECOMMEND THAT CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS EXPAND SERVICES AND PARTNER WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO PROVIDE GREATER SUPPORT TO STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

- Participants described a variety of factors that could impact a child’s experience in school, including health problems, homelessness, access to clean clothes, limited transportation, and food insecurity.
- Strengthening a school’s ability to connect with community organizations and provide wraparound services and help students who are experiencing a variety of problems outside of the classroom.

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