

# Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline: The Development of Strong, Stable Relationships

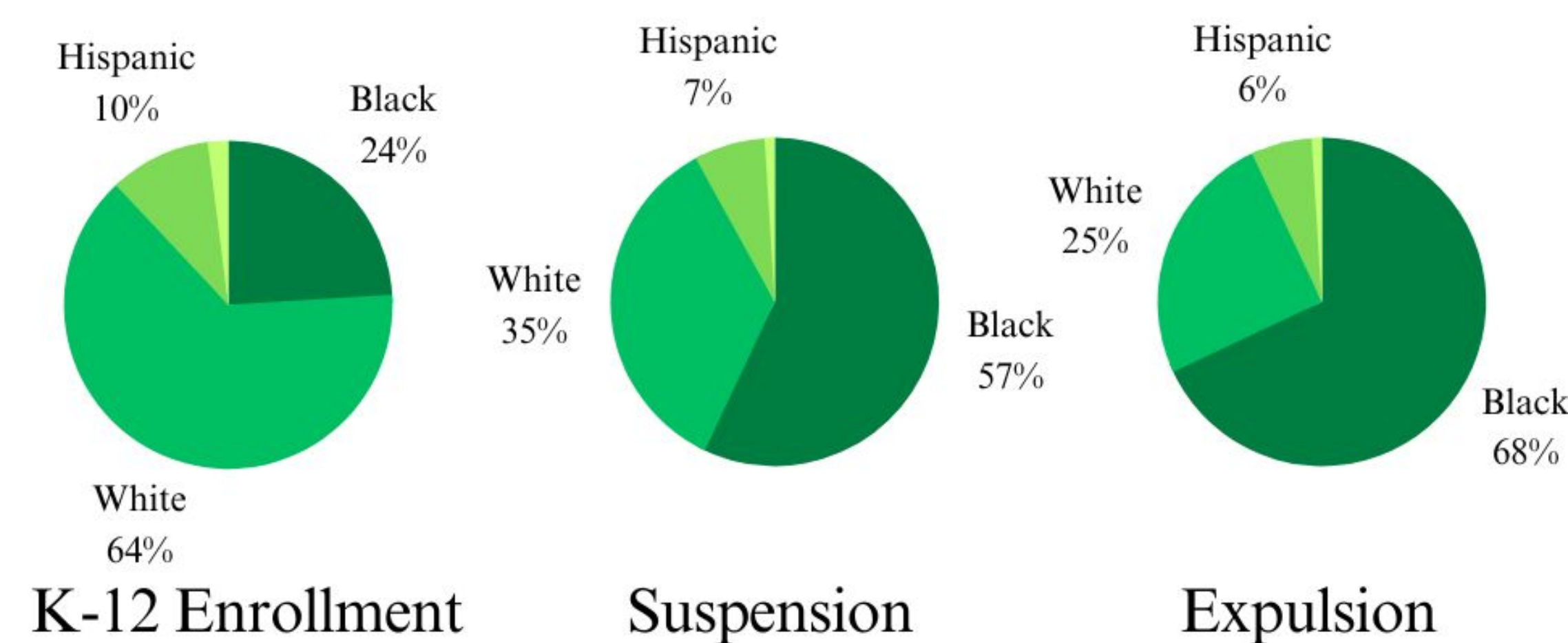
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## Abstract

The “school-to-prison pipeline” is a disturbing national trend where school policies and practices unjustly funnel children—namely children who are Black and Brown and/or have disabilities—into the Juvenile Justice system. Students of color are far more likely to be suspended, expelled, or arrested for the same kind of behavior as their white peers, and youth with disabilities are acutely affected by schools who ignore due process protections. Such students would benefit from extra supports and resources but instead face zero-tolerance policies, exclusionary discipline, and unreasonable difficulties with re-entry into school. The following research presents a review of current literature as it relates to the risk and protective factors for juvenile delinquency, as well as an analysis of mentorship as an evidence-based intervention. The Risk and Protective Factor Framework developed by Community Coalition for Healthy Youth informs the proposed intervention and provides a holistic approach for addressing adolescent delinquency. This poster explores why certain youth are punished, penalized, and incarcerated at a drastically higher rate than their counterparts and presents a detailed design for a school-based mentorship program aimed at promoting the development of strong, stable relationships between school adults and students to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.

## Scope of Problem



Source: TN Department of Education, 2016-2017

In MNPS, Black students are

**3X**

more likely to be suspended than white students  
(due to prejudice and unrecognized bias in school personnel)



**76%**

Of youth who come in contact with Juvenile Court have substance use disorder



**33%**

Of youth who come in contact with Juvenile Court have a high anxiety diagnosis

## Literature Review



- **Cost**
  - In Tennessee, the most recent cost to incarcerate one youth for a year is \$230,000
  - Delinquent behaviors can result in up to \$1 trillion per year in total costs to society
- **Risk factors**
  - Overlapping factors create layers of vulnerability
    - Economic and social deprivation
    - Racial discrimination
    - Death of a friend or family member
    - Residential moves
    - Parenting style and structure
    - Family conflict
    - Biological factors
    - Deviant peer association
    - Lack of commitment to academics
    - Academic failure, even in elementary



- **Protective factors**
  - School, faith group, or community activities
    - Prevent problem behaviors
    - Rewards for participation secure community bonds
    - Adolescents who participate stay in school longer
    - Provides structure that distracts from community violence
  - Parental involvement
    - Specifically authoritative parenting, denoted by warmth and appropriate discipline
    - Major influence over substance misuse, smoking, and violent behavior— three behaviors identified as core problems for delinquency
  - Mentorship
    - Healthy adult relationships—with parents, coaches, school staff, or teachers—affect children’s ability to cope with toxic stress
    - In the school setting: provides a protective relationship with a supportive adult and activities that develop a stronger sense of belonging and connection to school

## Proposed Intervention

- **Structure**
  - Students meet individually with MNPS faculty/staff volunteers
  - Once a week for 30 minutes during lunchtime
  - Mentor packet with suggested topics and questions
- **Goals**
  - Provide at-risk students with a stable relationship with an adult
  - Enhance child’s protective factors in and connection to school
- **Evaluation**
  - Effectiveness measured by pre-test and post-test surveys
  - Questions based on the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth’s Risk and Protective Factor Framework
  - Reduction in the score of risk factors and an increase in the score of protective factors on the post-test survey



Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
School faculty and staff volunteers	Weekly adult-student meetings	15 weekly meetings delivered	Reported increase in protective factors, as measured by a survey adapted from Community Coalition for Healthy Youth’s Risk and Protective Factor Framework
1 program director	Facilitated discussion of relevant topics	15 discussion topics covered	
Funding	Time for intentional connection	7.5 hours of relationally-focused time	
Scheduled time	Program director feedback and availability for mentors	x students engaged (based on recruitment criteria in each school)	Reported decrease in risk factors, as measured by a survey adapted from Community Coalition for Healthy Youth’s Risk and Protective Factor Framework
Meeting spaces (tables, chairs)		x adult volunteers engaged (based on availability in each school)	Reported subjective experiences before program
Guidance materials (topic information packet)			Reported subjective experiences after program
Standardized measurement scales (recruitment survey, post-test survey)			
Research base			

## Implications for Practice

- **Schools**
  - Can play a direct role in protecting youth from unfair funnelment into the justice system
- **Social workers**
  - Committed to achieving equal opportunity for all people by dismantling inequality and addressing racial and social injustices
  - Committed to encouraging healthy relationships as one of the greatest protective factors against trauma caused by exposure to violence
- **Potential impact**
  - Increase in meaningful school interactions and activities
  - Greater commitment and connection to school
  - Mentors fill in gaps in parental support, protecting against trauma from exposure to violence
- **Without intervention**
  - Systemic injustices will continue to unfairly funnel the most vulnerable Nashville students into the juvenile justice system