

Investing in Healthy Transitions to Adulthood: The Role of Schools

Brandon Lewis and Hailly T.N. Korman
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“Should schools have police officers?” is the wrong debate.

The events of 2020 sparked a national conversation about police violence, racism, and excessive punishment. But in many education circles, this conversation has devolved into a debate about more or fewer police officers in communities and in schools, which misses the larger picture. Police are only one part of a larger system that emphasizes punishment and punitive policies.

What would it look like for educators to imagine a system that actively avoids punishment and instead centers programming that improves life outcomes for all children?

What is the problem?

- America has a **culture of punishment**, as evidenced by our disproportionately large incarcerated population. **This culture filters through all parts of our society, including our schools.**
- **Our schools also contribute to the culture of punishment** by simply enforcing, rather than teaching, behavior expectations.
- **This approach is not working.** An abundance of research demonstrates that punitive approaches and policies do not improve school safety, nor do they make students or communities safer.

How can educators address this problem?

- Schools should **stop investing time and resources into punitive policies and approaches that do not work.** This can include school police, but also includes zero tolerance policies, suspensions, expulsions, corporal punishment, and other punitive approaches detailed later in these materials.
- Schools should **instead invest time and resources in community-based, restorative alternatives** (e.g., mentors, counselors, restorative justice programs) that align with their shared mission: supporting healthy transitions to adulthood.

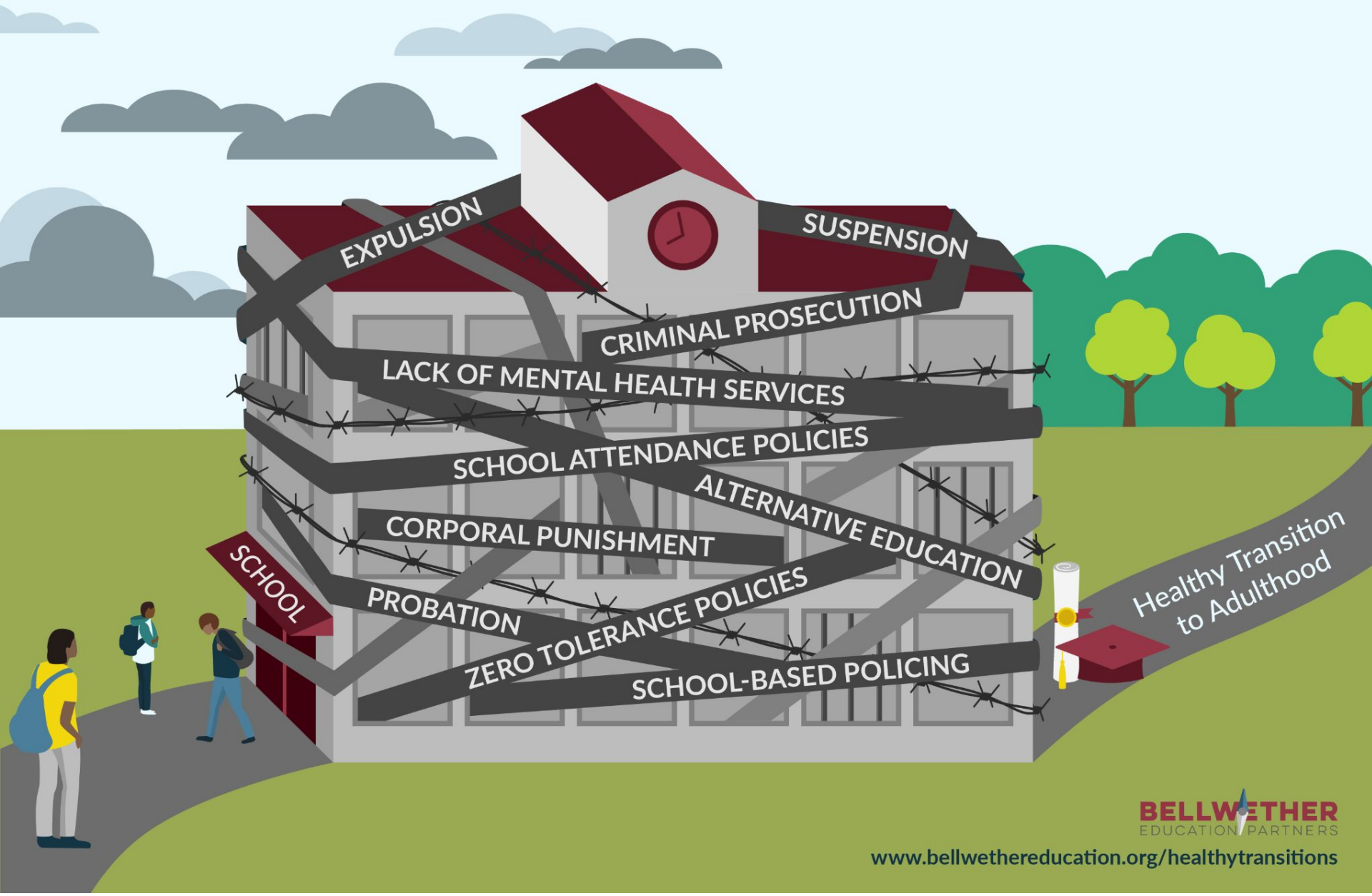
This is a broad and complex conversation, and there are three reasons to focus on schools:

1. Schools are places to make investments. Beginning in the summer of 2020, more Americans began to engage in conversations at the national and local level about divesting from punitive systems in response to acts of racial violence by police. While divestments are important, positive investments education leaders can make to support vulnerable youth are a necessary piece of the conversation — and most schools aren't doing enough. This project elevates local examples of strategies used to reduce youth contact with policing structures.

2. Sometimes school is the place where the problem starts. Trouble at school can often lead to a student's first contact with the criminal legal system. In some cases, schools are responsible for pushing students into the juvenile justice system through on-campus arrests and punitive policies that police student behavior. Education leaders interested in interrupting this system need more information on the different kinds of investments they can make to support vulnerable student populations.

3. Schools are falling behind. Some states, local governments, and advocates are leading the way on reducing the size of punitive systems by investing in evidence-based reforms to improve outcomes for vulnerable youth. Education leaders should learn from these reforms, and have an important role to play in supporting healthy transitions to adulthood — in part by ensuring students have fewer interactions with punitive systems.

Complex Punitive Systems Deny Access to Education



The status quo of punitive systems isn't working, and change is possible.

This resource **identifies key opportunities for schools** to take on broader and more influential roles in the evolving conversation about policing, mass incarceration, and the movement for racial justice. This is not an assessment of any one set of interventions or investments that reduce juvenile contact with the justice system. Instead, this resource offers:

- 1 a grounding in **evidence**
- 2 common questions and **guiding principles**
- 3 stories of **real-world efforts** to surface lessons for leaders
- 4 **planning tools** to begin to act
- 5 an explanation of **common terms** for further exploration

Throughout the document, we integrate quotes, photos, and stories from young people we've interviewed. More from them can be viewed [here](#).

Rehabilitative and restorative approaches are essential to ensuring that all young people can make a healthy transition to adulthood.

Criminal justice theorists understand that all systems for social control are built upon four primary purposes: incapacitation, deterrence, retribution, and rehabilitation.¹

Punitive Systems draw on the first three purposes: They are intended to prevent further bad behavior, punish those deemed offenders for their transgressions, and discourage future, similar behavior from that same person or from others. This includes school police or school resource officers (SROs), but more broadly punitive systems include all of the formal and informal policing and punishment structures that young people may come into contact with.

Rehabilitation or Restoration is the alternative. Rehabilitation is oriented toward the person who caused the harm and is designed to support them to develop more effective, prosocial patterns of thought and behavior. Restoration is oriented toward the repair of the harm and can include the participation of the victim.

Divestment or Defunding is a strategy of evidence-based resource allocation and investment that diverts resources away from punitive systems demonstrated to be harmful to youth and directs them to those institutions, resources, and services that research shows help communities and individuals to grow and thrive: rehabilitation and restoration.

A successful system supports a **healthy transition to adulthood** where all young people — particularly vulnerable youth who have experienced disruption or punitive systems — have the resources, tools, skills, and other supports (e.g., family and community relationships) they need to lead healthy lives with limited future interactions with punitive systems.



Evidence

Many schools rely on punitive approaches to all misbehaviors, not just those that cause harm or rise to the level of “crimes,” but also the minor misbehaviors and transgressions that are common in adolescence.

What does the evidence say?

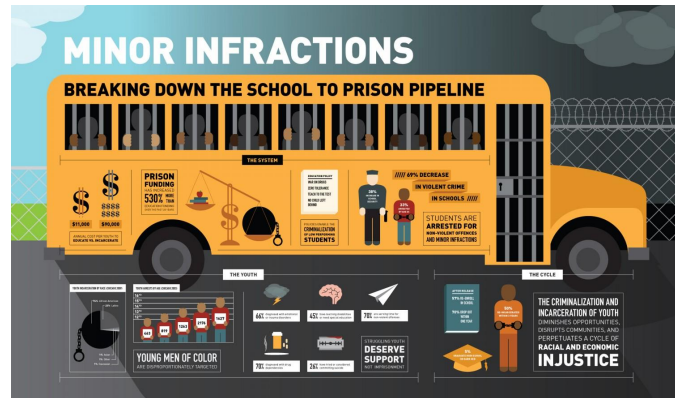
It is important to start with an honest assessment of what many schools are like today.

Punitive environments make schools less safe. Evidence shows punitive environments can be harmful to students' learning, the academic environment, socio-emotional development, and school climate. These losses are experienced the most severely by children from low-income families, those with disabilities, and children of color.²

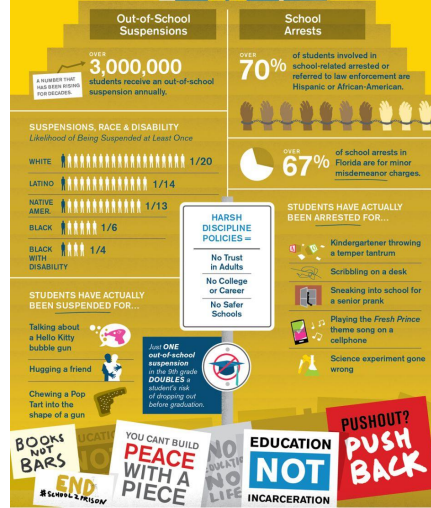
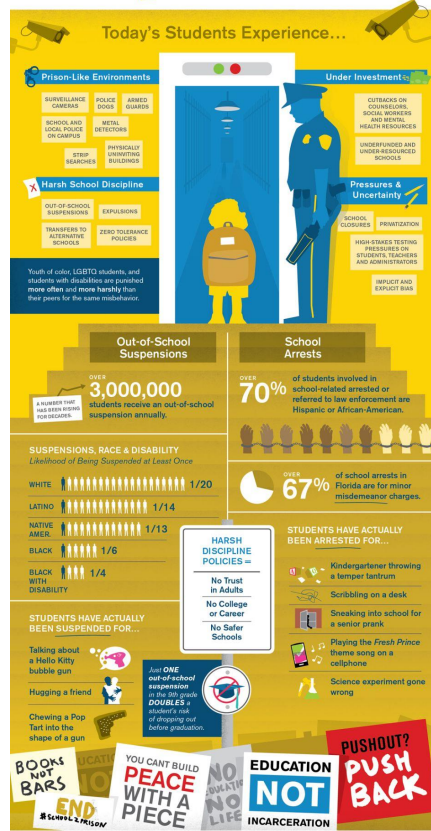
Increased presence of law enforcement in schools can coincide with increases in referrals to the juvenile justice system — even for minor offenses. These referrals cause youth lasting harm and disrupt their educational process.³

Justice-involved youth, particularly those youth who need special education support, have substantially worse outcomes later in life than those who avoid serving time for similar offenses. These students often face significant barriers during the transition back to school.⁴

Punitive systems put students into more frequent and more serious contact with law enforcement ...



SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE



ADVANCEMENT PROJECT | Ending the Schoolhouse Jailhouse | safequalityschools.org

Our current **punitive approaches** to youth behavior — both in and out of schools — **divert youth to a pathway that is characterized by control and punishment** rather than care and support ...

a pathway we know as the **school-to-prison pipeline.**

Youth who have contact with the school-to-prison pipeline have their **educational experiences permanently disrupted** with limited prospects for recovery ...

leading to a **“life without education.”**

There's an abundance of research and evidence documenting the long-term negative impact of the school-to-prison pipeline on youth.^{5, 6, 7}

Current approaches also mete out the sentence of “life without education” disproportionately.



Days of Learning Lost*

White students

21

Black students

103

Due to out-of-school suspensions, **Black students** lost 82 more days of learning compared with their white peers.⁸



States That Charge Fees

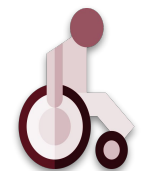
No fees

10

Charge fees

40

Most states allow courts to **require youth to pay some fee** for legal representation. As a result, youth may waive access to representation or force their families into debt.⁹



Referrals to Law Enforcement

Students without disabilities

1 in 30

Students with disabilities

1 in 10

1 out of every 10 **students with disabilities** is referred to law enforcement at school, while significantly fewer students without disabilities receive the same referrals.¹⁰



Suspensions

White girls

2%

Black girls

10%

Black girls in public elementary and secondary schools are suspended at a higher rate than girls of any other race, and more than white and Asian boys.¹¹



LGBTQIA+ Disparity

All students

5%

Incarcerated students

15%

Although **LGBTQIA+ youth** make up 5% of all students, they are overrepresented in juvenile detention and incarceration settings.¹²

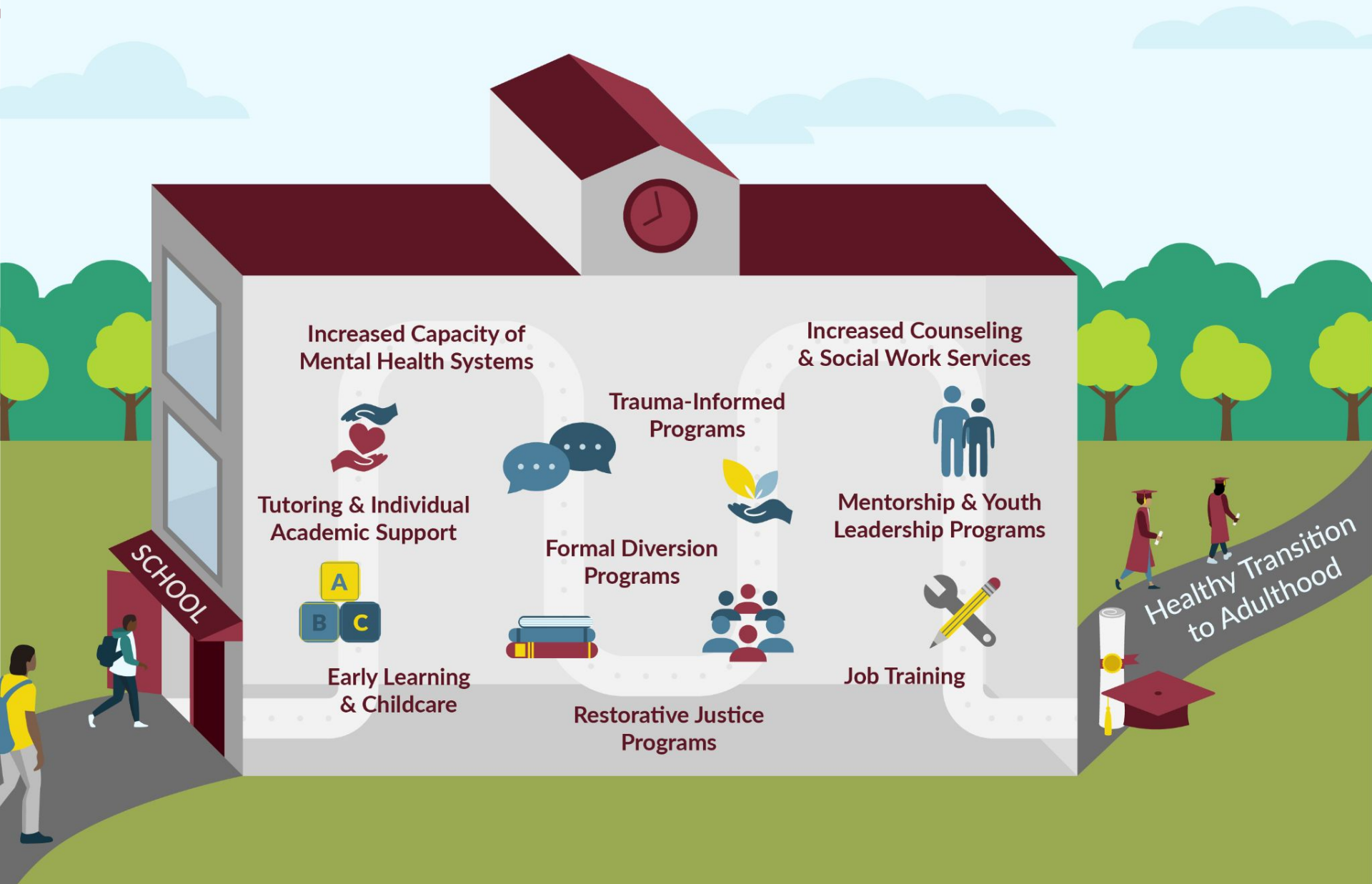
*Note: Racial disparities in school discipline are not driven by more serious or more frequent behavior from students of color. Instead, racial discrimination leads to students of color being treated more harshly.¹³

The evidence is clear: The status quo doesn't work.

Punitive systems fail to protect young people or prepare them for healthy transitions to adulthood. As a result, leaders should plan to wind down their investments in these strategies and instead invest in alternatives — and they should do so in partnership with youth, families, and communities.

Investments in community and care-based programming can help youth avoid interactions with punitive systems altogether, and prepare students for healthy transitions to adulthood.¹⁴

Alternatives to Punitive Systems and the Role of Schools





**IF I COULD'VE
HAD A MENTOR
BACK THEN,
I WOULD'VE HAD
SOMEONE
TO TALK TO**

But since I didn't,
I felt kinda hopeless.
I didn't have anyone to go to,
anyone to express myself to.
It felt kinda rough.

JEREMIAH - EL DORADO COUNTY, CA

Mentorship, counselors, restorative justice practices, and other positive evidence-based investments give students like Jeremiah a better chance at successfully transitioning to adulthood and avoiding contact with the criminal legal system.



2

Guiding Principles & Common Questions

It is important for leaders to balance the demands for both robust evidence and a firm commitment to articulated principles.

When questions are complex, guiding principles give leaders their “North Star” to **illuminate shared values** and foster the kind of agreement around goals that can provide **guidance when confronting challenges**.

We offer five principles as a starting place for local leaders to engage with, adapt, amend, and revise:

1. School-based **punitive systems harm all young people, and they cause disproportionate harm** to Black youth and other youth of color, queer youth, youth with disabilities, and other marginalized young people.
2. Total local resources are typically stable year-to-year, but how they are used is not fixed. Strategic resource allocation means that **efforts to divest from school-based punitive systems can be paired with complementary investments** that are more likely to support young people's social and academic success.
3. In order to achieve sustainable change, education leaders must develop a **comprehensive, long-term divestment and investment strategy that complements parallel community-based work** focused on young people.
4. Divestment from punitive systems means **replacing reactive punitive culture with intentional alternative practices for all youth** — including students who commit crimes, engage in violence, and cause harm.
5. Meaningful change will **include plans to share power and decision-making** with communities including students, parents, and community members.

Faced with the idea of punitive system reform, some might turn to these common questions:

Without punitive systems, what are schools supposed to do when kids commit acts of serious violence?

Most youth aren't in the juvenile justice system for serious acts of violence.¹⁵ In addition, studies show that violent crimes peak at ages 14-15, and 74% of those who do commit violent offenses do not reoffend as adults.¹⁶ Schools should discipline and rehabilitate students who engage in violence, but punishing those students with jail or prohibiting them from accessing high-quality education sets these children up for serious challenges in adulthood.

How will victims feel if we don't punish kids who misbehave?

Many victims do not believe that current systems bring them justice. Recent surveys show that more than half of victims prefer shorter prison sentences, and prefer additional investments in community programs, prevention, and rehabilitation.¹⁷

Doesn't this reform just lead down a path where schools have no discipline?


There's a clear difference between discipline and punishment. Our society often conflates the two and leads with a punitive approach to regulate behavior. Psychologists have known for some time that punishment doesn't work to change behavior, and encourage parents and educators to use other tools to discipline youth.¹⁸ Instead schools might consider long-term investments in professional development that prepares all educators to teach and reinforce positive behavior.

What does "defund" actually mean? Aren't there some real trade-offs to consider when we defund police?

Mainstream leaders increasingly acknowledge that the movement to "defund" or divest is, in fact, a call to use evidence to reimagine ways to keep communities safe and hold people accountable for causing harm. Across ideology, class, and racial lines, many Americans now agree that now is the time to rethink our entire public safety system, and this includes reevaluating how much money we spend and the long-term impacts of our system on youth, families, and adults.¹⁹

Aren't most people opposed to these kinds of reforms?

While many voters oppose efforts to "defund," they do support reform efforts.²⁰ Moreover, public opinion can be shaped and influenced by public institutions. For example, support for gay marriage climbed *after* the Supreme Court took action in 2015. Public institutions (e.g., courts, schools) have the power to change public perspectives — especially on divisive, controversial ideas.²¹



**I THINK SOME KIDS
GIVE UP AND
DROP OUT
BECAUSE THEY
DON'T HAVE
A GOOD SUPPORT
SYSTEM AT HOME,**

**OR, LIKE
AT SCHOOL
BECAUSE
TEACHERS
CAN BE NOT
SUPPORTIVE, TOO**

LENSHA - NEW ORLEANS, LA

Coming out of the pandemic, schools have the opportunity to redefine themselves as places where students are guaranteed the supports they need.

What is the opportunity for schools in this moment?

- In the coming months, many students will be going **back to school for the first time in over a year**. Before the pandemic, some schools relied on punitive systems and, in many cases, held the problem in place with their reluctance to engage in discussions about alternatives.
- Schools have an opportunity to **welcome students back to a different kind of school experience**: one rooted in positive supports and investments, and not punitive approaches to regulate student behavior. Some schools have already started down this road by training teachers in methods to teach and reinforce positive student behaviors, but far too many have done nothing.
- Schools that have taken action have limited their actions to low-stakes incidents. But efforts to reform school-based punitive systems must **include all students** — including students with serious violations.
- Schools owe an extra special duty to **students who have already had contact with the justice system** and those returning from out-of-home or institutional placement to ensure they are welcomed back to a supported pathway.



3

Real-World Efforts

To **contextualize these ideas**, the following slides detail snapshot stories of each of six places. Each provides a different set of **key takeaways** that can be instructive for local leaders who might apply some of those lessons learned to their own unique context.

We found examples of three big approaches to change ...

Top-down reforms



Advanced primarily by state legislatures and/or governors

Our examples:

- Georgia
- Utah

Bottom-up reforms





Advanced by community leaders

Our examples:

- Philadelphia
- Minnesota

A combined approach



Includes reforms advanced by elected officials, grass tops, and grassroots leaders.

Our examples:

- California: Oakland
- California: Los Angeles

These stories are intended to provide highlights and illustrations of some of the reform efforts in each place. Given the breadth and history in each, they are incomplete histories and do not represent all perspectives.

... and seven high-level takeaways from the local examples.

Schools **Schools play a key role** in the juvenile justice system and are essential to eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline. State efforts to implement punitive system reforms without a meaningful effort to engage schools will result in limited success.

School Leaders Before pursuing juvenile justice reforms that implicate schools, be sure to **include school leaders** from all levels in the discussion to understand their perspectives.

Transitions Have a plan to **help schools transition** away from punitive systems that includes resources and professional development.

Investments To ensure the success of efforts to defund or divest from punitive systems, school leaders must simultaneously **consider what investments to make**.

Engagement When implementing punitive system reforms, school districts should **engage the community** in conversations about their vision for their youth and develop a long-term strategy and plan for investments and divestments.

Coordination As school and community activists, elected officials, and state actors continue to reform their approaches to youth development, it is critical to **build coherence between schools and other systems** in order to magnify the impact and minimize the risk of developing competing plans or working at cross-purposes.

Time Campaigns to reform or defund punitive systems can span decades. Activists and school leaders should be prepared with a **long-term vision and strategy** when engaging in this work. Activists can focus on small, individual reforms that are aligned with their ultimate goals.

Summary: Georgia's governor worked with stakeholders to implement evidence-based, restorative practices for youth.

Alarmed by the soaring cost of juvenile justice facilities, Georgia's governor worked with policy and political leaders in the state to create a juvenile justice policy that would reduce the number of youth in state custody.

The governor's reforms focused on evidence-based programs that centered restorative practices, not punitive ones.

These reforms failed to include or address schools in a meaningful way.

Key Takeaways

Schools play a key role in the juvenile justice system and are essential to eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline.

State efforts to implement punitive system reforms without a meaningful effort to engage schools will result in limited success.

Detail: Georgia's governor worked with stakeholders to implement evidence-based, restorative practices for youth.

When Gov. Nathan Deal took office in 2011, Georgia led the nation in criminal supervision. One in 13 people in the state were either locked up, on probation, or on parole. The state was spending \$1.2 billion on its prison system, and was looking to spend nearly \$300 million on building new state prisons to hold new inmates. A conservative Republican, Deal saw this as a fiscal crisis for his state and set about implementing a set of reforms to reduce the state's prison, probation, and parole population even as Republican lawmakers and voters tried to convince him this wasn't an issue he should focus on. In 2013, Deal turned his reform agenda to the state's Department of Juvenile Justice, which was spending nearly two-thirds of its budget on out-of-home placements for youth and was experiencing readjudication rates of more than 50%. In May 2013, Deal signed H.B. 242 into law with two goals: 1) focus out-of-home placements on high-level offenders who posed a threat to public safety; 2) divert lower-level offenders into programs proven to reduce recidivism.^{22, 23}

One key aspect of the law was the creation of the Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant Program, which offered state grants to counties whose juvenile courts would implement evidence-based programs proven to reduce recidivism among juveniles.²⁴ These evidence-based programs included multisystemic therapy, functional family therapy, trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy, and aggression replacement training. Just as the federal government used federal funding incentives to drive implementation of the 1994 crime bill, Georgia used this new incentive program to draw in reluctant counties — and it worked. As of 2018, Georgia has reduced the number of youth in secure confinement by 36% and the number of youth in secure detention by 11%. Overall juvenile confinements to the Department of Juvenile Justice dropped by 46%.²⁵

Deal's reform efforts had a transformative impact on the adult and juvenile justice systems in Georgia, but failed to fully address one of the primary drivers of youth into the system — schools. Instead grassroots organizations like the Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline ([Gwinnett SToPP](#)) have formed to push individual school districts to address the policies that increase the likelihood that students come into contact with the criminal legal system.²⁶ What might happen if the state were to collaborate with organizations like Gwinnett SToPP and implement their reform ideas statewide? What kind of transformative impact would this strategy have on the system?

Summary: Utah's governor created a working group of stakeholders to transform the state's juvenile justice system.

Based on the recommendations of the working group, the state implemented a set of juvenile justice reforms that reduced the overall number of youth in the system, but failed to help all children equitably.

Some of the reforms that directly implicated schools were not well received by building and district leaders, so the state is offering new training and resources to help schools transition away from punitive systems.

Reflecting on the process, state leaders and advocates recognize that they should have targeted more school leaders for feedback while developing recommendations.

Key Takeaways

Before pursuing juvenile justice reforms that implicate schools, be sure to include school leaders from all levels in the discussion to understand their perspectives.

Have a plan to help schools transition away from punitive systems that include resources and professional development.

Detail: Utah's governor created a working group of stakeholders to transform the state's juvenile justice system.

Two years after Utah implemented a series of reforms designed to improve the state's adult criminal system, Gov. Gary Herbert (R), in partnership with state legislators, public officials, educators, and advocates, formed the Juvenile Justice Working Group. With technical support from the Pew Public Safety Performance Project, the governor charged the group with developing a comprehensive set of data-driven policy recommendations designed to increase public safety and focus juvenile justice system resources on youth who pose the greatest threat to public safety. "The bones of the juvenile justice system in Utah were really strong. We already had a bench designated to hear juvenile justice cases. We had a good structure, but we had not paid attention to how the system was morphing over time," recalls working group member Pam Vickrey, executive director of the Utah Juvenile Defender Attorneys. Based on the findings of the working group, Herbert signed H.B. 239, a comprehensive set of research-based reforms, into law in March of 2017.²⁷

H.B. 239, which passed with near-unanimous support in the Republican-controlled state legislature, included reforms to keep youth who can be supervised safely out of residential placements, expand community-based programs to reduce referrals to the system, and standardized practices to reduce egregious racial disparities within the system. Since the law passed in 2017, over 50% of juveniles referred to the Utah juvenile justice system have been diverted to non-judicial remedies and there has been an additional 44% drop in youth referred to detention programs.²⁸ While these reductions in detention and referrals have been celebrated, advocates, including Voices for Utah Children, point out that many of these reforms have benefited white kids in Utah, and in some instances have contributed to worse outcomes for children of color. 2018 data shows that white youth's overall arrests dropped between 2014 and 2018, while the proportion of overall arrests for young people of color increased during the same period.²⁹

Though the State Board of Education had a representative in the 2017 Juvenile Justice Working Group, advocates on the ground report that schools across the state have been resistant to some of the reforms. "I've been shocked at how reliant the schools are on punitive tools and the juvenile justice system," notes Vickrey. She adds, "Schools have struggled to find a different way to engage with disruptive or struggling students that doesn't involve referrals to the courts." In response the state formed a committee in order to strengthen relationships with district and school leaders, deploying staff on a "road show" in 40 meetings with district and school leaders as well as a full conference inviting school-level administrators to learn about restorative justice alternatives to school-based punitive systems. Cuong Nguyen, an absenteeism and dropout prevention specialist in restorative practices with the Utah State Board of Education, said, "So far, it's been a very positive reception. The messages about relationship building and community building work aren't new to our teachers, but they do struggle finding time to implement these new ideas."

"Lots of school districts that were resistant have come along, and we recognize there are some pockets of schools we just won't be able to change," says Vickrey. She and Nguyen both acknowledge the working group could have done more to engage more school leaders during the planning process, and both ultimately hope to see a culture shift in Utah public schools around punitive policies.

Summary: Progressive Philadelphia D.A. with support from grassroots activists implemented juvenile justice reforms.

Larry Krasner, whom many considered an outsider, ran a race for Philadelphia prosecutor and was elected in part because he promised to bring some progressive reforms to the city's criminal justice system.

Krasner promised and implemented a sweeping set of juvenile justice reforms, which led to a reduction in the number of children charged and held in detention.

Krasner paired his reforms with investments in community-based, restorative diversion programs.

Krasner's reforms complemented the work of a former Philadelphia police commissioner who introduced a program designed to limit the number of school-based arrests.

Key Takeaways

To ensure the success of efforts to defund or divest from punitive systems, school leaders must simultaneously consider what investments to make.

Detail: Progressive Philadelphia D.A. with support from grassroots activists implemented juvenile justice reforms.

Many thought Larry Krasner's campaign for Philadelphia district attorney was a fool's errand. His resume included defending clients like Black Lives Matter and Occupy Philly in criminal court — not the typical background of someone running for district attorney. Krasner had publicly called law enforcement “systemically racist” and had sued the Philadelphia police 75 times. Beyond his background, Krasner's progressive platform included plans to end pursuits of the death penalty, stand up to police misconduct, treat addiction as a medical condition instead of a crime, end cash-bail imprisonment, and review old case files to free the wrongfully convicted.³⁰ Despite what some saw as a rogue campaign, in the end, Krasner earned significant victories in the crowded seven-way primary and the general election, where he won with 75% of the vote.

On the campaign trail, Krasner promised to “return our juvenile system to its true purpose: rehabilitation of youth, which turns children's lives around and makes us all safer.” Once in office Krasner introduced a set of new policies to reduce the number of children arrested and sent to juvenile placement in the city. Krasner released a [seven-point plan](#) that covered a number of procedural matters including pre-adjudicatory offers, detentions, dispositions, review hearings and bench warrants, and the end of solitary confinement.^{31, 32} As a result, in 2018, Krasner's first year in office, the average number of children charged as adults [fell below 50](#).³³ Prior to his election, the city averaged 127 children per year charged as adults. In 2021, Krasner's office offered additional data documenting his sweeping changes. In 2017, over 600 Philadelphia children were placed in residential placements. By 2020 that number had dropped to 109, just three years after Krasner's election.

To ensure the success of his programs and prevent further recidivism, Krasner's office offered an expanded menu of community-based diversion programs. In January of 2019, the city's Juvenile Diversion Unit had just eight diversion service providers and programs for youth. By February of 2021, that number jumped to 21 providers. New partners like MileUp, a running and mentoring program, helped youth to complete restitution for certain felony cases and has even offered jobs to youth as youth advocates.

These reforms built on the efforts of former Philadelphia Deputy Police Commissioner Kevin Bethel, who in 2014 identified the school system as the source of many juvenile offenders. He proposed a solution, and in 2014, the School District of Philadelphia took a big step when it collaborated with the Philadelphia Police Department and the Philadelphia Department of Human Services to develop and operate the Philadelphia Police School Diversion Program. The [Philadelphia Police School Diversion Program](#) is a pre-arrest, school-based diversion program that diverts all first-time offending youth who commit qualifying, low-level offenses on school property away from arrest and into community prevention services.³⁴ According to an [evaluation](#) from the Juvenile Justice Research and Reform Lab, as a result of this program, the number of school-based arrests in Philadelphia fell 84% between 2013 and 2018 to 251 total arrests during the 2018-19 school year.³⁵ The combined efforts of the Philadelphia DA, the Philadelphia Police Department, and the School District of Philadelphia suggest a coordinated effort to end the status quo, and reduce overall interactions between law enforcement and the city's youth.

Summary: Minneapolis school board removed school police, but failed to plan for a complementary investment.



The death of George Floyd sparked a national conversation about the role of police, and, after years of youth activism, led the Minneapolis Board of Education to get rid of school police.

Instead of planning for an alternate investment to replace the police presence, district officials rehired many individuals with police backgrounds with different titles.

As a result, community members and local activists have lost faith in the school board and worry about a return to the status quo.

Key Takeaways

When implementing punitive system reforms, school districts should engage the community in conversations about their vision for their youth and develop a long-term strategy and plan that includes complementary investments paired with divestment from punitive systems.

Detail: Minneapolis school board removed school police, but failed to plan for a complementary investment.

In the immediate aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, Kim Ellison, chair of the Minneapolis Board of Education, and her colleagues decided to end the district's contract with the Minneapolis Police Department that allowed officers on campus as school security.³⁶ This district had been paying \$1.1 million per year to place 11 school resource officers in its middle and high school buildings. While the public may have believed this was a spontaneous move, those inside the city recognize this was the culmination of several years of student activism.³⁷

In the months that followed, Minneapolis Public Schools privately struggled to determine what alternative programs and policies to invest in instead of school-based police officers. Some hoped that the district would make a greater investment in counselors and social workers who offered a more student-centered approach. But throughout the summer of 2020, news outlets began reporting that Minneapolis Public Schools was simply swapping out one kind of police for another in response to the canceled contract. According to public reporting, district Superintendent Ed Graff created a new position within the school district called Public Safety Support Specialist, and to many this felt like a return to the status quo.³⁸ These specialists would not be employees of the Minneapolis Police Department, and would not be allowed to carry a gun, unlike school resource officers. The job description for the specialists required applicants to have a degree in law enforcement, and noted that they would serve as a liaison to the Minneapolis Police Department.³⁸

To many in Minneapolis, this turn of events was disappointing but not surprising. "The school board reacted, but it didn't reflect and respond. This was a time for the board to be critically conscious, and engage the community. They didn't," said Raj Sethuraju, a local community activist with the Minneapolis NAACP and a professor. As a result, what was once a bright moment for the school district has become another missed opportunity for the school board to invest in systems that are designed to support students and their families.

Summary: Los Angeles activists and leaders work on juvenile justice from different angles, but lack a coordinated strategy.

Los Angeles County has a story of four separate efforts to reform the juvenile justice and punitive systems from different actors who each control a unique set of levers.

LAUSD, the largest school district in LA County, eliminated one-third of its school-based police, and made a complementary investment in schools with large concentrations of Black students.

Recently, Los Angeles County partnered with youth, activists, and policymakers to develop a plan to reform the county juvenile justice system, and produced a set of recommendations with little focus on schools and school-based punitive systems.

Simultaneously, the new Los Angeles DA is implementing a sweeping set of citywide juvenile justice reforms, but fails to account for the role of schools.

And at the same time, the state is requiring counties to develop a plan to transition incarcerated youth back into communities.

There is no plan for coordination across these different efforts.

Key Takeaways

As school and community activists, elected officials, and state actors continue to reform their approaches to youth development, it is critical to build coherence between schools and other systems in order to magnify impact and minimize the risk of developing competing plans or working at cross-purposes.

Detail: Los Angeles activists and leaders work on juvenile justice from different angles, but lack a coordinated strategy.

Los Angeles County has a story of four separate efforts to reform the juvenile justice and punitive systems from different actors who each control a unique set of levers. Despite having the best interests of youth in mind, these actors lack a coordinated strategy and common “North Star” for their efforts.

Like leaders in other cities and districts, school board leaders in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) voted to strip funding from their school-based police department. In 2021, the Los Angeles Unified Board of Education voted to keep officers out of secondary school campuses, ban them from using pepper spray on students, and to eliminate positions, including sworn officer positions. Board members also voted to redirect those dollars toward a \$36.5 million Black Student Achievement Plan, which will focus on providing resources to schools with high concentrations of Black students and low academic performance.³⁹ Schools can use these funds to hire “school climate coaches,” members of the community who will replace the school police presence. Schools can also use funds to hire other staff including psychiatric social workers, counselors, and restorative justice advisers.

While LAUSD is the largest school district in LA County, it is just one of 83 districts in the county. In 2019, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors passed a motion creating the Youth Justice Work Group and charged it with developing thoughtful, actionable recommendations for a reimagined youth justice system in Los Angeles County. This group inherited a legacy of activism led by students, families, and community members to transform the county’s youth justice system. In 2020, the Youth Justice Work Group released [Los Angeles County: Youth Justice Reimagined](#) proposing a comprehensive approach to transform and improve the county’s youth justice system.⁴⁰ Few of the proposals account for the role schools can and should play in building this system. In fact, schools are rarely mentioned in any documents from the Youth Justice Work Group, including the recent [timeline](#) of juvenile justice reform in LA County.⁴⁰ Advocates like Meredith Desautels, staff attorney at the Youth Law Center, argue that schools are absent from these documents because school leaders are often absent from conversations about reforming the juvenile justice system.

Newly elected county District Attorney George Gascon is pursuing a separate set of reforms. During his campaign, Gascon laid out a comprehensive [plan](#) to reform the city’s juvenile justice system, but schools were only mentioned once in his seven-point agenda.⁴¹

In 2019, Gov. Gavin Newsom introduced his proposal to hand over management of the state juvenile justice operations to the Department of Youth and Community Restoration and offer a block grant to provide counties money toward services for youth.⁴² Counties are actively planning how to spend those dollars and advocates like Frankie Guzman, director of the Youth Justice Initiative at the National Center for Youth Law, worry that without strong plans that prioritize alternatives, resources — and youth — will remain stuck within punitive systems. “The schools are missing from the county planning process. It’s an appalling gap,” noted Desautels.

Summary: Oakland activists work for a decade to eliminate school-based police, and create long-term investments in youth.

The death of a young Black man on school property by a school police officer outraged the Oakland community, and led to the creation of a grassroots organization focused on eliminating school-based police.

Activists focused on specific policy wins, leading to the eventual elimination of the Oakland school police force.

Activists have worked with community leaders to develop a set of holistic, restorative investments the school district should make replacing the punitive school police force.

While activists have made gains, the state has made similar efforts to reform some of its punitive systems and is providing counties with funds to develop complementary investments to support youth.

Key Takeaways

Campaigns to reform or defund punitive systems can span decades. Activists and school leaders should be prepared with a long-term vision and strategy when engaging in this work.

Activists can focus on small, individual reforms that are aligned with their ultimate goals.

Detail: Oakland activists work for a decade to eliminate school-based police, and create long-term investments in youth.

In 2011, 20-year-old Raheim Brown was shot and killed by the Oakland Unified School District's (OUSD) police force outside Skyline High School. Brown was shot five times outside of the building. Weeks later, Brown's mother explained at an Oakland City Council meeting that the officer who shot her son had twice been accused of excessive use of force, including another case that resulted in the death of a young man. This school shooting by a school police officer led to the formation of a citywide movement to remove police from every school in Oakland.⁴³ In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and years of activism in Oakland, the school board took the final vote to eliminate the Oakland Unified School District police force. It was a victory nine years in the making.

Bettering Our School System (BOSS), the community-based movement to remove OUSD police, was led by young people and organizers within Oakland's Black Organizing Project. To achieve their goal, organizers within BOP set small achievable goals. In 2012, organizers pressured the board to adopt a complaint policy, finally giving students and parents a clear process to file complaints against OUSD officers and protect them from any retaliation.⁴⁴ In 2015, BOP pressured OUSD to eliminate "willful defiance" from the district's discipline policy. Data showed that willful defiance, a broad term used to justify excessive student discipline, led to disproportionate suspension of Black students in Oakland.⁴⁵ The state followed suit several years later in 2019 when Newsom signed legislation barring schools from suspending students in K-8 for willful defiance. And in June 2020, following the lead of school board leaders in Minneapolis and Denver, the OUSD school board adopted the George Floyd Resolution eliminating the Oakland Schools Police Department.⁴⁶

BOSS is prepared to advocate for additional investments in OUSD now that the district has eliminated the district police department. According to the BOSS [People's Plan for Police Free Schools](#), eliminating police in schools is only step one of a four-part plan to transform OUSD schools. Other recommendations include "reorganize the campus safety and security program under the department of equity or behavioral health," "restructure the role of security personnel to become mentors and peace/culture keepers," and "reinvest \$2.3M OSPD budget into hiring additional school mental and behavioral health and special education staff." It remains unclear how the district will respond to these demands, but BOSS organizers in Oakland plan to continue to organize for policies that support the whole child and community-based solutions.

Some of these reforms mirror similar reforms at the state level. In 2019, Newsom introduced his proposal to hand over management of the state juvenile justice operations to the Department of Youth and Community Restoration and offer a block grant to provide counties money toward services for youth.⁴⁷ Advocates hope the money will be spent on community-based alternatives and investments in holistic reentry services for youth leaving detention or probation. This presents a new opportunity for county and district education agencies to consider what kinds of supports and investments they can offer and what long-term investments they can make to prevent more youth from having contact with the justice system.

4

Planning Tools

The following slides provide planning tools for school system leaders, local advocates, and policymakers. These tools are designed to both **support reflection internally** and to **guide collaborative conversation externally**.

Six steps toward school systems that support healthy transitions to adulthood

Rather than fixed recommendations, we propose a progression of six steps to make progress toward systems that support healthy transitions to adulthood. These steps are appropriate across the key roles in any region, though the details vary for school system leaders, local advocates, and policymakers.*

1. Understand your system
2. Understand your community
3. Clarify your principles
4. Identify your partners
5. Articulate your path forward
6. Create and hold yourself to multiple measures of success

1. Understand your system

School System Leaders

Questions:

What are the school-based or district-based practices that contribute to contact with law enforcement or other punitive systems?

Do these practices impact some students more than others?

What policies enable those practices?

Strategies:

Collect and report disaggregated data including:

- Number of students referred to police or juvenile justice programs
- Number of days of learning lost by students who are suspended or expelled
- Disaggregated student discipline data
- Expenditures for SROs and other punitive systems

Local Advocates

Questions:

Do advocates have access to regularly reported, disaggregated, accurate data on student contact with law enforcement?

Strategies:

Request data on juvenile justice disparities including:

- Number of students referred to police or juvenile justice programs
- Number of days of learning lost by students who are suspended or expelled
- Disaggregated student discipline data
- Expenditures for SROs and other punitive systems

Policymakers

Questions:

What policies are in place that contribute to increased contact between youth and the criminal justice system?

How much money is currently spent on punitive systems (e.g., police, military grade weapons) in schools?

Strategies:

Collect and report data on juvenile justice disparities including:

- Number of students referred to police or juvenile justice programs
- Number of days of learning lost by students who are suspended or expelled
- Disaggregated student discipline data
- Expenditures for SROs and other punitive systems
- State and local spending on school punitive systems and weapons

Learn More:

Schools often implement punitive policies (e.g., zero tolerance) to police student behavior and improve school safety. Evidence shows that these policies make schools and students less safe. (See: [Zero Tolerance, Zero Evidence](#))

2. Understand your community

School System Leaders

Questions:

How do the youth and families in your community experience punitive systems?

Strategies:

- Hold regular roundtables with students and families to hear their concerns and ideas about the current system.
- Develop a consistent feedback loop through which families and students can communicate with those in power without fear of retribution.

Local Advocates

Questions:

Do advocates have reliable channels of communication with school leaders?

Are school leaders receptive to community feedback?

Strategies:

- Hold regular roundtables with students and families to hear their concerns and ideas about the current system and capture the data/feedback from the conversations to share with school leaders.
- Request meetings with education leaders on these topics at a regular intervals.

Policymakers

Questions:

Do you have relationships with community advocates?

What are their experiences and demands?

Strategies:

- Hold regular roundtables with students and families to hear their concerns and ideas about the current system.
- Develop a consistent feedback loop through which families and students can communicate with those in power.

Learn More: Leaders who have strong relationships with their communities strengthen their chances of getting public support, minimizing criticism, and learning the values and priorities of their communities (See: [Practical School Community Partnerships Leading to Successful Educational Leaders](#))

3. Clarify your principles

School System Leaders

Questions:

What are your goals?

Is your system designed to meet those goals right now?

Strategies:

- Write down your current values and goals. Compare them with your disaggregated student outcomes.
- Identify additional investments that can support improvement in student outcomes.

Local Advocates

Questions:

What do advocates expect of schools?

Have they expressed their vision for their students clearly?

Strategies:

- Write down your current values and goals. Compare them with your disaggregated student outcomes.
- Identify additional investments that can support improvement in student outcomes.

Policymakers

Questions:

What is your vision for young people in your community?

Do your policies reflect that vision?

Strategies:

- Write down your current values and goals. Compare them with your disaggregated student outcomes.
- Identify additional investments that can support improvement in student outcomes.

Learn More: Everyone needs a clear and complete set of guiding principles to inform their work, establish values, and ensure that all stakeholders understand what is important. (See: [Guiding Principles for Closing the Gap Between Strategy Design and Delivery](#))

4. Identify your partners

School System Leaders

Questions:

Do you collaborate with local organizers and leaders focused on the divestment/investment strategy?

Strategies:

- Build relationships with local community organizers. Listen to their concerns, and collaborate on solutions on which schools can lead.

Local Advocates

Questions:

What issues are other advocates working on?

How can you partner to advance a common vision?

Strategies:

- Build relationships with education and policy leaders. Share your concerns, and collaborate on solutions on which advocates can lead.
- Identify advocates working on similar issues.

Policymakers

Questions:

What other elected officials can you partner with to advance a reform vision?

Education leaders? Advocates?

Strategies:

- Build relationships with local community organizers and education leaders. Listen to their concerns, and collaborate on solutions on which policymakers can lead.

Learn More: Public policy is strengthened when constituents and stakeholders are directly involved in the policymaking process. (See: [Creating More Effective, Efficient, and Equitable Education Policies with Human-Centered Design](#))

5. Articulate your path forward

School System Leaders

Questions:

What is your plan to implement reforms independently or in collaboration with district and state leaders?

Strategies:

- Schools and districts should focus first on reforms that are within their loci of control and that do not require multiple layers of approval to implement. This can include implementing restorative justice practices, offering professional development to educators on the negative impact of the juvenile justice system on student learning, or making additional investments in counselors.

Local Advocates

Questions:

What is your plan to hold education leaders accountable to their vision and commitments?

Strategies:

- Collaborate with other advocates, families, and community leaders to develop a community-based plan for what schools will look like without punitive systems.

Policymakers

Questions:

What partners will you need to convince before you can implement new policies?

What additional investments will schools need to pursue implementation successfully?

Strategies:

- Schools and districts will need dedicated investments and technical assistance to implement sweeping changes successfully. Policymakers can support the successful implementation of these policies by appropriating adequate funding for counselors, teacher and leader professional development, and restorative justice training.

Learn More: Schools must take accountability for their role in maintaining policies that increase student interactions with punitive systems, and communicate a clear plan to interrupt the pattern. Advocates who invest time and resources in visioning a future can guide education leaders toward the appropriate next steps. (See: [School-to-Prison Pipeline Can Be Dismantled Using Alternative Discipline Strategies.](#))

6. Create and hold yourself to multiple measures of success

School System Leaders

Questions:

How does your accountability strategy reflect a plan for ongoing collaboration and cooperation?

What are your qualitative metrics (e.g., community attitudes, student attitudes, teacher attitudes, parent attitudes)?

What are your quantitative measures of success (e.g., fewer referrals to courts, decreased interactions between police and students, # of new policies implemented on restorative justice)?

Do you have a feedback process in place to receive ongoing community input about qualitative and quantitative measures of success?

Strategies:

- Consider creating more official opportunities for public feedback
- Transparency on progress toward goals
- Ongoing opportunities to revise or refine goals
- Community members with decision-making roles

Local Advocates

Questions:

What wins can you get that advance pieces of your larger vision?

Strategies:

- While it's important to keep your principles as your "North Star," advocates should position themselves to achieve realistic, attainable small victories and document these achievements

Policymakers

Questions:

What is your plan for continuous improvement if your policy needs updates or amendments?

Strategies:

- Consider creating more official opportunities for public feedback
- Transparency on progress toward goals
- Ongoing opportunities to revise or refine goals
- Community members with decision-making roles

Learn More: Using multiple measures of success allows leaders to determine if they are making progress on their goals, and if that progress is aligned to their guiding principles. This approach demonstrates that leaders are committed to transforming the system, not just improving a few self-selected metrics. (See: [Bring Stakeholders on Board by Gathering Multiple Measures of Success.](#))



**ONCE YOU
GIVE UP ON
A STUDENT,
THE STUDENT
IS CRUSHED
EMOTIONALLY
AND MENTALLY**

And without a barrier to keep them on track, that student will fall off the rails.

KIALL - NEW ORLEANS, LA

Schools are a critical piece of any vision for a better future. Education leaders can play their role most effectively when they have a broad understanding of the complexity of the issues and curiosity about the relationships between them.

5

Explanation of Common Terms

Moving from punitive approaches toward alternatives can often be flattened into false “either-or” choices.

The following common terms define many of the punitive systems, structures, and tools and some of their alternatives. These are provided here to help **establish a common vocabulary** and **encourage further exploration**.

Punitive systems, structures, and tools (1 of 5)

Term	About	For Example
Alternative education & schools of last resort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education programs designed to meet the compulsory education needs of students no longer allowed to attend their neighborhood schools • Often includes pregnant and parenting students as well • May be grouped in with adult education or other “nontraditional” high school learners • Often part-day programs • May be oriented toward high school equivalence certificate rather than a diploma (i.e., GED or HiSET) 	<p>How do states define alternative education?</p> <p>How Students Get Banished to Alternative Schools</p>
Child welfare (foster care)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed to protect children from abuse and neglect • Social workers often manage unsustainable caseloads, leading to triaging for life-and-death needs • Long history of racism and bias against poor families, historical policies removing Indigenous children from their homes and communities • Most jurisdictions prioritize family reunification, which can make foster care placement unstable • May or may not cover kinship care and informal arrangements 	<p>How the Child Welfare System Works</p> <p>Introduction to the Child Welfare System</p> <p>What Would It Take to Create the Child Welfare System Families Say They Need?</p>
Corporal punishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical punishment within the school setting • Permissible in 19 states 	<p>Corporal Punishment in U.S. Public Schools: Prevalence, Disparities in Use, and Status in State and Federal Policy</p>
Criminal & adult prosecution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States set ranges of “juvenile court jurisdiction” above which prosecution happens in the adult criminal court • Within the range of juvenile jurisdiction, there may be exceptions for types of crimes or circumstances under which the case will be transferred to adult court; those transfers are sometimes automatic and sometimes require a hearing and judicial discretion 	<p>Juveniles in Adult Court</p>

Punitive systems, structures, and tools (2 of 5)

Term	About	For Example
Electronic monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often referred to as “ankle monitors”• Electronic monitoring can be offered as an alternative to incarceration• These programs can have a broad range of constraints on behavior and movement on a case-by-case basis• Often enforced by threat of revocation and incarceration	Electronic Monitoring Digital Jail: How Electronic Monitoring Drives Defendants Into Debt
Expulsion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The forced removal of a student from a school for behavioral or disciplinary reasons• Procedural protections include an expulsion hearing and, for students with disabilities, a manifestation determination (was the behavior a manifestation of the disability? If so, the student cannot be disciplined for it)• Similar evidence of disproportionality as earlier levels of school discipline• Students still subject to compulsory attendance rules but may be offered alternative programs (e.g., independent study or online education)	Life After Getting Expelled: What Really Happens When Students Are Kicked out of School School discipline: The rights of students with IEPs and 504 plans
Juvenile fines & fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The imposition of legal fines and court fees to self-pay costs of administering juvenile or criminal legal system• Often imposed on the parents of minor children• Nonpayment can lead to escalating sanctions	DEBTORS' PRISON FOR KIDS?: The High Cost of Fines and Fees in the Juvenile Justice System
Immigration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exclusively federal jurisdiction around living and working in the USA• Many local public safety organizations have MOUs under which they provide cooperative services, for example notifying ICE when and where a person with an outstanding deportation order is being released from prison	FAQ for Educators on Immigrant Students in Public Schools The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on the Nation's Schools

Punitive systems, structures, and tools (3 of 5)

Term	About	For Example
Juvenile incarceration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential programs for youth within juvenile justice jurisdiction • Short-term detention is typically pre-adjudication, typically length of stay in weeks to months • Long-term detention is typically post-adjudication and can range from terms of months to terms of years • Length of stay typically around 9 months • No reliable data on total cumulative incarceration during a lifetime and frequency of recidivism 	<p>Youth Confinement: The Whole Pie 2019</p> <p>Adapt youth prisons for maximum education, not maximum security</p>
Mental health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health services can include therapeutic services, medication management, and psychiatric hospitalization 	<p>How America's Overmedicating Low-Income and Foster Kids</p> <p>Treatment Options</p>
Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State and local sworn officers who hold a monopoly on the legitimate use of force • Can detain and arrest • Bound by federal and state constitutional constraints as well as local regulations, but generally limited oversight and few channels exist for complaints 	<p>What Police Are For: A Look Into Role Of The Police In Modern Society</p> <p>How the U.S. Got Its Police Force</p> <p>Predatory Policing</p>

Punitive systems, structures, and tools (4 of 5)

Term	About	For Example
Probation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The formal supervision of an individual by a public safety agency • Can range from daily in-person check-ins to weekly or phone checks to no regular check-ins • Typically probation status waives a number of constitutional protections, permitting searches that would otherwise be unlawful • Can be prolonged and include terms of years, even where the underlying offense is minor • May follow a period of incarceration or may take the place of incarceration • Enforced by a threat of revocation and incarceration • Some jurisdictions have used public resources for “voluntary probation” programs where parents can elect probation supervision for minor children 	<p>Juvenile Probation: The Workhorse of the Juvenile Justice System</p> <p>Probation Violations</p> <p>Probation May Sound Light, but Punishments Can Land Hard</p> <p>LA County Puts Thousands of Kids on ‘Voluntary’ Probation for Merely Struggling With School</p>
Residential treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of the facilities that provide round-the-clock supervision and services to meet specific needs (e.g., substance abuse treatment or sex offender programs) • These can be court-ordered as alternatives to incarceration or under different legal authority • Some programs accept young people absent a court order with the consent of their guardians 	<p>‘They told me it was going to be a good place’: Allegations of abuse at home for at-risk kids</p>
School attendance policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of punitive strategies to address tardiness, truancy, and attendance • May be wielded against students or parents • May or may not use law enforcement • Can include fines, fees, and hearings up to threats of incarceration 	<p>Inexcusable Absences</p>

Punitive systems, structures, and tools (5 of 5)

Term	About	For Example
Substance abuse treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance abuse treatment addresses the use of any substance not as prescribed by a medical professional • Includes substances that are otherwise legal for adults (e.g., alcohol and cannabis, in some states) • Often includes things like 12-step programs • Can be ordered by a court, often for low-level offenses or an alternative to incarceration • Can also be included as part of a sentence that includes incarceration (which, if administered in a “treatment facility,” is then referred to as “residential treatment” rather than incarceration) 	To Decrease Juvenile Offending, Make Effective Drug Treatment a Priority.
Suspension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The escalation of behavior management interventions in and outside of the classroom • Includes in-school suspension (typically for some or all of a single school day, but could be longer) • And out-of-school suspension, which typically spans at least one full school day • Wealth of data on disproportionality at every level (racial, gender, disability, perceived as LGBTQ) • Some procedural protections for students with disabilities (known as manifestation determinations) 	School suspension and the school-to-prison pipeline Students Move Further Down School-to-Prison Pipeline With Every School Suspension
Zero tolerance policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and laws that designate specific offenses as “zero tolerance” resulting in immediate expulsion with no option for discretion by school officials 	A Generation Later: What We’ve Learned about Zero Tolerance in Schools

Alternative systems, structures, and tools (1 of 7)

Term	About	For Example
Broad decriminalization and fewer “arrestable” offenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of prosecutorial reform that limits the number of offenses youth and others can be arrested for to decrease the size of the incarcerated population 	<p>New DA Gascon to decline prosecution on range of low-level crimes</p> <p>Philly police to halt narcotics arrests, other charges during COVID outbreak</p>
“Close to home” incarceration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternatives to out-of-home placements for youth not deemed to pose a substantial threat to public safety Policies that ensure youth are placed in residential facilities near home in local (versus state) care and custody, and receive the necessary support to safely transition home 	<p>Innovations in NYC Health and Human Services Policy: The Close to Home Initiative and Related Reforms in Juvenile Justice</p>
Community alternatives to 911	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy to reduce community interactions with the police and give communities the tools to engage with each other about problems and disputes. This strategy encompasses a number of alternatives including: community patrols, increased reliance on mental health professionals, restorative justice programs, decriminalization of nonviolent crimes, and unarmed mediation and intervention teams 	<p>Six Ideas for a Cop Free World</p>
Community spaces & activities (sports, arts, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public spaces like community centers give youth the opportunity to engage in productive activities and avoid antisocial behavior or negative influences 	<p>Students learn life lessons while deep sea drift fishing</p> <p>Milwaukee County Reduces Number of Inmates In Youth Prisons</p>

Alternative systems, structures, and tools (2 of 7)

Term	About	For Example
Congregate care reforms (e.g., closing high-capacity facilities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reforms to reduce the number, size, and length of stay in group homes, and other nonfamily placements 	Reducing Congregate Care Placements: not so easy, not always good for kids
De-escalation training for law enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training that teaches police officers to slow down, create space, and use communication techniques to defuse potentially dangerous situations Intended to give officers strategies to more calmly deal with people who are experiencing mental and emotional crises, and reduce the use of deadly force 	Not Trained to Not Kill: Most states neglect ordering police to learn de-escalation tactics to avoid shootings
Direct anti-poverty remedies (housing, food, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People in households at or below the federal poverty level had more than double the rate of violent victimization as those in high-income households There's some evidence from other nations to suggest that more equitable income distribution contributed to reducing violence 	The stark relationship between income inequality and crime
Direct cash transfers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government-guaranteed payment that each citizen receives or cash grants from the government targeted toward the poor, usually without conditions about how the money should be used 	The City That's Giving People Money
Domestic violence two-generation strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies to prevent domestic violence and offer solutions and support for both parents and children in the home 	Preventing Intergenerational Transmission of Domestic Violence
Drug use harm reduction strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use Incorporates a spectrum of strategies that includes safer use, managed use, abstinence, meeting people who use drugs "where they're at" and addressing conditions of use along with the use itself 	Principles of Harm Reduction

Alternative systems, structures, and tools (3 of 7)

Term	About	For Example
Early learning & childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence shows that students with high-quality early education will have reduced interactions with the juvenile justice system 	Early Education: The Power to Reduce Future Crime Victimization
Education programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality education programs can help reduce crime. Data show that increased college graduation rates correspond to a significant decrease in the crime rate 	Why education reduces crime
Formal diversion programs (via courts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentence in which the criminal offender joins a rehabilitation program intended to remedy the behavior that led to the original arrest, allow the offender to avoid conviction, and — in some jurisdictions — hide a criminal record 	Los Angeles Board of Supervisors Votes to Launch ‘Historic’ Juvenile Diversion Plan
Fundamental infrastructure (lead, asbestos, fetal exposure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investments in infrastructure to limit youth exposure to harmful substances and chemicals that can negatively impact brain development 	Study Links Childhood Lead Exposure to Later Gun Violence: Link Increases Pressure on Milwaukee’s Lead Abatement Program
Gender/sex-based violence intervention and prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on prevention and intervention in intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual assault. Most responses have focused on after-the-fact treatment in shelters and criminal legal system responses Prevention strategies include: teaching safe and healthy relationship skills; engaging influential adults and peers; disrupting the developmental pathways toward IPV; creating protective environments; strengthening economic supports for families; supporting survivors to increase safety and lessen harms 	Governor Cuomo Announces Four-Point Plan to Reduce Sexual Violence in Educational Institutions as Part of 2021 Women’s Agenda

Alternative systems, structures, and tools (4 of 7)

Term	About	For Example
Immigration reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investments in state and federal immigration policy • Facilitating increases in school enrollment of immigrant students • Expedite changes in our schools to better meet the needs of immigrant students 	Immigration reform proposed by Biden could alleviate anxiety, fear for thousands of California children
Increased capacity of mental health systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies to improve access to mental health services, treatment, and payment for these services • Reforms may include: dissemination and implementation of evidence-based programs, expanding the number of entry points to access mental health services, additional research on prevention, and better interventions for communities at high risk for mental illness 	Alameda DA unveils “groundbreaking” mental health diversion program
Increased counseling & social work services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 1 in 5 students (8 million) don’t have access to a school counselor • Part of the school support team who provide social-emotional support to students • School counselors can play a role in retention rate for at-risk youth and reducing dropout rates 	Students to School Board: Please Hire More Counselors
Investments to understand & address social determinants of health (SDOH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health and quality-of-life risks and outcomes • Five key areas of SDOH are health care access and quality, education access and quality, social and community context, economic stability, neighborhood and built environment • Local and state governments can use this framework to adopt a health care approach to all local policy 	Public Health and Safety: The Social Determinants of Health and Criminal Behavior

Alternative systems, structures, and tools (5 of 7)

Term	About	For Example
Job training, workforce development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investments in youth employment programs and job training leading to: fewer arraignments for violent and poverty crimes; improvements in skills, attitudes, and aspirations; improvements in social and emotional skills that were linked to declines in arraignments • Can reduce crime and violence, and improve overall social and emotional skills 	Gov. Pritzker announces \$4 million for Illinois at-risk youth career training
Mental health crisis intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased investment in mental health professionals • Shifting toward preventive, supportive, and independent living care for those who struggle with mental illness • As recently as 2005, more than half of all prison and jail inmates had an unmet mental health need 	Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Inmates
Mentorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural and programmatic mentors can be effective in reducing recidivism and promoting successful transitions out of juvenile justice systems 	Mentoring for Youth who Have Been Arrested or Incarcerated
Prosecutorial reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effort to push prosecutors to shift their priorities and adopt reforms that address the root causes of crime to reduce crime, incarceration, and recidivism 	21 Principles for the 21st Century Prosecutor
“Raise the age” campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to local policies that raise the presumptive age of adult criminal responsibility • These policy changes move youth under the age of 18 (or 21 in some instances) out of the adult criminal legal system and into the juvenile system 	Raising the Age: Shifting to a Safer and More Effective Juvenile Justice System

Alternative systems, structures, and tools (6 of 7)

Term	About	For Example
Research to practice on adolescent brain development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juvenile brains differ from adult brains in key areas that control the ability to regulate impulses, emotions, planning and anticipation of outcomes, and resistance to peer pressure • Better understanding of juvenile brain science and its development can help ensure that children are treated more fairly 	Rewiring juvenile justice: the intersection of developmental neuroscience and legal policy
Restorative justice programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replaces punishment (suspension/expulsion) with different techniques to repair harm • Early research on restorative justice in schools shows mixed results and variance in implementation 	Restorative justice provides accountability, healing, and justice
Transition support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support services offered to people as they transition out of the criminal legal system • Supports can include housing, job training, financial literacy, and education courses 	Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System: Practical Considerations
Trauma-informed programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma-informed care recognizes the role trauma may play in a child's life, and integrates knowledge about trauma into services offered 	Trauma Informed Care and Positive Youth Development
Tutoring & individual academic support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides critical academic support to at-risk youth and reinforcement from a positive role model • Tutoring is also a path to build relationships with at-risk youth 	Providing Individually Tailored Academic and Behavioral Support Services for Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems

Alternative systems, structures, and tools (7 of 7)

Term	About	For Example
Violence prevention & intervention programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address violence before it occurs • Violence intervention programs work with individuals who may have already been violent to interrupt future acts of violence with a number of strategies including mediation, counseling, etc. 	What Works in Youth Violence Prevention: A Review of the Literature
Youth development/ leadership/ organizing programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program to prevent the onset of antisocial behaviors and justice system involvement • Strategy to activate and direct youth energy and dissatisfaction with the status quo 	Community Organizations Have Important Role in Lowering Crime Rates
Youth legal services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion and investment in legal services available to youth, so that adjudicated youth have access to proper legal representation and advocates who will argue for appropriate services 	Legal Counsel for Youth and Children

Methodology for examples

Identifying examples of cities and states that have acted to reform their punitive systems is complicated given that many localities have considered some punitive system reform in recent decades. To develop our case studies, we began with interviews with experts in the field, including professors, practitioners, and funders, to identify bright spots. The authors also attended forums and webinars hosted by universities, advocacy groups, and organizers, and conducted desk research to learn about trends in the field.

Based on this information, we developed a list of six localities with a documented record of punitive system reform. From there, we began reaching out to leaders in each locality. We sent emails, called leaders, and used our networks to connect with people who were involved in the reforms we hoped to profile. We conducted interviews with some local leaders to learn more about the history of the reforms and lessons learned from the implementation.

We also considered the diversity within our case studies, and attempted to include localities that are diverse along different dimensions in order to bring varying perspectives to inform our overall analysis. For example, the political conditions within our six localities vary, as does the approach to system reform. We believe that the diversity within our final sample helped us better understand the different approaches and conditions behind punitive system reform, and will serve readers coming to this work from different perspectives.

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- Cuong Nguyen, Prevention Specialist, Absenteeism and Dropout Prevention Restorative Practices

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- Dr. Raj Sethuraju, Chair, Criminal Justice Reform, Minneapolis NAACP; Associate Professor, School of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, Metropolitan State University

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- Jennifer Rodriguez, Executive Director, Youth Law Center
- Alex Johnson, Program Director, California Wellness Foundation
- Roger Chung, Laney College, Ethnic Studies Department Chair

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- Roger Chung, Laney College, Ethnic Studies Department Chair

About the Authors



Hailly T.N. Korman is a senior associate partner at Bellwether Education Partners on the Policy and Evaluation team. Originally from Hawaii, Hailly is a graduate of Brandeis University. She also holds a J.D. from UCLA School of Law. She can be reached at hailly.korman@bellwethereducation.org.



Brandon Lewis is a senior analyst at Bellwether Education Partners on the Policy and Evaluation team. He is a graduate of Columbia University. He can be reached at brandon.lewis@bellwethereducation.org.

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Writing and editing: Brandon Lewis, Hailly T.N. Korman, Andy Rotherham, and Tanya Paperny
Communications: Lindsay Ferguson
Graphics: Five Line Creative
Copy Editing: Super Copy Editors

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