

## **A “Transforming the School-to-Prison Pipeline” Initiative: Mentoring Model Pilot Project**

**Abstract:** This informative and interactive teaching symposium posits the Positive Peer Leadership Mentoring Program (PPLM) as an evidence-based wrap-around service for youth and families in Miami-Dade who are involved in the school-to-prison pipeline. Presenters first provide information to initiate the dialogic process of discerning and interpreting the school-to-prison pipeline, impacted by costs of incarceration for Black youth and families and the move toward effective mental health services in the juvenile justice system. Then, participants experience an interactive pedagogical mentoring format set forth in PPLM as the first step toward transforming the school-to-prison pipeline in their own classroom or other educational setting.

**Key Words:** Black youth, community-based initiative, disproportionality, effective mental health services, experiential learning, financial costs of youth incarceration, mentoring, juvenile justice, transforming the school-to-prison pipeline.

### **Description of the Initiative**

Miami-Dade Anti-Gang's Positive Peer Leadership Mentoring (PPLM) Program is held at Turner Guilford Knight Correctional Center with direct-filed juveniles (children in the adult court system due to serious nature of their alleged crime) and at Miami-Dade's Regional Juvenile Detention Center with juveniles detained there. PPLM sessions involve pedagogical mentoring

of youth who are in some way impacted by incarceration, including but not limited to: (a) have one or both parents in prison; (b) have been suspended, expelled, or incarcerated; and (c) are reentering school, family, and community after suspension, expulsion, or incarceration, for the purpose of reducing or eliminating (their involvement in) violent crime and increasing their advocacy skills. Pedagogical mentoring is the experiential process of encouraging and teaching for youths' critical conscious awareness, thinking, habits of mind, and understanding of their active role in learning, living, and improving society. Pedagogical mentoring involves experiential learning, structured dialogue, and critical literacy practices to increase community-building, conflict resolution, communication, leadership, literacy, and advocacy skills. This project is a Researcher (E-SToPP) – Practitioner (Miami-Dade Anti-Gang Strategy Initiative) partnership. The Miami-Dade Anti-Gang Strategy Initiative puts forward its Positive Peer Leadership Mentoring Program model. E-SToPP draws from this model to develop research-based pedagogical mentoring curricula that augment the Positive Peer Leadership Mentoring Program. The broader community is welcome to participate in PPLM sessions to develop mentoring relationships with youth who are detained or incarcerated.

### **Goals of the Symposium**

Goals of this symposium are for participants to (a) discern and interpret the school-to-prison pipeline, costs of incarceration, and effective juvenile justice mental health services; (b) experience interactive pedagogical mentoring, posited in PPLM as a first step in transforming the school-to-prison pipeline in one's own teaching and learning spaces.

### **Format of the Symposium**

#### **Introductions and First Presentation (10 minutes)**

**Chairperson.** Debra Mayes Pane, Ph.D., Florida International University

**Bio.** As Founding President of E-SToPP, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to transforming schools and educational programs for youth involved in suspension, expulsion, and incarceration, Dr. Pane pursues her passion for conducting transformative educational research and developing partnerships within the community, juvenile justice education, and public schools to transform the school-to-prison pipeline.

**Title.** What is the School-to-Prison Pipeline?

**Abstract.** The school-to-prison pipeline, a disproportional exclusionary discipline trajectory, disconnects Black youth from peers, families, school, work, and opportunities to develop a satisfying and productive life. Youth who participate in evidence-based mentoring relationships demonstrate better educational, social, behavioral, and other outcomes than nonmentored youth. Evidence-based mentoring programs are needed in Miami-Dade.

**Summary:** The school-to-prison pipeline is an existing trajectory from the first time predominantly Black students get in trouble at school to being disproportionately labeled a troublemaker and potentially dangerous, referred to the office, expelled to disciplinary alternative education schools, and sent to jail or prison (Fabelo et al., 2011; Wald & Losen, 2003). The school-to-prison pipeline phrase was coined when a theme, linking school discipline and juvenile justice data, emerged during a joint research conference cosponsored by the Civil Rights Project and Northeastern University's Institute on Race and Justice. Disproportionality increases as African American students move from referral to suspension, expulsion, school failure, dropping out, and, according to the disproportionate minority confinement data of the juvenile justice system, from detention to state prison (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, 2009; Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, 2009; National Center for Education

Statistics [NCES], 2010a,b,c; Office of Juvenile Justice Dropout Prevention, 20009; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006; see handout, Figure 1).

The school-to-prison pipeline is also a euphemistic metaphor for the oppressive *physical, structural, psychological, and discursive conditions of violence* in the form of exclusionary discipline that have been historically and disproportionately issued to Black youth in America (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). Dominant educational research, newspapers, and popular movies such as "Waiting for Superman" continually fuel public debates about whether our public schools provide justice for all, decrease the achievement gap, and leave no child behind. District and state public school policies defer to the school-to-prison pipeline with announcements about reducing suspensions and arrests (Miami-Dade and Broward, 2014). At the same time, policy makers put forth race-based academic achievement standards and goals that enforce racial biases and low expectations for Black students more than one hundred years after *Plessy v Ferguson* (RBS, 2014). Juvenile justice research calls for a continuum of care in dealing with youth who are involved in the school-to-prison pipeline in order to reenter school, family, community, and society successfully (Children's Law Center, 2011). However, top-down mandates, announcements, standards, and calls for change *do not answer questions and thoughts about why and how to do so* (Pane & Rocco, 2014). What does the school-to-prison pipeline have to do with me—I am a law-abiding citizen? How can I, one teacher, do anything about the school-to-prison pipeline in my own classroom—I teach gifted White students? Why should I bother to keep disruptive Black children in my classroom—that is unfair to my students who want to learn what I have to teach? Even if I understand the issue of the school-to-prison pipeline, where would I begin to make a change—I can't repair families, I cannot fix poverty, I am not a psychologist?

To address such bottom-up questions and concerns, this informative and interactive teaching symposium presents the Positive Peer Leadership Mentoring Program (PPLM) as the infrastructure for an evidence-based wrap-around service for youth and families in Miami-Dade who are involved in the school-to-prison pipeline. PPLM is a researcher-practitioner pilot project designed to gauge diverse volunteer mentors' interest, correctional staff and mentees' buy-in, and successes and challenges of developing an empowering culture of thinking in detention and correctional settings through interactive pedagogical mentoring. During the symposium, presenters will provide background information on the school-to-prison pipeline, financial costs of incarceration, and the move toward effective juvenile justice mental health services. Then presenters will guide participants through the process of discerning, interpreting, and taking the first step toward transforming the school-to-prison pipeline in their own classroom or other educational setting via the interactive teaching pedagogical method set forth in PPLM.

**Second Presentation (10 minutes)**

*Speaker.* Chaundra L. Whitehead, Doctoral Candidate, Adult Education and Human Resource Development, Florida International University

*Bio.* Chaundra L. Whitehead, a doctoral candidate in Adult Education and Human Resource Development at Florida International University, has 15 years of experience in adult education as a volunteer tutor, correctional educator, and literacy coordinator. Her dissertation research examines a conflict resolution training program in two South Florida prisons.

*Title:* Financial Costs of Incarceration on Black Youths' Families

*Abstract:* Increasing attention has been given to the governmental cost of maintaining the current state of mass incarceration in the United States. This presentation seeks to illuminate the costs of

incarceration which are endured by youth offenders' families, and how they have a direct impact on Black communities.

*Summary.* Increasing attention has been given to the governmental cost of maintaining the current state of mass incarceration in the United States, however there are also critical cost at the familial level of the incarcerated person. The economic stability of the family is greatly impacted by the arrest, trial and incarceration of a family member. Considering that incarceration in America is concentrated among Black men, their families suffer the greatest economic impact related to incarceration. The economic damages involve justice related cost (court fees, lawyers, restitution, probationary fees, etc.), loss of a wage earning adult in the household, charges for supporting the incarcerated individual (commissary, phone calls, visitation travel), and upon release severely diminished earning potential or joblessness. There is a life-long earnings gap which exist for an incarcerated individual long after release. Incarceration also impacts the education and earning potential of the incarcerated person's children. Family members of incarcerated individuals- especially spouses and children- often have increased mental and physical health care needs, which can lead to increased medical cost. This presentation seeks to illuminate the cost of incarceration which are endured by offenders' families, and how they have a direct impact on Black youth, families, and communities.

**Third Presentation (10 minutes)**

*Speaker.* Heather T. Pane, Ph.D., Research Fellow, Duke University

*Bio.* Heather T. Pane, Ph.D., M.P.P., is a postdoctoral fellow at Duke University and a licensed psychologist in North Carolina. She has worked in various clinical settings with youth, families, and adults from diverse backgrounds. Dr. Pane's research emphasizes promotion of

evidence-based interventions for psychosocial difficulties, particularly for historically underserved populations.

***Title.*** Effective Mental Health Services in the Juvenile Justice System

***Abstract.*** The prevalence of mental health difficulties among youth involved in the juvenile justice system has spurred initiatives to promote effective services. Gaps still exist in assessment and treatment effectiveness. More integrated, comprehensive programs are currently being implemented, and hold promise for deterring the school-to-prison pipeline and other long-term costs.

***Summary.*** The majority of youth within juvenile justice system are experiencing mental health difficulties (70%; Schufelt & Coccozza, 2006) and many have a history of trauma (92%; Abram, et al., 2013). History of substance abuse, anxiety, mood, or behavior problems are highly prevalent among juvenile offenders, who often experience co-occurring difficulties (e.g., Domalanta et al., 2003). Many youth begin experiencing mental health difficulties well before their contact with the system, while others may develop such problems as a result of their antisocial behavior or contact with the system. In any case, youth who do not receive appropriate services, particularly those evidenced as more effective for juvenile populations, are likely to experience increasing difficulties over time including school failure and recidivism (e.g., Lambie & Randell, 2013). Mental health difficulties thereby play a role in perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline and related costs incurred by youth, their families, and society.

For youth involved with the juvenile justice system, there remains a need for more effective mental health services to help deter long-term difficulties. Current efforts highlight the importance of universal, comprehensive assessments to inform treatment planning, service referrals, and more effective responses to mental health needs (e.g., Hoeve, McReynolds, &

Wasserman, 2013). However, the assessment process varies between states, with some screening all youth and others focused on screening and more in-depth evaluations for youth with greater perceived difficulties or more serious offenses. Certain cities, such as Chicago, have also implemented specialized mental health courts while some states, including California and Arizona, have established procedures allowing legal professionals to request mental health screenings (e.g., Callahan, Coccozza, Steadman, & Tillman, 2012). Other initiatives involve diversion programs that provide youth with community-based mental health services rather than adjudication when no public threat is posed, or aftercare programs that support youth access to services after their release (e.g., Schwalbe, Gearing, MacKenzie, Brewer, & Ibrahim, 2012).

Similar to assessment, intervention programs vary widely in comprehensiveness and effectiveness for mental health needs of youth associated with the juvenile justice system. Adolescence is characterized by growth and change, as well as multiple influences from the complex, dynamic environment within which youth are embedded. As such, interventions that involve continual assessment and address the multiple systems interacting with the youth (e.g., peers, family, community) are generally most effective at encouraging positive trajectories. Some examples of evidence-based work include Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST; Henggeler, Melton, & Smith, 1992) and wrap-around services (e.g., Walker & Bruns, 2007).

Future efforts should promote collaborative programs that provide more accessible community- and home-based wrap-around services (e.g., Lambie & Randell, 2013). These comprehensive services make up a continuum of care, involving integration of services and communication across juvenile justice, mental health, education, and child welfare systems. For example, E-SToPP schools will engage with the surrounding community to support positive youth development through educational, mental health, medical, mentoring, and other services.

Such programs have the potential to meet the multifaceted needs of youth, including mental health, while also helping to deter juvenile justice system involvement.

#### **Fourth Presentation and Interactive Pedagogical Mentoring Experience (20 minutes)**

***Speaker.*** Miguel Peña, Student, Florida International University

***Bio.*** Miguel Peña is a Miami native raised in Hialeah, and a graduate of Hialeah Miami Lakes Senior High. He attended the University of Pittsburgh and currently attends Florida International University studying elementary education. He decided to study elementary education because he enjoys learning about learning.

***Title.*** Facilitating the Experience of a Positive Peer Leadership Mentoring Session

***Abstract.*** Working with juvenile residents at Miami-Dade's Regional Juvenile Detention Center and Turner Gilford Knight Correctional Center, we contest ideology that is destructive to our communities and future. Developing a critical community of practice, we identify, discuss, and initiate thoughts and actions to advance our schools, neighborhoods, and nation.

***Summary.*** Every session at TGK and JDC is focused on creating an empowering culture of thinking and a critical community of practice. Introducing these two platforms and instituting the expectation that each will be achieved throughout the session sets the foundation for our program. Each participant sharing their intellect is crucial to successfully confronting the deficiencies in our culture and facilitates problem solving, peer education, and critical thinking. Encouraging the young men to listen and share is supported by reinforcing the traits of a CCOP when exercised by participants with verbal praise and positive gestures. Probing questions that lead to higher order thinking requiring the group to reflect on their own experiences and the experiences of others to create corrective action plans that fit their needs and the needs of their community is a chief instrument going into each discussion. The discussion is aided by a variety

of material that reflects the topic. Current event articles, literature, or music can all play a role in fostering thought and participation.

The most valuable asset in each session is the thoughts of the young men. It is important not to reject their perspectives. Every comment can be elaborated on providing a platform to expand conversation and thinking. The discussions often do not explicitly follow the lesson plan, adapting the lesson to the path of the discussion must occasionally take place when the dialogue deviates from the initial plan. Find what is important to the group and work off that. The prominent problem that has been expressed during sessions is the concept that change, relative to the individual(s) and environment is unattainable. This obstacle opposes the principles of the CCOP and an empowering culture of thinking. Some things may be difficult to change, improve, or grow but by listening and discussing we have initiated change and in the CCOP we develop the skills necessary to overcome barriers and impact the world.

Please join us as we guide you through the experience of creating a CCOP-CM, which our research shows develops mentoring relationships while transforming the initial barrier of the school-to-prison pipeline involving one's mindset, conscientization or the acknowledgment and realization of one's conditions, and decision to use one's advocacy skills to engage in civic engagement that lead to changing one's condition, particularly oppressive, isolated, and race-based discrimination (see handout, Lesson Plan; Freire, 1985, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003; Freire & Macedo, 1987).

### **Justification**

In the United States, *exclusionary school discipline* is common. Since the Children's Defense Fund (1975) research on school suspension, studies of school discipline have consistently documented the disproportionality of African American students, particularly males,

in the administration of exclusionary school discipline (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000) and placement in disciplinary alternative education schools (Foley and Pang, 2006; Van Acker, 2007) and the juvenile justice system. Exclusionary school discipline includes removing students from the classroom by referrals to the office, suspensions, and expulsions. Exclusionary school discipline consequences are more frequent, harsher, and less congruent to the incident for African American students, particularly males. Also, exclusionary discipline consequences increase for African American students, particularly males, in higher socioeconomic schools even though no evidence supports the claim that they are more disruptive than their peers.

The disproportionality of African American students, particularly males, in exclusionary school discipline is termed the *discipline gap* (Monroe, 2005, 2006). Disproportionality is determined by a 10% of the population standard, by considering a subpopulation “over- or under-represented if its proportion in the target classification (e.g., suspension) exceeds its representation in the population by 10% of that representation” (Skiba et al, 2000, p. 3). Since African Americans make up 16.9% of the student population in our nation, 10% of the population standard for disproportionate suspension would be less than 15.3% or more than 18.7%. The current 33.4% suspension rate of African American students is two to five times more than their White peers, which is well over 10% of the population standard, and confirms their disproportionate representation.

As a result of being out of class so much, too many Black students get caught in the school failure, dropout, and juvenile justice system cycle—school-to-prison pipeline. In the United States, Black youth make up 16% of the juvenile population (under 18) compared to 78% White (including Hispanic) youth. However, they are involved in 26% of juvenile arrests, 44% of juvenile detentions, 46% of youth sent to adult court, and 58% of youth sentenced to state

prisons<sup>7</sup>. Black youths' involvement in the juvenile justice system is 10 times higher than Whites (including Hispanic; Center on Crime and Juvenile Justice 2008). Blacks are 27% of all high school dropouts and 52% of Black male dropouts are incarcerated by the time they are 30 years old (NCES, 2010). National statistics for suspension, expulsion, status dropout (not enrolled in high school and do not hold high school credential), and juvenile arrest rates differentiate between Black, White, and Hispanic youth (NCES, 2010a,b,c; see handout, Table 1).

Florida statistics for school-related delinquency rates differentiate between Black, White, and Hispanic youth. In Florida, disproportionate minority confinement (DMC) data shows that disproportionality increases for Black youth as they move from referral to expulsion and from detention to state prison. During FY 2009-10, Florida's school-related delinquency referrals to the juvenile justice system for the total at-risk population of 1,917,765 youth were **2.5** times higher for Blacks than for Whites (NCES, 2010). While only representing 21% of the youth ages 10-17 in Florida, Black males and females accounted for 47% of all school-related referrals. Black males were disproportionately more likely than Whites to receive commitment dispositions or to have their cases transferred to adult court. Yet, Black youth were more likely than Whites to have their cases ultimately dismissed because their referrals were predominantly for disorderly behavior or assault and battery versus drug and alcohol offenses for Whites (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, 2010; see handout, Table 2).

Miami-Dade County statistics for school-related delinquency rates differentiate between Black, White, and Hispanic youth (see Table 3). Blacks were disproportionately overrepresented at the referral stage in 66 out of the 67 (98%) counties in Florida (FDJJ, 2009). From a total at-risk population of 269,331 youth, Miami-Dade ranked 64<sup>th</sup> out of 67<sup>th</sup> (third from the bottom) for

most serious rate of school-related delinquency referrals—Blacks were **5.7** times more likely to be referred than Whites. Over a 5-year period, Miami-Dade ranked 66 out of 67—Blacks were 5.5 times more likely to be referred than Whites. Sixty-seven percent of school-related referrals were for misdemeanors in Florida, and Miami-Dade reported the highest percentage of misdemeanors (45%; see handout, Table 3).

However, no evidence supports the hypothesis that African American students misbehave more. Instead, African American students are referred for more subjective reasons such as disrespect or excessive noise while White students are referred for more serious and objective behaviors such as smoking and vandalism. Racial and gender disparity appears to originate at the classroom level as “systematic and racial discrimination” (Skiba et al., 2000, p. 3).

*Understanding why and how to create mentoring relationships with students may be the most important first step teachers can take in preventing or transforming the school-to-prison pipeline in their own classroom—without having to discontinue their love of teaching, leave their school, or overhaul their own unique classroom practices* (Miller et al., 2012). Teachers, mentors, and other concerned adults can reduce the following disproportional statistics that result in youth’s disconnection from peers, families, schools, and society by developing mentoring relationships instead of power struggles in their own spaces for teaching and learning (Pane & Rocco, 2014).

This symposium calls for volunteers to join the PPLM effort to develop mentoring relationships among children and adults through PPLM in seven Miami-Dade County neighborhoods, which have escalated rates of youth-involved violent crime and disproportional youth involvement in the school-to-prison pipeline: (a) Carol City, Opa-Locka, Miami Gardens; (b) Brownsville, Liberty City/Model City; (c) Overtown; (d) Coconut Grove; (e) Little Haiti,

North Miami, North Miami Beach; (f) Goulds, West Perrine, Naranja-Modello; and (g) Homestead, Florida City (Lee-Sin, 2008; NCES, 2007).

Accomplishing this goal will help reduce national, state, and county event dropout rates as differentiated by Black, White, and Hispanic youth (NCES, 2007; see handout, Table 4) and improve young lives and, eventually, adult productivity Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, 2009).

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