



PLANK 17: Build a school-to-opportunity pipeline.

The [school-to-prison pipeline](#) has become a front door into the criminal-legal system. This pipeline is characterized by punitive and exclusionary policies and practices that push students out of school and into the criminal-legal system. School-based officers [arrest students on site](#), put them in [chokeholds](#), and [handcuff children](#) as young as 6 years old. Typical adolescent behavior has become criminalized in school, especially for students of color. For instance, [Black students are expelled at three times the rate of White students](#). Students with disabilities also are disproportionately impacted. Students who are suspended or expelled for discretionary violations are [nearly three times as likely to be involved in the criminal-legal system the following year](#).

This approach funnels youth into jails and prisons and denies them the very opportunities for learning and growth that schools are meant to provide.

The school-to-prison pipeline must end. We must advocate against school-based police officers and out-of-school suspensions. But that is not enough. The real solution must go beyond these reactive measures; it must also offer schools a holistic, relationship-focused way to address conflicts that occur and build additional opportunities for students to grow and thrive. Providing these supports will not only end the school-to-prison pipeline, but it will also create a school-to-opportunity pipeline that improves all children's chances for success.

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State Policy Priorities

Support the social-emotional needs of students

- Create culturally competent and age appropriate social-emotional learning standards at the state level, as well as professional development opportunities that equip educators and school professionals with the resources and information that they need to implement these standards.
- Provide schools with additional resources to meet the needs of children of incarcerated parents, with particular attention to schools with high concentrations of children of incarcerated parents.
- Provide technical assistance and grant funds to culturally competent community schools that provide support staff (including counselors, psychologists, and nurses), trauma-informed and healing-centered care, and wraparound services to families to support the extra services provided.
- Require all schools in high-need areas to become trauma-informed schools.
- Provide positive school supports that contribute to a safe, just, and welcoming climate for all students and is LGBTQ and gender inclusive. This includes providing resources for counselors, training for staff, culturally responsive multi-tiered systems of supports (including Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support), anti-bias training, and voluntary mental health supports for all students. In addition, ban police from being stationed in schools and eliminate state funding for infrastructure and personnel that criminalize students and school environments.
- Ensure access to high-quality instruction and adequate educational resources, and provide support needed to narrow disparities in high school graduation and college matriculation rates by providing all students with meaningful educational opportunities. Such reforms should include policies to ensure funding equity among school districts. See this [Youth Mandate for Education and Liberation](#) for more details and policy proposals.

Ensure youth access to high-quality counsel

- Meet constitutional requirements to provide access to quality legal counsel for children in the justice system.

Decriminalize offenses associated with youth

- Decriminalize running away, curfew violations, and truancy. Eliminate negative descriptions of youth experiencing homelessness now found in some statutes, such as “unruly,” “incorrigible,” and “vagrant.” Limit the circumstances under which youth who have run away can be taken into custody or punished for running away, set very brief time limits for such custody when it is permitted, and prohibit sheltering of such youth with delinquent youth or adults in detention facilities.

Support the educational needs of criminal-legally involved youth

- Ensure quality educational services for children in the criminal-legal system, including additional services for children with disabilities.

Protect youth from being treated like adults

- Remove youth from adult facilities and, to strengthen states’ incentives to do so, create a private right of action under the [Prison Rape Elimination Act](#).
- Stop prosecuting youth under 18 as adults and ensure that juvenile courts raise the minimum age of juvenile jurisdiction to 21. Expand programs, such as [Young Adult Court](#) in San Francisco, that work with young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 — because this population is qualitatively different in development, skills, and needs from both children and older adults.

Remove police and criminalizing infrastructure from schools

- Create police-free schools, including by banning police from being stationed in and around school campuses.
- Prohibit arrests, summonses and/or tickets, and any criminal charges for school-based disciplinary behavior and remove all criminalizing infrastructure.
- Support community-led, community-driven efforts to develop a comprehensive policy concerning police-youth interactions. This policy must ensure that police-youth interactions are informed by the principles of child and adolescent development, as well as an understanding of youth-specific law.
- End the use of all criminalizing surveillance equipment, including metal detectors, facial recognition software, social media monitoring software, and surveillance cameras. See also ***Plank 9: End high-tech harm and the surveillance state.***
- Eliminate funding that supports police in schools, such as all of the Community Oriented Policing Services program funding and the COPS Hiring Program.

Close youth prisons and support reentering youth

- Create a clear, time-bound plan for closing youth prisons and replacing them with community-based, rehabilitation-focused continua of care.
- Deeply invest in prevention-oriented, non-carceral, alternative investments that promote a positive vision for youth opportunity.
- Provide funding and support to schools to help ensure a smooth return to school for students leaving confinement and reentering communities. These supports should include transition coordinators, timely records transfer, and planning to ensure students are on track for high school graduation and postsecondary education.



Federal Policy Priorities

End child poverty and meet the social-emotional needs of students

- Provide a child benefit, or a targeted expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, that is funded sufficiently to eliminate child poverty.
- Enact legislation, such as a federal Youth Opportunity and Community Schools Act, which provides grants to school districts that turn high-need schools into “community schools” by doing at least the following:
 - Adopting a restorative approach to discipline, including eliminating zero tolerance policies, ending long suspensions, implementing better due process policies, and rethinking the use of “school jails” for young people subject to long suspensions and expulsions;
 - Providing ongoing, comprehensive, and mandatory training for all staff in cultural competence, trauma-informed care, and age-appropriate responses to discipline;
 - Offering social services and two-generational programming at or near school sites, using partnerships with community-based organizations;
 - Implementing positive behavior support systems that focus on rewarding good behavior rather than punishing bad behavior;
 - Providing expanded learning, art, music, and enrichment opportunities during and after school and during holiday breaks;
 - Requiring clear communication with parents and guardians about students’ well-being and behavior and seeking input from parents and guardians before making decisions about school discipline;
 - Extensively engaging parents, guardians, and community members in student learning; and
 - Having extra counselors and support staff available to help meet student needs.
- Create incentives for [Statewide Family Engagement Centers](#) that integrate support services for families involved in the criminal-legal system.
- Provide states with funding for positive school supports that contribute to safe, just, and welcoming climates for all students, including resources for counselors, training for staff, culturally responsive multi-tiered systems of supports, and mental health supports for students in crisis. Eliminate federal funding for police in schools and infrastructure and personnel that criminalize students and school environments.

End inappropriate discipline

- Facilitate the banning of corporal punishment and inappropriate discipline in schools, such as by passing the Protecting All Students in Schools Act, the Ending PUSHOUT Act, and the Keeping All Students Safe Act, which would ban restraint and seclusion practices that contribute to a hostile school climate and are disproportionately used on Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and students with disabilities.
- Fully fund and staff the [U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights](#) and ensure proper investigation into both individual and systemic civil rights complaints regarding school discipline and policing, as well as full compliance with FERPA. Reintroduce and pass the [Record Expungement Designed to Enhance Employment \(REDEEM\) Act](#) provisions on the age of adult court jurisdiction and incentivize states to raise the minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 21.
- Adhere to the joint guidance from the Departments of Justice and Education on reducing racial discrimination in school discipline.

Remove police and criminalizing infrastructure from schools

- Pass legislation like the Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act, which ends federal funding for police in schools and establishes a \$5 billion grant program for culturally responsive supports and resources for students, such as counselors and psychologists.
- Develop guidelines prohibiting the use of public school threat assessment programs, which disproportionately target Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and students with disabilities.
- Require, as a condition of receiving federal education or criminal-legal funding, an end to school-based police officers.
- Support legislation that effectively disrupts the school-to-prison pipeline and the disciplinary policies and practices that can push students out of school and into the justice system. Reject proposals that would increase police presence in schools and/or unnecessarily and inappropriately increase the number of youth who come in contact with the justice system.
- End the [U.S. Department of Defense 1033 program](#), including its transfer of military equipment to schools.
- Support local efforts in states to develop a comprehensive policy concerning police-youth interactions. This comprehensive youth policy would ensure police-youth interactions are informed by principles of child and adolescent development, an understanding of juvenile specific law, and a commitment to positive role-modeling and relationship building between police and youth consistent with procedural justice and community, problem-oriented, and bias-free policing.
- Conduct oversight of the Department of Education's school safety initiatives. Stop the move by the department to allow Every Student Succeeds Act dollars to be spent on arming teachers.

Create targeted supports for vulnerable students and reentering youth

- Create an enforcement protection and advocacy program to fund the work that state Protection and Advocacy Systems offer youth with disabilities who face school removal and/or referral to the criminal-legal system.
- Increase coordination between the criminal-legal and child welfare systems, such as by enacting the [Child Outcomes Need New Efficient Community Teams \(CONNECT\) Act](#), which seeks to help states identify and respond to the needs of children who come into contact with both the criminal-legal and child welfare systems.
- Amend the [Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act title of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006](#) to exclude youth from sex offender registries and community notification practices.
- Support culturally responsive year-round programming for system-involved and reentering youth, which includes increasing federal coordination on youth reentry and providing funding for youth reentry and year-round programming, including summer jobs and internships.
- Support the implementation of graduated sanctions and positive enforcements within the [Juvenile Accountability Block Grants program](#).
- Create and fund a large-scale national subsidized employment program that targets youth and adults impacted by the criminal-legal system. To support the near-term economic recovery and provide much-needed long-term investment into historically oppressed communities, the federal government must develop and implement a permanent national subsidized employment program that targets youth and adults impacted by the criminal-legal system and other people who have been marginalized, displaced, left out, or left behind in the economy.

Protect youth from being treated like adults

- Pass legislation to increase access to federal courts for youth facing abuse in juvenile justice facilities, like the Justice for Juveniles Act (H.R. 5053), to remove juvenile justice from the PLRA.
- Amend 34 U.S.C. 12601 from “juvenile justice” to “juvenile and criminal justice,” expanding the authority of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division to conduct investigations into any situations wherein a government actor administering criminal justice has engaged in a pattern or practice of violating the Constitution or laws of the United States.