How this Resource Directory Works

This toolkit was created to offer resources within the education equity space. Education equity encompasses a wide range of interconnected topics, including the school-to-prison pipeline, zero-tolerance policies, and more. Each of these themes plays a significant role in shaping student experiences and outcomes. The primary goal of this toolkit is to serve as a starting point for understanding the core concepts of education equity. It also includes a curated list of resources and links to help readers explore these issues more deeply and take informed action.

You can advocate for de-escalation policies with your local school administration and school board to help promote fairer disciplinary systems that benefit students' well-being.

Disclaimer

The ACLU of Missouri is not affiliated with and does not endorse any of the external organizations, publications, or sources included in this toolkit. These resources are provided solely to support broader understanding of education equity and to equip families with the guidance necessary to ensure all students receive an equal and equitable education.

Education Equity

Educational equity calls for an equal and equitable education for all students, ensuring that each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential. To promote education equity, is to create a school system that caters to students of all kinds and develops their educational experience accordingly.

While it is the duty of school districts to rectify any injustices or disparities that occur in their classrooms, education inequities continue to deeply embed themselves in our schools—leaving students and families to endure those repercussions. For more information about how education equity presents itself and how you can take action, check out the links below:

- To learn more about what it means to create equitable schools, click here.
- For additional resources on how to implement education equity in your school, click here.
- To learn more about Dignity in Schools' proposed model for an equitable school, click here.
- To find out more about discipline disparities among marginalized groups in education, click here.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

The ACLU defines the school-to-prison pipeline as a vast system of structural inequalities that funnels children out of public schools and into the criminal justice system. One common manifestation of the pipeline occurs when certain students' behavior is interpreted through a biased lens, and they face harsher punishments than their peers. These punishments may include in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement. Significant concerns of the pipeline are its ability to create inequitable outcomes for students and disproportionally affect certain student demographics, including students of color and students with disabilities. It is important to note that advocates for education equity are not against school discipline or student accountability but are against the practices that subsequently produce the

school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline topic is large and cannot be adequately defined in a page or two. Please view these additional resources to learn more:

- For an overview of the school-to-prison pipeline, click here.
- For a summary of the American Bar Association's report on the school-to-prison pipeline, click here.
- To hear more from those involved in and affected by the pipeline, click here.
- To learn more about the school-to-prison pipeline in Missouri, click here.

Zero-Tolerance Policies

Zero-tolerance school policies refer to disciplinary policies with predetermined consequences, such as expulsions, suspensions, and referrals to law enforcement for offenses such as possession of weapons and drug violations but even include infractions such as classroom disruptions or profanity. These policies create an environment in which students are pushed out of school, increasing their risk of contact with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system. Zero-tolerance policies can be overly punitive, lead to unfairness, and have unintended negative consequences for students and school districts.

- For some frequently asked questions about zero-tolerance policies, click here.

- For two principals' accounts of the negative impacts of zero-tolerance policies, click here.
- For a policy expert's take on zero-tolerance policies, click here.
- To learn about the American Psychological Association's recommendations for zero-tolerance policies, click here.

Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice or restorative practices are processes that focus on finding new and different ways to respond to conflict. Discipline is often administered in a punitive manner in school settings. Restorative justice practices recognize that discipline does not need to be punitive but can be used to help repair and reduce certain behaviors. Instead, restorative justice practices build relationships between parties, fostering understanding rather than resentment.

- **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** is a framework for school discipline that encourages early, positive interventions, as opposed to punishment, and focuses on cultivating and rewarding self-discipline.
    - To learn more about PBIS, visit the Center on PBIS by clicking here.
    - To learn more about PBIS in Missouri, click here.
- **Social emotional learning (SEL)** is an introspective approach to discipline that encourages students and teachers alike to look inward and reflect on the root causes of misbehavior rather than resorting to punishment. SEL practices help students and teachers understand themselves and each other, and in doing so can be invaluable in building positive relationships. To learn more about SEL initiatives in Missouri, click here.
    - For more resources, visit CASEL, a non-profit organization that advocates nationally for SEL, by clicking here.
    - To hear a success story from two superintendents who implemented SEL, click here.

- **The Missouri Model: Trauma Informed Schools**
  The Missouri Model provides a framework for trauma-informed approaches. The purpose of this model is to ensure agencies, including schools, do no harm, and to increase the effectiveness of services by promoting trauma awareness. The model emphasizes that trauma can affect all communities and populations. Being trauma informed requires a multi-year process of addressing schools' and organizations' practices, policies, and culture surrounding trauma.
  - To learn more about the Missouri Model, click here.
  - To learn more about trauma and the effect it has on children, click here.

Seclusion and Restraint

Often, school districts will use seclusion and/or restraint as a crisis management tool to address certain student behaviors. There is physical and mechanical restraint. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) defines physical restraint as "a personal restriction that immobilizes or reduces the ability of a student to move his or her torso, arms, legs, or head freely" Mechanical restraint is defined as "the use of any device or equipment to restrict a student's freedom of movement". Some examples of mechanical restraints include restrictive clothing, belts, and straps. Seclusion defined by the OCR is "the involuntary confinement of a student alone in a room or area from which the student is physically prevented from leaving" (US Dept. Of Education.)

Seclusion/restraint practices often are not effective in addressing student behavior but are physically and mentally harmful to the students and faculty involved. Often, psychological trauma is not easy to quantify or discover, which can limit resources for students who have been affected by these practices.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) states that schools must notify parents if their child was involved in an incident that leads to the use of seclusion or restraint. A full report detailing each time seclusion/restraint is used must also be shared within five school days of the incident.

- To learn more about how seclusion and restraint affects children with disabilities, click here.
- For additional seclusion and restraint resources from the U.S. Department of Education, click here.
- To answer frequently asked questions about seclusion and restraint, click here.
- To read the National Alliance on Mental Illness's statement on seclusion and restraint, click here

Importance of School Boards

Local school boards are elected or occasionally appointed to serve as the decision-makers for policy, budgets, and direction for public education and provide oversight for the administrative aspects of their school districts. Their primary responsibility is to collaborate with their communities to enhance student achievement in their local public schools. School boards derive their power and authority from the state. In compliance with state and federal laws, school boards establish policies and regulations by which their local schools are governed.

School boards should encourage community members to attend open school board meetings. Often, there are established procedures for people who wish to speak or ask questions during the

public comment period. The public has the right to attend school board meetings. They can also request the meeting agenda and minutes.

- To learn more about school boards and their function, click here.
- To learn more about school boards, click here.
- For some sample questions to ask school board candidates, click here.

Charter and Public Schools

Charter schools are non-religious public schools under a contract or 'charter'. Missouri charter schools are largely concentrated in the St. Louis and Kansas City areas. Charter schools follow a set of rules separate from traditional public schools, allowing them more autonomy in their school operations, including staffing decisions, curriculum choice, and budget management. Studies have found that both charter and public schools suspend Black students and students with disabilities at a disproportionately high rate.

- To view DESE's page on charter schools, click here.
- To address some frequently asked questions about charter schools, click here.
- To learn more about the difference between charter and public schools, click here.
- To learn how charter schools compare to public and private schools in terms of educational outcomes, click here.

Power of Parent Teacher Organizations/Parent Teacher Associations

Having a strong Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) or Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in your local school district is an important piece of education equity. PTOs/PTAs are organizations for both parents and school staff that provide a platform for parents to advocate for their children's needs. It is highly recommended to establish a strong PTO/PTA within your school district. There are multitudes of resources to help get your group started.

- To learn more about National PTA, click here.
- To learn more about Missouri PTA, click here.
- To learn more about starting your own PTO, visit the National PTO here.

Data: How to Access Additional Information

Accessing school discipline data is critical for promoting transparency, accountability, and equity in education. This data helps identify patterns of disparities—particularly those relating to students of color and students with disabilities. The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), the DESE, and sunshine requests are resources to access this information. The sources below outline how data can be accessed, as well as how parents may exercise their right to request information from the state.

Civil Rights Data Collection

The CRDC is generally a biennial survey required by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. The CRDC collects data from a universe of all public local educational agencies and schools. Through the CRDC, you can gain statewide and national data.

CRDC Links

- To access all CRDC publications, click here.
- To access Missouri CRDC dashboard, click here.

Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

All school districts are legally mandated to report data to the DESE. This may include discipline rates, state-testing scores, and graduation rates, for example. Another important DESE tool, especially around school academic achievement and growth, is the Missouri School Improvement Program. Each year, DESE will generate an annual performance report for each local education agency. The annual performance report is calculated through the Missouri School Improvement Program. DESE released a comprehensive guide outlining the report.

DESE Links

- To access discipline incident rates in your school district, click here.
- To access your district's or charter's report card, click here.
- To access general website, click here.
- To access Missouri School Improvement Program, click here.
- To access Comprehensive Guide for Missouri School Improvement Program 6, click here.
- To access DESE's Student Discipline policies, click here
- To access Long-Term Suspension Guidance, click here.
- To access Federal Regulations Governing Discipline of Disabled Students, click here.
- To access DESE's fact sheet on Significant Discrepancy in Discipline Rates, click here.

Sunshine Requests
To receive school discipline data and other information, parents may submit a sunshine request. To access this form and an example of language one may reference in their request, consult the links below.

Sunshine Request Links

- To submit a sunshine request, click here.
- To access a sample language form, click here.

Importance of Storytelling Campaigns
Storytelling campaigns are powerful tools for advocacy, expanding community engagement, and conveying the importance of a cause. They help bring data to life by adding human voices and personal experiences that complement quantitative findings. For example, while researchers can document the number of corporal punishment incidents in a school district and identify disparities in its application, storytelling adds critical context.

- To access The Importance of Storytelling in Rural Education Advocacy, click here.
- To access Tips for Thoughtful and Effective Nonprofit Storytelling, click here

American Civil Liberties Union Resources

- Juvenile Justice: School-to-Prison Pipeline, click here
- Missouri's Pipeline of Injustice: From School to Prison, click here
- Know Your Rights: Missouri, click here

- School to Prison Pipeline Handbook: Empowering Reformers and Demanding Change, click here
- Hayti P.A.U.S.E Know Your Rights, click here
- Q and A on Discipline and Policing, click here
- Know Your Rights: Police in Schools, click here
- Cops and Counselors, click here