

**LET'S TALK
ABOUT THE**



**SCHOOL
TO PRISON
PIPELINE**

Mokah Jasmine Johnson

Illustrated By: Eleanor Davis

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mokah-Jasmine Johnson is a dedicated activist, educator, and social entrepreneur, as well as the co-founder of the Athens Anti-Discrimination Movement (AADM). In this book, she sheds light on the harsh realities of the school-to-prison pipeline, offering essential knowledge to students, parents, and educators. With a focus on understanding systemic issues, protecting one's rights, and advocating for change, this guide empowers readers to break the cycle of the **School To Prison Pipeline**.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Storytime: Welcome to the School-to-Prison Pipeline
- What's the School-to-Prison Pipeline
- Top 5 Juvenile Offenses
- Knowing Your Rights
- Trivia: Protecting Your Rights
- Conflict & Bullying
- How to Make a Difference

WELCOME TO THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

The day my daughter walked into that courtroom, I knew her life had crossed an invisible threshold—one that too many Black and Brown children step over without ever seeing it coming. She was only 17, standing in a space where young men and boys sat in shackles, waiting for their fate to be decided. I could feel the weight of the system pressing down, not just on her, but on every child in that room.

It all started when she was 17. A normal day, a simple video, and a teenage girl's pride turned into a battle far bigger than the fight itself. My daughter had recorded a school fight—nothing unusual in the digital age. But the girl who lost decided that humiliation required payback. She never asked my daughter to take it down. Instead, she waited. And when she saw my daughter at a local clothing store, she pounced—with family and friends joining in, turning it into a full-blown ambush.

I did what any mother would do. I marched up to the school the next day, demanding accountability, demanding a restorative meeting. But it was testing week. “We’ll deal with it later,” they said. By lunchtime, later had come too soon. My daughter saw the girl again, and this time, she wasn’t going to wait for another beating. She threw the first punch. And that single moment—of self-defense, of fear, of frustration—was all it took.

Disorderly conduct. A charge that sent her straight into the system. A system that doesn’t ask what led up to the fight. A system that doesn’t consider the trauma of being jumped. A system that turns a teenage scuffle into a criminal offense.

When the judge handed down her sentence—one year probation, six hours of community service—I turned to my daughter and said the words that no parent should ever have to say:

Welcome to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Instead of handling conflicts with restorative justice, schools and the legal system often criminalize students—especially when they feel forced to defend themselves.

My daughter was failed at multiple points:

- The school delayed addressing the issue, allowing tensions to escalate.
- There was no immediate intervention or restorative meeting to prevent further conflict.
- The system was quick to punish but not to protect or mediate.

Seeing those young men and boys in shackles was a painful moment—one that exposes the reality of how the system treats our youth.

They don't care about justice; it's about control and criminalization.

WHAT IS THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE?



The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to policies and practices that push students, particularly marginalized youth, out of the public school system and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. This often occurs through strict school discipline rules, known as Zero-Tolerance policies.

“When children attend schools that place a greater value on discipline and security than on knowledge and intellectual development, they are attending prep schools for prison.”

—Angela Davis

ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES

Zero-tolerance policies enforce harsh disciplinary actions regardless of individual circumstances. These policies often include:

- School suspensions
- Expulsions
- Student arrests for minor infractions

Such policies disproportionately affect marginalized students and contribute to higher incarceration rates among youth.

WHO IS IMPACTED THE MOST?



The School-to-Prison Pipeline disproportionately affects:

- Black and brown students
- Students from low-income backgrounds
- Students with disabilities

These groups are more likely to experience harsh discipline due to systemic biases.

TOP 5 JUVENILE OFFENSES

Juvenile crimes are often non-violent misdemeanors. The most common offenses include:

1. **Theft & Larceny - Shoplifting, stealing a car, bike, phone, etc.**
2. **Simple Assault - Physical altercations like hitting or shoving.**
3. **Drug Possession - Carrying illegal substances.**
4. **Disorderly Conduct - Engaging in fights or disruptive behavior.**
5. **Alcohol Offenses - Underage drinking or DUI violations.**



Top Offenses Leading to Student Arrests:

- 1. Threats of Violence:** Following incidents like the shooting at Apalachee High School in Georgia, there has been a notable increase in student arrests for making threats on social media or bringing weapons to school.
- 2. Weapon Possession:** Bringing weapons to school premises is a serious offense. School districts, such as Cobb County, outline that carrying deadly weapons at school functions or on school property can lead to criminal charges and arrests.
cobbk12.org
- 3. Aggravated Assault:** Physical altercations resulting in serious injury can lead to aggravated assault charges.
- 4. Robbery:** Incidents involving theft using force or threats continue to be a concern. In 2020, robbery accounted for 3% of all youth arrests, highlighting its prevalence.
ojjdp.ojp.gov
- 5. Drug-Related Offenses:** Possession or distribution of illegal substances on school grounds remains a significant issue.

(Source: U.S. Department of Justice. Trends in Juvenile Crimes. MST Services)

DID YOU KNOW?

You Can Get Arrested While Dating in High School

Students 18 and older must be cautious when dating minors. Federal law prohibits sexual relations between an adult and a minor who is four or more years younger. Check your state's age of consent laws.

Skipping School Can Lead to Arrest

Truancy and curfew laws can result in arrests. In some areas, teens under 18 cannot be in public places from 11 PM - 5 AM without a parent or guardian.

(Research your local juvenile laws for specifics.)

STUDENTS: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS LET'S PLAY TRIVIA!



QUESTION #1

What Should You Do if Questioned by Law Enforcement?

If you are questioned by law enforcement, here are some key steps to protect your rights:

1. **Stay Calm & Respectful** - Remain polite and avoid escalating the situation.
2. **Know Your Right to Remain Silent** - You do not have to answer questions beyond providing your name in some states. Clearly state, "I am invoking my right to remain silent."
3. **Ask If You Are Free to Leave** - If not under arrest, you can ask, "Am I free to go?" If they say yes, calmly walk away.
4. **Do Not Consent to Searches** - You have the right to refuse searches of your person, vehicle, or home. Say, "I do not consent to a search."
5. **Request a Lawyer** - If you are arrested, state, "I want to speak with an attorney," and do not answer further questions without legal representation.

- 6. Do Not Lie or Provide False Documents - Giving false information can lead to legal trouble.**
- 7. Document the Encounter - If possible, remember officer names, badge numbers, and details of the interaction. You may also record in a public space if legally allowed in your area.**
- 8. Do Not Resist Arrest. Running or fleeing can escalate the situation.**
- 9. Stay Calm and Pay Attention. Observe what is happening around you.**
- 10. Request to Speak with a Parent or Guardian.**

YOU HAVE THE
RIGHT TO REMAIN
SILENT AND THE
RIGHT TO AN
ATTORNEY.



DO NOT RESIST.
BE POLITE, AND
COMPLY WITH POLICE
DIRECTIONS.



IF POLICE WANT
TO **QUESTION** A
MINOR INSIDE OR
OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL,
THEIR **PARENTS** HAVE
A RIGHT TO BE
PRESENT.



POLICE **MUST** MAKE
A REASONABLE ATTEMPT
TO LOCATE A MINOR'S
GUARDIAN BEFORE
QUESTIONING THEM.



QUESTION #2

What Does It Mean to Plead the Fifth?

The Fifth Amendment protects individuals from self-incrimination. By pleading the fifth, you are refusing to answer questions that may incriminate you.



QUESTION #3

Are Searches and Pat-Downs Allowed on School Campuses Without Consent?

Answer: Yes. Schools have the right to conduct searches and pat-downs if they suspect a violation of school policy.



QUESTION #4

Can an Arrest Be Made Without Notifying Parents?

Answer: Yes. Minors can be arrested without immediate parental notification.



QUESTION #5

If a juvenile is arrested on campus, what should they do to protect their rights during the process? Here's what they should know:

- 1. Right to Remain Silent - They do not have to answer questions beyond providing their name. Anything they say can be used against them.**
- 2. Right to an Attorney - They can request a lawyer before answering questions. Parents or guardians should also be notified.**
- 3. Parental Notification - In most cases, law enforcement must notify a parent or guardian as soon as possible.**
- 4. Protection Against Unreasonable Searches - Their personal belongings (backpack, phone, etc.) cannot be searched without consent, a warrant, or probable cause. However, school officials have more flexibility in conducting searches.**

SCHOOL CODES OF CONDUCT

It's important to get familiar with your school's Code of Conduct so you understand your rights, responsibilities, and the consequences of breaking rules. Here's what you can do:

1. **Read the Handbook** - Schools provide a student handbook with rules on behavior, dress code, discipline, and academic integrity.
2. **Ask Questions** - If something isn't clear, ask a teacher, counselor, or administrator for clarification.
3. **Know Your Rights** - Understand how disciplinary actions work, including your right to appeal unfair punishments.
4. **Understand School Policies on Law Enforcement** - Know how the school handles interactions with police and when they can question or search students.
5. **Stay Informed** - School policies can change, so check for updates each year.

School Codes of Conduct outline the rules, expectations, and disciplinary procedures that students must follow while on campus. While each school district has its own policies, common elements include:

1. Student Rights & Responsibilities

- Right to a safe and respectful learning environment.
- Freedom of expression (within reasonable limits).
- Right to due process if facing disciplinary action.
- Responsibility to follow school rules and respect others.

2. Behavior Expectations

- Respect for teachers, staff, and fellow students.
- No bullying, harassment, or discrimination.
- No fighting, threats, or violence.
- Prohibition of drugs, alcohol, and weapons.

3. Dress Code

- Appropriate attire as determined by the school.
- No offensive or disruptive clothing.

4. Academic Integrity

- No cheating, plagiarism, or falsifying information.
- Consequences for violating academic honesty rules.

5. Technology Use

- Rules for using school computers, internet, and personal devices.
- No cyberbullying, hacking, or misuse of school technology.

6. Disciplinary Actions

- Warnings, detention, suspension, or expulsion for rule violations.
- Due process rights, including appeals for major disciplinary actions.

7. Law Enforcement Involvement

- Schools may involve law enforcement for serious offenses.
- Students still have legal rights if questioned or arrested on campus.

HOW CAN YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline requires action at multiple levels—individual, community, and systemic. Here are some key ways to make a difference:



For Students & Parents

- 1. Know Your Rights - Educate yourself and others on student rights regarding school discipline, searches, and law enforcement interactions.**
- 2. Advocate for Fair Policies - Speak up at school board meetings to demand restorative justice practices instead of harsh disciplinary measures.**
- 3. Build Strong Support Networks - Encourage mentorship programs, after-school activities, and mental health resources to keep students engaged and supported.**
- 4. Challenge Unfair Punishments - If a student faces an unjust disciplinary action, appeal the decision and seek legal support if necessary.**

For Educators & School Staff

- 1. Implement Restorative Justice - Push for conflict resolution programs that focus on mediation rather than punishment.**
- 2. Reduce Suspensions & Expulsions - Work towards keeping students in school rather than pushing them out through zero-tolerance policies.**
- 3. Address Racial Disparities - Recognize and challenge bias in school discipline that**

disproportionately affects Black and Brown students.

- 4. Provide Trauma-Informed Support - Create school environments where students feel safe and supported rather than criminalized.**

For Community Leaders & Activists

- 1. Advocate for Policy Change - Support legislation that limits school policing and increases funding for counselors and social workers.**
- 2. Support Alternatives to Incarceration - Partner with organizations that provide diversion programs and second chances for at-risk youth.**
- 3. Raise Awareness - Use storytelling, workshops, and community events to educate others about the school-to-prison pipeline.**
- 4. Hold Schools Accountable - Demand transparency in school disciplinary data and push for reforms when necessary.**

For Lawmakers & Policymakers

- 1. End Criminalization of Minor Infractions - Advocate for policies that prevent students from being arrested for nonviolent behavior.**
- 2. Increase Funding for Education, Not Policing - Push for budgets that prioritize mental health**

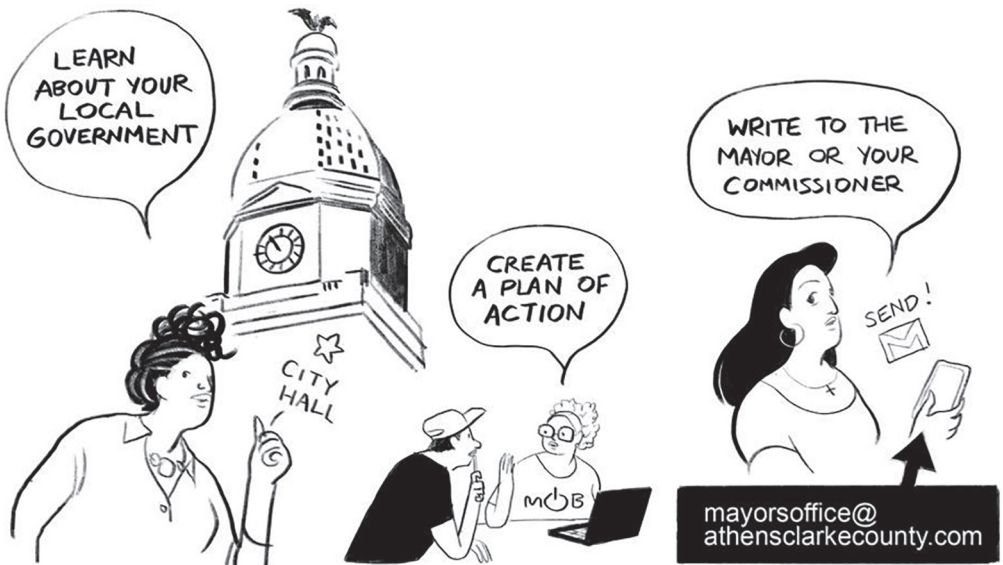
services, special education, and student support over school police officers.

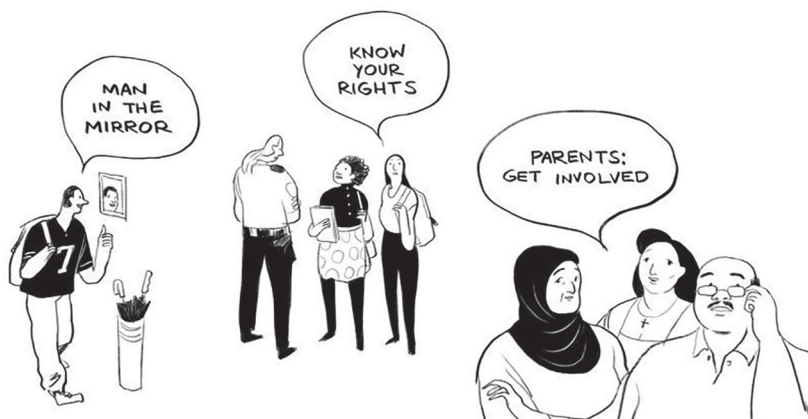
- 3. Support Ban-the-Box Policies - Prevent school disciplinary records from automatically affecting college admissions and job opportunities.**

By taking action at any level, individuals and communities can work together to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

CLOSURE

As an activist, time and time again I have witnessed young folks enter the criminal justice system due to a single bad decision, or simply for protecting themselves. Being incarcerated at such a young age can cause a detrimental impact on a child's future, shaping their sense of self, limiting opportunities, and deepening the cycle of trauma.





So, if there is any way we can prevent this from happening—by advocating for restorative justice, demanding more supportive school environments, and creating systems that nurture rather than punish—we must. The future of our youth depends on it. Let this book be a call to action, a reminder that change is possible, and that each of us has a role to play in dismantling the systems that harm our young people. Together, we can break the cycle and build a world where every child has the opportunity to thrive, not just survive.



