



Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline: A Community-Based Solution

Gwinnett STOPP Endeavors

History

The Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline (Gwinnett STOPP) formed in April 2007 to lead a parent-driven, community centered partnership approach to dismantling the school to prison pipeline in Gwinnett County. Growing frustration with the number of schools relying on harsh punishment, and law enforcement to address minor school misconduct led to the formation of the parent coalition. Gwinnett County Public Schools has well over 1,400 children enrolled in alternative schools. Gwinnett's population has doubled since 1990, while its inmate population has increased six times.

Gwinnett STOPP seeks to build and strengthen relationships with community leaders in two constructive ways. The first way is to increase public awareness of the injustice that all children face within the educational system as it relates to the pipeline and the judicial process. Secondly, by promoting policy changes through data accountability and fact-based incident reporting which serve to support and strengthen the dismantling of the school to prison pipeline in Gwinnett County.

Members of the coalition include the American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia, Atlanta Community Engagement network (ACEN), Interfaith Children's Movement (ICM), the Rho Kappa Lambda Chapter of the of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and other community stakeholders.

Initiatives

Gwinnett STOPP's first year was spent organizing, forming our mission, creating goals, and developing collateral materials. Upon completion, the public education and monitoring of policies began. Gwinnett STOPP has been actively engaged in fulfilling the awareness and education tenets of its mission while promoting policy changes.

To increase awareness both within and outside of the Gwinnett borders we have:

- Developed a formal customizable presentation, which includes a panel comprised of our co-chairs, that is designed to share the details of the state, national and local data trends, and respond to audience questions. Gwinnett STOPP has presented at:
 - * Atlanta's John Marshall Law School
 - * Gwinnett County Public Schools
 - * Gwinnett Human Relations Commission
 - * Georgia PTA Convention and Leadership Training Conference
 - * UGA College of Family and Consumer Sciences - The Prison Pipeline: The Intersection of Childhood and the Criminal Justice System Conference
 - * Georgia State University MSW Students - Stop the School to Prison Pipeline Forum

To facilitate the public education component, we have developed two highly interactive workshops available free to parents. The workshops are designed to empower parents and care-givers with information and tools to be a better advocate for children. Each session lasts 2 hours, and both include an introduction into the school to prison pipeline so the classes are able to run independently of each other or together. Available workshops include:

➤ ***What Your Student/Parent Handbook Didn't Really Tell You ...reading between the lines***

Highly interactive workshop which has been designed specifically to engage our community in understanding the links between student behavior, GCPS disciplinary policy, the loss of educational opportunity, and the juvenile/adult court system. We believe that caring adults who are informed and understand these specific links will be the single most important factor in dismantling the school to prison pipeline which exists in our community and the nation.

➤ ***Has Your Student Received Suspension/Detention; is it time for an intervention?***

Which behaviors are more likely to result in disciplinary action or in low grades? Behavior is one of the major feeders to the dropout rate. How we manage behavior has a critical impact on the education of our children. Many students with undiagnosed learning disabilities can become behavior issues. Students removed by suspension are often those who need to be in school the most. Parent involvement is key! Learn how early interventions can keep your student on the right track.

Our specialized workshops have been very successful in providing parents with the necessary tools to be an informed partner in their students' education. Gwinnett SToPP offers the workshops to community groups supportive of our mission.

In 2011, Gwinnett SToPP launched the Parent Leadership Institute (PLI). PLI is an extensive grassroots school-advocacy training program for parents. PLI pairs grassroots community leadership training with education advocacy training and school discipline reform tools. Project teams implement a school-community project in their immediate school cluster designed to impact a feeder into the School to Prison Pipeline, ultimately improving the climate for learning in schools.

Subject matter experts in and outside of Gwinnett are used in the areas of restorative practices, juvenile justice, student codes of conduct and media. Particular skill sets needed such as verbal and written communication to influence decision makers and understanding the legislative and school board processes are honed to prepare participants for completion of their school-community projects.

Some of the policy changes that Gwinnett SToPP and its organization partners have successfully advocated for include:

- Participated in the development of a community-based review of the disciplinary code of conduct revision.
- Instigated a policy change to provide transparency and increased education equity for every other district in the state regarding Investing in Educational Excellence (IE2) contracts that the Georgia Department of Education makes with school systems. We also closed the loophole that Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) used to amend their IE2 contract without public review. Districts must now renegotiate their entire contract to gain release from new state rules. IE2 participation is a decision that all 189 districts in Georgia will have to make by 2015.
- Denoting Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA) violations in the GCPS Student/Parent Handbook that could result in a referral to a School Resource Officer and possible criminal charges.
- Reviewed and rewrote (with other organizations) the Georgia Department of Education's alternative school rules.
- Mounted a successful campaign to challenge the creation of a proposed disciplinary alternative program for elementary school students and increased public transparency for this issue.
- Supported the Safe Schools Initiative that dramatically changed the use of restraint and seclusion in Georgia schools.
- Filed a U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) complaint against GCPS' Investing in Educational Excellence Partnership (IE²) contract. The accountability and performance objectives featured in the IE2 contract, which allow GCPS to bypass several existing state laws — regarding education certification requirements for teachers, class size requirements, expenditure controls, and ELL program requirements, among others, are dependent upon different aggregate performance benchmarks segregated by race and therefore, discriminatory. We are awaiting a finding of the OCR investigation.