



## **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 the community 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 parents, 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, and creating goals. 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 customizable presentation designed for participants to understand feeders into STPP as well as share the details of the local, state, and national data trends. Gwinnett STOPP has presented at:
  - \* Atlanta's John Marshall Law School
  - \* Georgia System of Care
  - \* 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 developed two highly interactive workshops 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 designed to specifically 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 are 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) and Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) in 2015. PLI and YLI are extensive grassroots school-advocacy training programs for parents and youth. The training institutes pairs grassroots community leadership training with education advocacy training and school discipline reform tools. Project teams implement a school-community project 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:

- Eliminated the contact quota for GCPS School Resource Officers.
- Participated in the development of a community-based review of the disciplinary code of conduct revision.
- 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.
- Successfully advocated for the inclusion of school discipline in the state's report cards.
- Filed a U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) complaint against GCPS' Investing in Educational Excellence Partnership (IE<sup>2</sup>) contract. The accountability and performance objectives featured in the IE<sup>2</sup> 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 findings from the OCR investigation.
- Instigated a policy change to provide transparency and increased education equity for every other district in the state regarding Investing in Educational Excellence (IE<sup>2</sup>) 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 IE<sup>2</sup> contract without public review.
- Reviewed and revised (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.