



## **Eliminating the Pipeline Crisis: Preparing from Birth**



Schools are closing the doors for learning opportunities for young children and shifting them into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. With excessively strict school guidelines and an increased role of law enforcement in schools, a “cradle-school-to-slavery pipeline,” has pushed our students into detention centers, jails, and prisons. This is more than an educational and schooling crisis; it is a racial justice crisis. The students forced out of school because of strict discipline policies are disproportionately children of color. Racially discriminatory school discipline policies contribute to the “Pipeline” crisis with a Black boy born in 2001 having a 1 in 3 chance of getting incarcerated in his lifetime and a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance of equal fate. The March 2014 report from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights included disconcerting findings on the unfairness of and excessively harsh

school discipline policies may be getting implemented as early as preschool. As our nation’s children slowly become majority non-White, greater compassion, sympathy, and knowledge of the children being educated are necessary and precautions should be taken so that the uniqueness of race, gender, culture, and special needs or gifted are respected and better understood (Children’s Defense Fund, 2014).

Children born into economically deprived neighborhoods with elevated levels of poverty experience multiple challenges not faced by students in more prosperous areas of the city. Exclusively by their parents’ zip code, these young children begin school ill-prepared for kindergarten, and it is extremely difficult for them to catch up (McKenzie, 2013). It has been proven that a two-year-olds vocabulary determines school readiness skills, school readiness skills determine third-grade test scores, and third-grade test scores determine the number of jail cells taxpayers provide. A single instance of imprisonment in a young person’s life enhances the possibility of later incarceration, at a price tag to taxpayers of \$240.99 per day. Living in detention centers, jails, or prisons impairs the psychological, intellectual, emotional, and behavioral issues with which these young children and adolescents continue to struggle (Herrington, 2015). Because of the high percentage of young children who could be vulnerable to be forced into the “cradle-school-to-slavery pipeline,” or are not “ready” for school as it relates to affective and cognitive development, this future population of vulnerable children will not be college-ready or career ready.

School readiness provides significant advantages for young children below and above age three (3). Affective and cognitive development is a crucial element for grooming young children for school and life success. By concentrating on the importance of the first few years of life, young children should receive immediate affective and cognitive experiences. Under the Abecedarian Project at the UNC-Chapel Hill Child Development Center, young children, ages six weeks to 5 years received early educational experiences and were assessed through age 21 for cognitive, academic, and social effects. The results revealed approximately \$100,000 saved per child



*Submitted by: Roshunda Harris-Allen, Ed.D.  
Assistant Professor of Education  
Division of Education, Supervision, and Instruction  
Tougaloo College  
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through decreased expenditures on special education, wellbeing, and juvenile offenses. Moreover, the age 21 follow-up found that young adults who received early educational experiences consistently achieved higher scores on assessments of cognitive development, produced much higher scores in reading and math, and were more likely to attend college (Frank Porter Child Development Institute, 2019).

The need for professional development and training for parents/families of color, educators, and the community is critical. From three areas, affective, cognitive, and physical development, young children are not ready to enter K-12 schools. For example, it has been identified that 85% of mothers and 90% of early childhood providers who reside in the Metro Jackson area of Mississippi are in need of professional development due to lack of education, resources, and services. In the past 30 years, the percentage of employed mothers with children below 3 years of age has almost doubled. According to the Child Care in America 2014 State Fact Sheet, in Mississippi there are 103,160 single working mothers with children under the age of six. This has caused a significant increase of children birth to 36 months in out-of-home care than ever before (Larner, Behrman, Young, & Reich, 2001). This social and demographic change has placed an unremarkable level of duties on people other than family “caregivers” to provide a developmentally appropriate environment that will meet the needs of young children and positively promote their learning and growth development. However, only a small portion of infant/toddler care and school readiness environments are of adequate quality to address and meet the needs of young children from birth to eight (8) years. According to the Mississippi Department of Human Services (2014), out of approximately 1,800 childcare centers, only ten were high quality early learning environments. Mississippi has ranked among the bottom 10 states in Child Care Center Requirement oversights, which include the regularity of monitoring visits, caseloads for faculty, and the educational qualifications of licensed staff (NACCRR, 2011 Update).

In order to exceptionally service this young population, highly-educated and trained professionals are greatly needed. Decades of research shows that high-quality child development care and developmentally appropriate educational environments have significant academic and lifelong benefits, ranging from lower rates of grade retention and special education placements to greater success in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2012).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***1. Develop an “Earn & Learn” program for parents/families of color, educators, and community members at academic institutions.***

Through child development, judicial education, and social competence academic and non-academic credit programs, participants can earn academic credit certificates and contact hours that will give them the knowledge and skills necessary to advocate for vulnerable young children. Young children who are vulnerable to society’s pipeline will now be invulnerable and achieve high levels of success in school and later in life. This will be accomplished by providing assistance to early childhood educators, prospective early childhood educators, parents, and the community throughout the country in the areas of affective and cognitive development.



*Submitted by: Roshunda Harris-Allen, Ed.D.  
Assistant Professor of Education  
Division of Education, Supervision, and Instruction  
Tougaloo College  
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## **2. Incorporate social justice and restorative practices in the child development classroom.**

By incorporating both social justice and restorative practices in a child development learning environment, students will be introduced to positive approaches for behavior management and the use of positive coping and self-help skills. Once practices are implemented, child development educators will notice a decrease in behavioral disruptions and expulsions.

### **RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Improving affective and cognitive development at an early age will help to increase school readiness skills. With behavior being a crucial concern in a child development learning environment, it is sometimes difficult for educators to teach effectively. I recommend child development educators and advocates research the effects of incorporating social justice in an early childhood education learning environment serving children zero to eight years.

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