

Chapter 12

From Courageous to Unapologetic Conversations About School Discipline Disparities: How Do We Stop the Hemorrhaging?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter asserts that too much commentary has been given to school disciplinary disparities with few remedies for mitigating the problem. The time has come to move from courageous to unapologetic conversations about disciplinary disparities. Data furnished by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, for the school year 2017-18 estimates that 11,205,797 youths missed school days from our nation's public schools due to out-of-school suspensions. The average school year is roughly 182 days. Thusly, 61,570 students per day missed invaluable instructional time due to out-of-school suspensions. Black/students of color, males, and students with special education identification are especially vulnerable. This chapter summarizes the extant literature; discusses the core issues, controversies, and problems; highlights the correlates associated with school disciplinary disparities; and proposes several unapologetic and radical recommendations for reducing disparities.

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INTRODUCTION

Data furnished by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, for the school year 2017-18 estimates that 11,205,797 million youths missed school days from our nation's schools public schools due to out-of-school suspensions. Taking into account that the average school year is roughly 182 days, an average of 61,570 students per day missed invaluable instructional time due to out-of-school suspensions (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Further, a United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) report (2018) maintains that "Black students, boys, and students with disabilities were disproportionately" suspended and/or expelled in K-12 schools (GAO, 2018). These findings are not new (Dunn, 1968). The time has come to move from courageous to unapologetic conversations about school discipline and to embrace radical approaches to ameliorating school disciplinary disparities. How Do We Stop the Hemorrhaging?

The author argues that we must move beyond courageous to unapologetic conversations about school discipline disparities. For over three decades the words courageous conversation has been linked to a broad swath of social issues, such as race, equity, and inclusion, social justice, LGBT equality, and interpersonal and gun violence to name a few.

The phrase Courageous Conversations has become an Internet sensation. A simple Google search using the tandem, "courageous conversation," unearthed over 10 million hits (August 14, 2021). Courageous conversations even has its own Website (Courageousconversations.com). The very notion of courageous conversations has become cliché. Courageous conversations are had through diverse mediums, including books (e.g., Singleton's 2015 *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools and More Courageous Conversations About Race*, Collins' (2021) *Mending Our Union: Healing Our Communities Through Courageous Conversations*, and DeLong's (2010) *Courageous conversations: The teaching and learning of pastoral supervision*), guides, training seminars, Toolkits (e.g., "A Guide to Courageous Conversations for Principals," Feb. 7, 2020; "Courageous Conversations: Parents Say Policy Fails in Practice," Jan. 16, 2014; "Courageous Conversations Training – End Inequality in Schools," May 29, 2019; "Courageous Conversations and Discipline Audits," YouTube, March. 14, 2019; "Continuing Courageous Conversations Toolkit," August 8, 2017), listening sessions and professional conferences (e.g., Courageous Conversation Academy; Courageous Conversations Towards Racial Justice, a dialogue-centered initiative, Boston College; Courageous Community Conversations, A Series of Listening Session on Race, Racism, and Social Equity, Center for Racial and Social Justice, Shaw University; and, The State of the African American Male – Courageous Conversations, Eastern Michigan University, spring 2006).

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