

[C] COMMUNITY CLASSROOM



THE GRADUATES LOS GRADUADOS

A FILM BY BERNARDO RUIZ



Youth Action Guide

Module 3. Alternatives to "Zero Tolerance" School Discipline Policies

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[ITVS] WOMEN & GIRLS LEAD

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MODULE 3

Theme: Alternatives To “Zero Tolerance” School Discipline Policies

Story: Stephanie Alvarado – Chicago, IL

Organizing Strategy: Working Through Official Channels



OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Investigate how school discipline policies that rely heavily on suspension and expulsion can be an obstacle to student success.
- Explore alternatives to punitive discipline policies, especially peer juries, conflict management, and other youth empowerment models.
- Practice writing sections of a proposal to start a new peer program.

ACTIVITY (60 minutes)

I. CLASSROOM CHARADES (10 minutes)

- As participants enter, quietly choose a few volunteers to act out classroom charades – creating a scene nonverbally. Give the scenario to them on a strip of paper:
 - I can't stand this student sitting next to me – they've been saying things online behind my back
 - I'm really bored and I don't understand the instructions
 - I didn't study for this test – I don't want to take it
 - I had an argument with my friend at lunch; everyone needs to leave me alone
 - This teacher never calls on me; s/he thinks I'm stupid
 - Somebody I care about got shot in my neighborhood last night. I'm devastated and scared
 - It's so noisy I can't concentrate
- Have each person act out their assigned scenario for 30 seconds or so and then take guesses from the rest of the participants as to what feeling and scenario they are portraying. Have the actor read their prompt or post it on the board/screen.
- Discuss – Have you ever been in a situation like this? What happened? How do different teachers respond to behaviors like these in your classrooms? What is the policy of your school and how does the principle deal with referrals and disruptions to learning? What are the consequences? What are grounds for suspension and expulsion at your school? Are Latinos suspended more than other students at your school? Why or why not?

II. SOME RESEARCH DATA (5 minutes)

- Post and read these excerpts from the issue brief “Exclusionary School Discipline” by Danfeng Soto-Vigil of the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy: (<http://www.charleshamiltonhouston.org/2013/04/exclusionary-school-discipline/>):
Latino students are also overrepresented in suspensions. Eight percent of Native Americans and 7 percent of Latinos were suspended at least once from school in the 2009-2010 school year, compared to 5 percent of non-Hispanic white students.



In a separate study, utilizing a data set taken from 364 schools implementing SWPBIS in 17 states, African American elementary students were still found to be more than twice as likely, and African American middle school students nearly four times as likely, as their white peers to be referred to the office. In addition, African American and Latino students received harsher punishments than their white peers for similar misconduct.

- Discuss: How does this reflect what's happening with discipline and punishment at your school? What do you think are the factors that cause this racial discipline gap? What do you think can be done to change this?



III. *THE GRADUATES/LOS GRADUADOS* FILM MODULE (17 minutes film + 10 minutes discussion)

- Screen the module spotlighting Stephanie's story. Preface by reading or distributing the background text about her from the Community Cinema Discussion Guide.
- Discuss reactions and responses
 - How do you relate to Stephanie? What similarities and differences do you see in her situation and yours, or in people you know?
 - What are reasons why students are suspended and/or expelled from your school? Do you think the discipline policies are fair and effective? Why or why not?
 - How effective is the peer jury program at her school? Would it work at your school? Why or why not?
 - How challenging would it be to implement a peer jury program at your school? Who could support? What steps would have to be taken?
 - What other kinds of programs or policies might help students stay in the classroom, resolve conflicts and engage in their education?
- Respond to some of the key quotes:
 - "Suspension, detention – doesn't speak as loudly as your peers."
 - "Keeping [students] in the building means more opportunities to teach them and more success."
 - "Schools that use peer juries have seen suspension rates drop by 30 percent."



IV. TWO ALTERNATIVES (10 minutes)

- The Soto-Vigil brief outlines some alternatives to “zero tolerance” punitive discipline policies. Give a basic overview of two of them:
 - School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)
 - Schools post clear expectations for student behavior, for example: “Respect, Responsibility, Relationships” in all classrooms, offices, hallways, playground, and cafeteria spaces and spend time teaching them at the beginning of the school year and reinforcing them throughout the year
 - “Check and Connect” programs provide space and time for students to meet with a peer or adult at school regularly to help stay on track with attendance, materials, homework, behavior, etc.
 - School provides or partners with counseling, boys/girls groups, tutoring, mentoring and health programs to support students in a variety of ways.
- Restorative Justice (RJ)
 - Working together with peers and adults to talk about how offenses impact the larger community, and how both “victims,” “perpetrators,” peers and adults can all be part of solutions that heal and reintegrates offenders.
 - Community circles, peer juries, teen court, conflict management, and other programs where students are actively involved in improving their school and decreasing referrals, suspensions, and expulsions and strengthen relationships and improve school climate.
- Discuss as a whole group what everyone thinks of these alternatives: pros and cons, effectiveness, and what it would take to implement at their schools.

V. PROPOSAL PRE-WRITING (15 minutes)

- Narrow the focus of the group to 4-5 key approaches they want to work on. This will mean brainstorming, defining, and outlining a proposal that will go to the school administration and/or school board. For example, one group can work on designing or refining their school's behavior expectations, another group can come up with a peer jury format and program, etc.
- Outlining the proposal – there are many templates and formats available online, but a good place to start is to jot down notes for these sections:

(See Bolded Below)

- **Background** – the issue or problem that has led your group to want to create a program
- **Objective & Goals** – what you hope the program will accomplish
- **Solution** – how the program will achieve these goals, what it will look like
- **Needs** – the support you will need from the school, peers, adults, community
- **Budget** – human resources, equipment or services needed itemized and priced
- **Schedule** – timeline of what needs to be done to implement the program and when
- **Contact** – names, phone and email information for the “point persons” for this program



TAKING IT FURTHER

The previous activity is an introduction to engaging with the topic and exploring the strategy. The following research and development activities can be done as outside assignments or can be the focus of future sessions to develop this organizing strategy for your campaign. Depending on your priorities, you may choose to go deeper here or with any of the other modules over the course of weeks or months:

- Hold proposal-writing sessions to flesh out and finalize the outlines you have started.
- Research other programs that can serve as models for what you want to implement. For example, Peer Resources www.peerresources.org (San Francisco) is an organization that has done school and community-based peer education, communication, leadership, and conflict mediation programs for many years.
- Design petitions and collect signatures from peers, school staff and faculty, parents, community members/organizations. Prepare presentations of these petitions to your school administration and/or school board.
- Survey and interview faculty and administrators about their views and practices concerning discipline.
- Draft a “pledge” that you can present to faculty and administrators at your school, which will have these adults promise to examine their biases when it comes to discipline, and consider preventative and alternative approaches. See the Campaign Toolkit from Module 2 for examples.
- Screen and discuss *Skipping Up*, a short film available on *The Graduates/Los Graduados* Engagement Toolkit DVD

A SUCCESS STORY: Voices of Youth in Chicago Education

Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) is a youth organizing collaborative for education justice led by students of color from six community organizations across the city of Chicago. VOYCE builds on these community based organizations' histories of organizing both parents and students around school reform issues, such as creating a policy change granting in-state tuition for undocumented students, securing the construction of new schools to relieve overcrowding, developing schools as community learning centers, and more. Since its formation in 2007, VOYCE has worked towards increasing Chicago's graduation rate by using youth-driven research and organizing to advance district-level policies that support student achievement. All of VOYCE's work is driven by the belief that young people, who are most directly affected by issues of educational inequity, must be the ones to develop meaningful, long-lasting solutions. To lay the foundation for VOYCE's campaign, over a hundred youth conducted an in-depth, year-long Participatory Action Research (PAR) study on the root causes of the city's 50 percent graduation rate.

To learn more, visit their website: <http://voyceproject.org/about-voyce>

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About American Graduate

American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen is helping local communities identify and implement solutions to the high school dropout crisis. American Graduate demonstrates public media's commitment to education and its deep roots in every community it serves. Beyond providing programming that educates, informs and inspires, public radio and television stations – locally owned and operated – are an important resource in helping to address critical issues, such as the dropout rate. In addition to national programming, public radio and television stations across the country have launched on-the-ground efforts working with community and at risk youth to keep students on-track to high school graduation. More than 1000 partnerships have been formed locally through American Graduate, and CPB is working with Alma and Colin Powell's America's Promise Alliance and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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QUIET PICTURES

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