Dr. Nancy McCormick Rambusch Lecture

Anna Deavere Smith
"Notes from the Field: Doing Time in Education"

Dear Attendees,

Today we are proud to bring actor, educator, and playwright Anna Deavere Smith to our community to discuss the intersection of America’s education and criminal justice systems.

Today’s presentation is part lecture and part theatrical performance. Ms. Smith will present segments of her play, “Notes from the Field: Doing Time in Education,” which will bring to life some of the many people impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline.

The topic of Ms. Smith’s address directly relates to another of today’s events—the youth-led March for Our Lives. This rally for safer schools is taking place nationwide, including Denver. We know many of you wish to participate in the march. AMS is gathering a group, and invite you to join us. Rally signs and buttons will be distributed.

Note: All Session 5 & 6 workshops are unaffected by the march; they will take place as scheduled.

Regardless of political beliefs or affiliations, we all serve a common purpose—to support the development and enrich the lives of children through Montessori education. Whether you attend afternoon workshops or participate in the March for Our Lives, you are making a commitment to your students: to advocate, to grow, to improve yourself and our systems in ways that will create a better tomorrow for them. AMS respects your choices and your commitment.

Attached are articles and inspirations to help guide you in your reflection of today’s events. We hope you continue the discussion online (#MontessoriNow), in these hallways, and back home in your schools and teacher education programs.

Thank you,
The AMS Staff & Board of Directors

Due to the theatrical nature of Ms. Smith’s presentation, we ask that you please silence your cell phones and respectfully remain seated until the end.
The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Policies and practices that favor incarceration over education do us all a grave injustice.

From Teaching Tolerance; Issue 43, Spring 2013
Author: Marilyn Elias

In Meridian, Miss., police routinely arrest and transport youths to a juvenile detention center for minor classroom misbehaviors. In Jefferson Parish, La., according to a U.S. Department of Justice complaint, school officials have given armed police “unfettered authority to stop, frisk, detain, question, search and arrest schoolchildren on and off school grounds.” In Birmingham, Ala., police officers are permanently stationed in nearly every high school.

In fact, hundreds of school districts across the country employ discipline policies that push students out of the classroom and into the criminal justice system at alarming rates—a phenomenon known as the school-to-prison pipeline.

Last month, Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., held the first federal hearing on the school-to-prison pipeline—an important step toward ending policies that favor incarceration over education and disproportionately push minority students and students with disabilities out of schools and into jails.

In opening the hearing, Durbin told the subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, “For many young people, our schools are increasingly a gateway to the criminal justice system. This phenomenon is a consequence of a culture of zero tolerance that is widespread in our schools and is depriving many children of their fundamental right to an education.”

A wide array of organizations—including the Southern Poverty Law Center, the NAACP and Dignity in Schools—offered testimony during the hearing. They joined representatives from the Departments of Education and Justice to shine a national spotlight on a situation viewed far too often as a local responsibility.

“We have a national problem that deserves federal action,” Matthew Cregor, an attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, explained. “With suspension a top predictor of dropout, we must confront this practice if we are ever to end the ‘dropout crisis’ or the so-called achievement gap.” In the words of Vermont’s Sen. Patrick Leahy, “As a nation, we can do better.”

What is the School-to-Prison Pipeline?

Policies that encourage police presence at schools, harsh tactics including physical restraint, and automatic punishments that result in suspensions and out-of-class time are huge contributors to the pipeline, but the problem is more complex than that.
The school-to-prison pipeline starts (or is best avoided) in the classroom. When combined with zero-tolerance policies, a teacher’s decision to refer students for punishment can mean they are pushed out of the classroom—and much more likely to be introduced into the criminal justice system.

**Who’s in the Pipeline?**

Students from two groups—racial minorities and children with disabilities—are disproportionately represented in the school-to-prison pipeline. African-American students, for instance, are 3.5 times more likely than their white classmates to be suspended or expelled, according to a nationwide study by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights.

*Black children constitute 18 percent of students, but they account for 46 percent of those suspended more than once.*

For students with disabilities, the numbers are equally troubling. One report found that while 8.6 percent of public school children have been identified as having disabilities that affect their ability to learn, these students make up 32 percent of youth in juvenile detention centers. The racial disparities are even starker for students with disabilities. About 1 in 4 black children with disabilities were suspended at least once, versus 1 in 11 white students, according to an analysis of the government report by Daniel J. Losen, director of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies of the Civil Rights Project at UCLA.

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A landmark study published last year tracked nearly 1 million Texas students for at least six years. The study controlled for more than 80 variables, such as socioeconomic class, to see how they affected the likelihood of school discipline. The study found that African Americans were disproportionately punished compared with otherwise similar white and Latino students. Children with emotional disabilities also were disproportionately suspended and expelled.

In other studies, Losen found racial differences in suspension rates have widened since the early 1970s and that suspension is being used more frequently as a disciplinary tool. But he said his recent study and other research show that removing children from school does not improve their behavior. Instead, it greatly increases the likelihood that they’ll drop out and wind up behind bars.

**Punishing Policies**

The SPLC advocates for changes to end the school-to-prison pipeline and has filed lawsuits or civil rights complaints against districts with punitive discipline practices that are discriminatory in impact.
According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the number of school resource officers rose 38 percent between 1997 and 2007. Jerri Katzerman, SPLC deputy legal director, said this surge in police on campus has helped to criminalize many students and fill the pipeline.

One 2005 study found that children are far more likely to be arrested at school than they were a generation ago. The vast majority of these arrests are for nonviolent offenses. In most cases, the students are simply being disruptive. And a recent U.S. Department of Education study found that more than 70 percent of students arrested in school-related incidents or referred to law enforcement are black or Hispanic. Zero-tolerance policies, which set one-size-fits-all punishments for a variety of behaviors, have fed these trends.

**Best Practices**

Instead of pushing children out, Katzerman said, “Teachers need a lot more support and training for effective discipline, and schools need to use best practices for behavior modification to keep these kids in school where they belong.”

Keeping at-risk kids in class can be a tough order for educators under pressure to meet accountability measures, but classroom teachers are in a unique position to divert students from the school-to-prison pipeline.

Teachers know their students better than any resource officer or administrator—which puts them in a singularly empowered position to keep students in the classroom. It’s not easy, but when teachers take a more responsive and less punitive approach in the classroom, students are more likely to complete their education.

The information in "A Teacher's Guide to Rerouting the Pipeline" highlights common scenarios that push young people into the school-to-prison pipeline and offers practical advice for how teachers can dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

**Avoiding the Pipeline**

How can school districts divert the school-to-prison pipeline?

1. Increase the use of positive behavior interventions and supports.
2. Compile annual reports on the total number of disciplinary actions that push students out of the classroom based on gender, race and ability.
3. Create agreements with police departments and court systems to limit arrests at school and the use of restraints, such as mace and handcuffs.
4. Provide simple explanations of infractions and prescribed responses in the student code of conduct to ensure fairness.
5. Create appropriate limits on the use of law enforcement in public schools.
6. Train teachers on the use of positive behavior supports for at-risk students.
From Little Rock to Parkland: A Brief History of Youth Activism

February 28, 2018; National Public Radio nprEd
Author: Erin B. Logan

It's too early to know if politicians will heed the calls for increased gun control after the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. But one thing is clear: If change comes, it will be because of the passionate activism of the schools' students. The teens appear to have galvanized a new, national movement and inspired student activists across the country, spurring high school walkouts in Washington D.C., Arizona, and Minnesota.

While this surge of teen organizing around gun control may feel new, the U.S. has a rich history of youth activism. Here's a quick look at three big moments when children and teens became agents of change.

Newsboys' strike in New York City, 1899

Before radio, television and the Internet, the public got much of its news from newsboys. Newsies would buy newspapers directly from publishers at a wholesale price, then sell them on street corners. Most boys made about a quarter a day and could not return their unsold papers.

Trouble began when media moguls William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer started shorting the boys' bundles and increased their wholesale price by ten cents — a crippling blow to the newsies' bottom line. The newsboys responded by refusing to sell Pulitzer and Hearst's publications and created a union — 3,000 strong — to oppose the new changes.

The publishers hired men to fill the void, but the boys fought back. In one confrontation chronicled by the New York Times, a group of boys surrounded the men and "tore up their papers into pieces." A brawl ensued; the boys won.

"What we want is to stick together and not sell The Journal and World," said a newsie identified as Kid Blink during a mass meeting after the fight. "We'll all go out tomorrow and stick together, and we'll win in a walk."

Within two weeks, the millionaires agreed to a compromise. Although the union didn't last, Hearst and Pulitzer agreed to buy back newspapers the boys couldn't sell and promised to stop shorting their bundles.

The Little Rock Nine, 1957

Three years after the Supreme Court declared segregated schools to be unconstitutional, nine black teenagers were recruited by the NAACP to enroll at the all-white Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas. After segregationist groups petitioned Gov. Orval Faubus to maintain the status quo at Central, Faubus filed for a temporary injunction to deny black students entry. A local official granted the
injunction but, the next day, a federal judge ordered the Little Rock school board to continue with its integration plans. That prompted Faubus to order the National Guard to physically block black students from entering the high school.

In the weeks that followed, a legal back-and-forth raged between federal courts and Arkansas’ government over the state’s unwillingness to comply with the Supreme Court’s ruling. By the end of the month, a white mob had gathered outside the school to protest the entry of the nine. The group assaulted black journalists and made it impossible for the school to resume its daily operations.

"At a certain point, I didn't know if I would be alive to graduate from high school, or be stark raving insane, or deeply wounded,” said Minnijean Brown who was 15 at the time of the incident.

After the uproar, President Eisenhower federalized the National Guard, ordering them to escort black students into Central. The incident marks the early days of the civil rights movement and the long quest for racial equality. Although the Little Rock Nine helped to successfully integrate their high school, public schools throughout the country remain segregated to this day.

Walkouts in East Lost Angeles, 1968

Chicano high school students in Los Angeles staged a massive walkout amid the growing 'El Movimiento' fifty years ago. The students wanted Mexican-American history and culture to be taught in their classrooms. They also wanted the school district to address high dropout rates, overcrowding and the "incompetent teachers and counselors who steered Latino students into auto shop instead of college-track courses," according to the LA Times. Thousands of students across the city participated in the walkouts.

"We feel disturbed and ashamed that these kids are carrying out our fight," teacher Ray Ceniceroz told the LA Times in 1968. "We should have been fighting for these things as teachers and as a community. Apparently, we have been using the wrong weapons. These kids found a new weapon — a new monster — the walkout."

The protests lasted a week before the school board agreed to meet with students, teachers and parents. The board conceded that changes needed to be made but insisted it lacked the funding to do so. This didn't sit well with students, and the unrest continued. In response to the students’ activism, the school district fired Sal Castro, a Mexican-American teacher who had helped organize the protests. Police also charged 13 students with conspiracy to disturb the peace. The charges were eventually dropped, and Castro was reinstated after students organized sit-ins in the district’s main office.

"In our small part of the world, we were going to force some kind of change and some kind of equality," Kathy Ochoa, who was in 10th grade, told the LA Times 20 years later.
In Her Own Words: Dr. Montessori on Peace

Use these quotes to continue your conversations surrounding the intersection of peace & social justice and Montessori education.

“An education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking; it involves the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live.”

"Times have changed, and science has made great progress, and so has our work; but our principles have only been confirmed, and along with them our conviction that mankind can hope for a solution to its problems, among which the most urgent are those of peace and unity, only by turning its attention and energies to the discovery of the child and to the development of the great potentialities of the human personality in the course of its formation.”

“Peace is a practical principle of human civilization and social organization that is based on the very nature of man. Peace does not enslave him; rather, it exalts him....”