

Decriminalizing Long Island Youth: Insights into building relationships with students



Thank you

- The Gardiner Foundation
- Molloy College/Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership for Diverse Learning Communities (shout out Cohort 6 and our adviser Dr. Ryan Coughlan!)
- Dr. Allison Roda
- Angela Zimmerman
- Gardiner Fellows
- All those whom we interviewed and who made this presentation possible
- And THANK YOU for being here today

Today's agenda

- Get to know each other
- Look at big picture
- Describe our research process and question
- Explore findings and themes; listen to the evidence—the voices of our interviewees
- Reflect on our roles in the system, the power we hold, and how to make change together in community

About us...

Florence Barbour & Kelly Bare

Mothers / Lifelong learners / Educators / Leaders



- African American/Haitian American
- Wife
- Mother of one daughter (15)
- Executive director of an early childhood education program
- Long Islander for over 40 years
- Long Island private school parent
- Research interest: The Preschool-to-Prison pipeline and its effects on Black preschool girls



- White woman
- Divorced
- One son (13); one daughter (10)
- Instructor in a master's of public leadership program
- Nebraska native; 19-year NYC resident
- Brooklyn/Manhattan public school parent
- Research interest: Antiracist community building in diverse spaces (through art!)

About the problem, and our role in it

In the chat, please ...

- Name one thing you know ...
- and one thing you want to know ...
- about the school-to-prison pipeline.

Oftentimes, children are seen as...

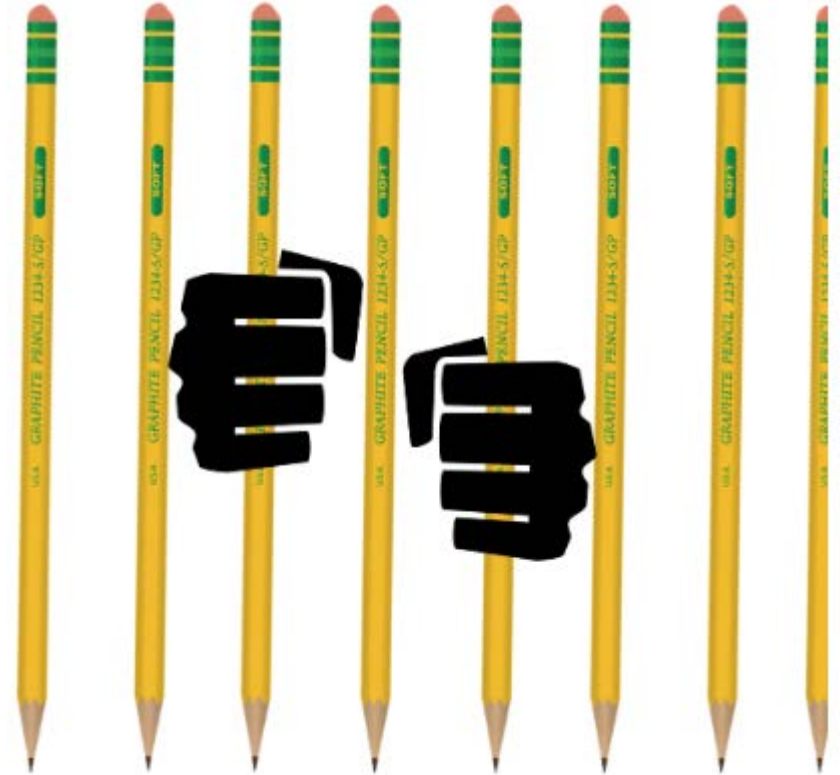
"...criminals or suspects, rather than as young people with an enormous amount of potential struggling in their own ways and their own difficult context to make it and hopefully thrive."

—Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*

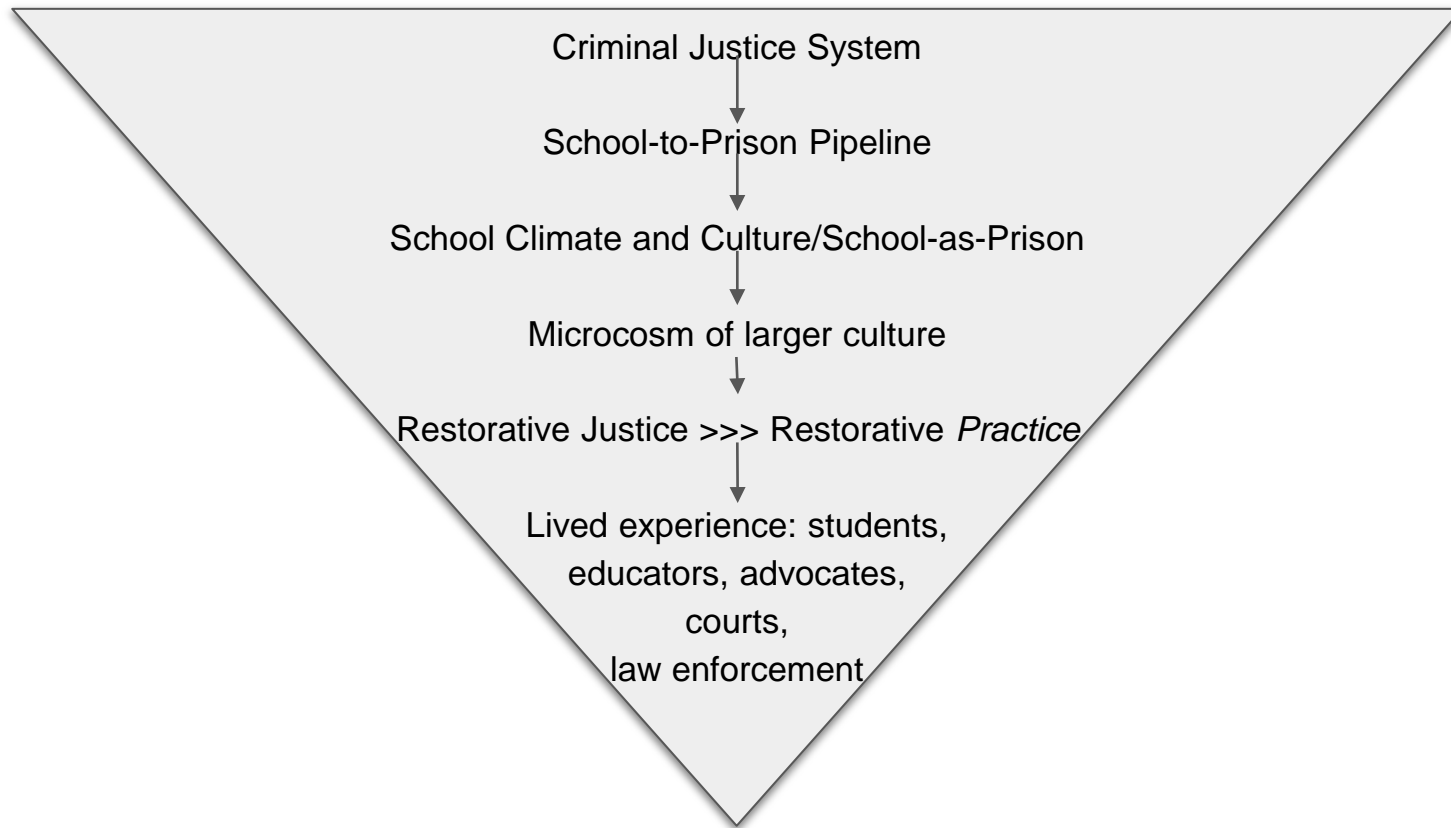


About this assignment, in this moment

- Huge
- Complicated
- Humbling
- Urgent
- Surreal



Our Research Process: From “*How did we get here?*” to “*What needs to change?*”



The Big Question

How do students, educators, law enforcement, officers of the court system, and advocates describe their lived experiences with the school-to-prison pipeline on Long Island?



A suspension crisis nationwide ...

- Suspensions associated with negative outcomes—a step in the pipeline
- Reflect a school climate characterized by punishment and fear
- Black students suspended at far greater rate than White students although Black students are not more likely to be disruptive

Source: Stolen Time: New York State's Suspension Crisis



“With every disciplinary infraction a student receives, the probability of them being a product of the criminal justice system at some point increases.”

(Diem & Welton, 2020, p. 116)

Worst of all: It starts before they're out of diapers

Begins in preschool...

- Data from the U.S. Department of Education show that African American schoolchildren of all ages are more than three times more likely to be suspended and expelled than their non-Hispanic White peers.
- Preschoolers are expelled at a weighted rate of more than three times that of K-12 students. Furthermore, while African American children make up only 18 percent of preschool enrollment, they account for 42 percent of preschool suspensions.

Source: Point of Entry- The Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2015/10/08/122867/point-of-entry/>

5. DISCIPLINE AND SUSPENSION OF STUDENTS. Pre-kindergarten students placed with SCHOOL DISTRICT'S pre-kindergarten program shall only be suspended from attendance following notice to SCHOOL DISTRICT'S Universal Pre-Kindergarten Coordinator/Principal and following the application of appropriate due process procedures, which shall include notice to the child's parent or person in parental relation, and an opportunity for the child and his/her parent or person in parental relation to be heard. A decision to seek suspension shall be premised upon the child's behavior (which shall have been documented) and shall be preceded by application of appropriate non-suspension interventions, parent input and involvement, and involvement of special needs personnel, if appropriate. No suspension shall be effectuated without the prior written approval of SCHOOL DISTRICT'S Universal Pre-Kindergarten Coordinator/Principal.

In New York state ...

- Schools in urban/suburban high-need districts were nearly five times as likely to suspend students as schools in low-need school districts.
- Suspension rates are highest in high schools, but racial disparities are greatest in elementary/middle schools.
- Schools impose the most disproportionate discipline on Black female students.

Source: Stolen Time: New York State's Suspension Crisis

And on Long Island...

- “Black students on Long Island are about five times more likely than whites to be suspended from their public schools.”

Source: *Newsday* (December, 9, 2018) Report: NY's black students suspended far more than whites, others



Spot check: Black & White

Analysis of available 2017 OCR data on in-school and out-of-school suspensions from middle and high schools in a sampling of four Long Island districts:

In every case:

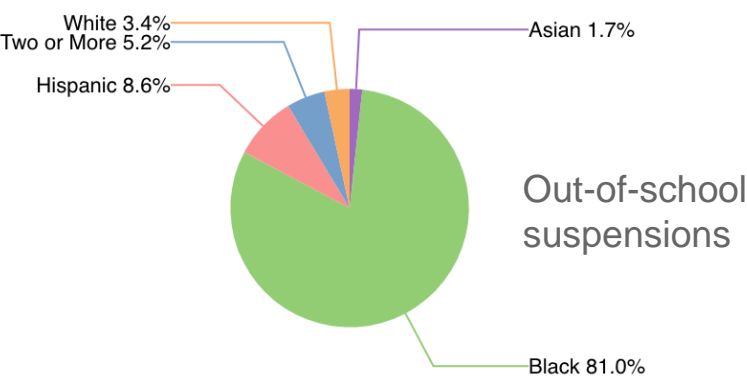
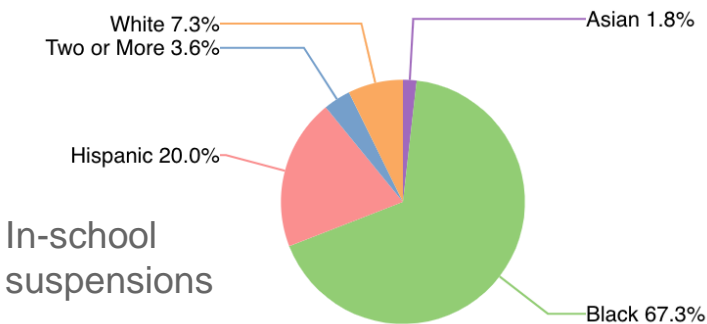
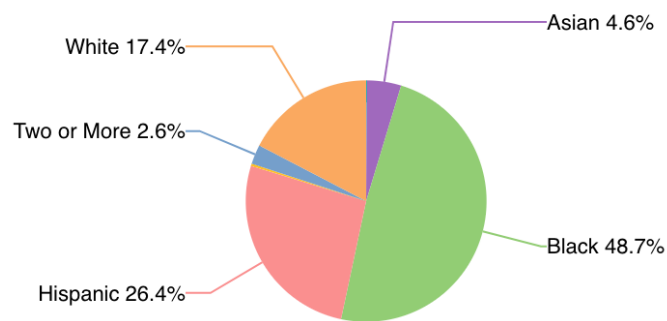
- Black students were overrepresented among suspended students relative to overall school demographics
- White students were underrepresented among suspended students, relative to overall school demographics

In more diverse districts, we tend to see the most disproportionality in terms of discipline rates by race.

Source: United States Office of Civil Rights, 2017

High school demographics: One Long Island district

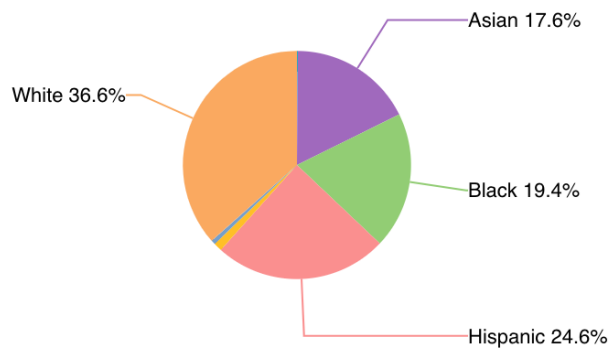
School enrollment



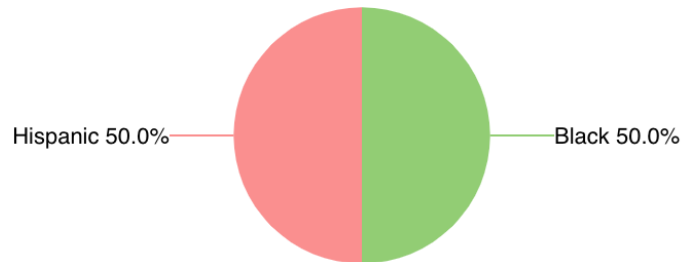
Source: United States Office of Civil Rights, 2017

For Latinx students, the picture was less stark, with notable exceptions

School enrollment

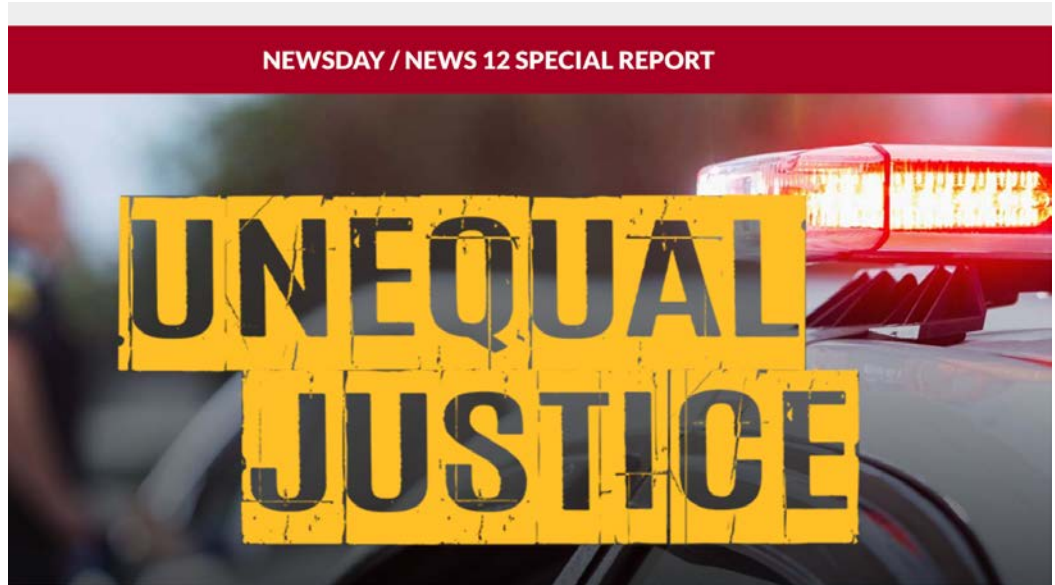


In-school suspensions



Source: United States Office of Civil Rights, 2017

But these stark facts are not breaking news ...



...as local media has been reporting this story since 2017.



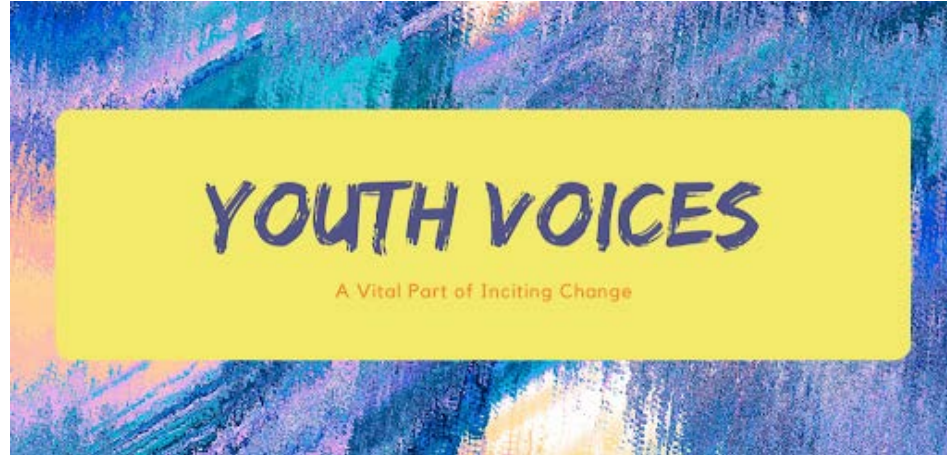
Voices in our study

- 30 Long Islanders, ranging in age from early teens to 80s
- Students, educators, formerly incarcerated individuals, law enforcement, judges, and advocates with a range of personal backgrounds and experiences
- Deep roots in the area
- Representing three community groups
 - Youth, family, and community development organization
 - Crisis intervention, counseling, support, and advocacy agency
 - Leadership development program for formerly incarcerated individuals





10



(Via two different focus groups: 6 female; 4 male)



Adult voices: wide range of expertise

- Attorney / family advocate
- Executive director: Organization that empowers formerly incarcerated individuals and their families
- Assistant superintendent in a Nassau County School District
- Coordinator of ENL & student internships in a Nassau County School District
- Judge
- Law enforcement officer
- Former county district attorney
- Retired nonprofit leader, author
- Founder of family and community development organization and dean at a local high school
- Director of juvenile detention center
- Molloy experts



Memories: Adult advocates reflect on their youth

- Six of our adult participants shared memories from childhood in or around Long Island
 - Added longitudinal context
 - Showed ways in which affected individuals become agents of change
 - Helped highlight what has changed, and what hasn't

THEMES



Children Not Feeling Safe
or that they Belong



Societal Constructs



Trauma/Resilience



Disciplinary
Policies



Long Island
Culture & Identity



Children Not Feeling Safe or that they Belong...

CHALLENGES

- Kids feeling unsafe, uncared for, and unwelcome
- Not feeling safe isn't only felt in school, it is also in their neighborhood or home
- Feeling unsafe was not only physical but emotional.

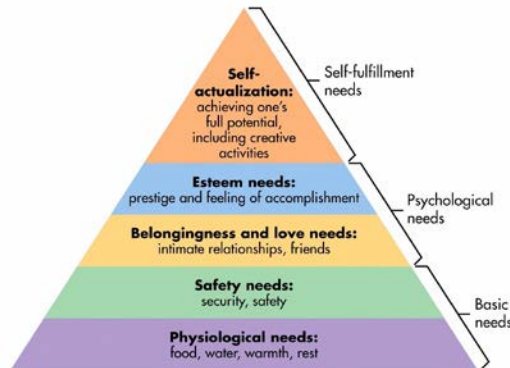
QUOTES

"I don't understand how they want students to thrive in a good environment when they make things difficult and escalate issues in school."

"All of my friends that are African American that have got to the high school don't feel part of the school."

"School does not guarantee safety."

"Security guards think they have power over you."



...Creating a community of care

ANTIDOTE

- Remember: “Behavior is communication”
- Build trust and relationships
- Tell kids they are NOT the problem
- “Adults need to apologize when they get it wrong.”





Trauma ...

CHALLENGES

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)
 - Experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect; witnessing violence; growing up in a household with substance abuse, mental health issues, suicide, incarceration (Source: CDC)
- Triggers “survival brain”; poor decision-making
- Linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use
- Painful to face and talk about, so young people think they are alone, damaged, broken—and at fault (disempowered)

“I have experienced violence to the extent that I know the difference between somebody who hurts other people because they’re hurt and someone who is inherently violent.”

“They don’t want to know”

... and Resilience

ANTIDOTE

- Trauma-informed practice; healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2020)
- Acknowledging what happened: voice; storytelling
- Recognizing and building resilience: individual and community strength

“I look at myself as a warrior, right? Like I’m a survivor”

“There’s nobody stronger than us”





Societal Constructs ...

CHALLENGES

- Racism and intersectional oppression
- Anti-immigrant sentiment
- Segregation
- All of which perpetuates most harm on those who are marginalized in multiple ways—i.e. special needs; LGBTQIA+

QUOTE

“One thing I can’t really take is racism in school. Though I never personally had a racist situation in school, my friends have and I have heard stories and seen it happen. There will be like teachers confront students just because of their skin color. I’ve seen one of our friends get pulled by himself into a classroom by a teacher because he was Brown skin color and Hispanic.”

...and Culturally Sustaining Practices

ANTIDOTE

- Culturally responsive teaching & learning (Gay, 2018)
- Antiracist recommendations (Diem & Welton, 2020)
 - Promote youth voice
 - Hire more educators of color
 - Address implicit bias and anti-blackness
 - Make students feel more included and connected to their school community





Punitive policies ...

CHALLENGES

- Individual codes of conduct; highly subjective
- Harsh, exclusionary punishments
- Zero tolerance
- High-stakes testing puts pressure on teachers and administrators
- What about "the students in the middle"?
- Schools as prisons
- Time out of school—learning time lost; home instruction wildly inadequate
- These attitudes mirrored in other systems: DSS, PINS, courts

“Disrespect is
subjective.
Insubordination is
subjective”

... and Restorative Practices

ANTIDOTE

- Awareness that policy and culture must transform
- Some evidence for change underway
- Safe and Supportive Schools Act (S.0767-A.1981)
- Restorative Justice >>> Restorative Practice
- School safety officers? Metal detectors?
- Social work, guidance: “Counselors, not Cops”
- Advocacy for families—know your rights

“Restorative practice is used for healing”





Long Island History and Culture

CHALLENGES

- Deeply segregated by design
 - Living in a very polarized place
- Long Island culture both entwined with NYC and its “success” culture and a supposed escape from city crime and grime
- Silence

Persistent myths

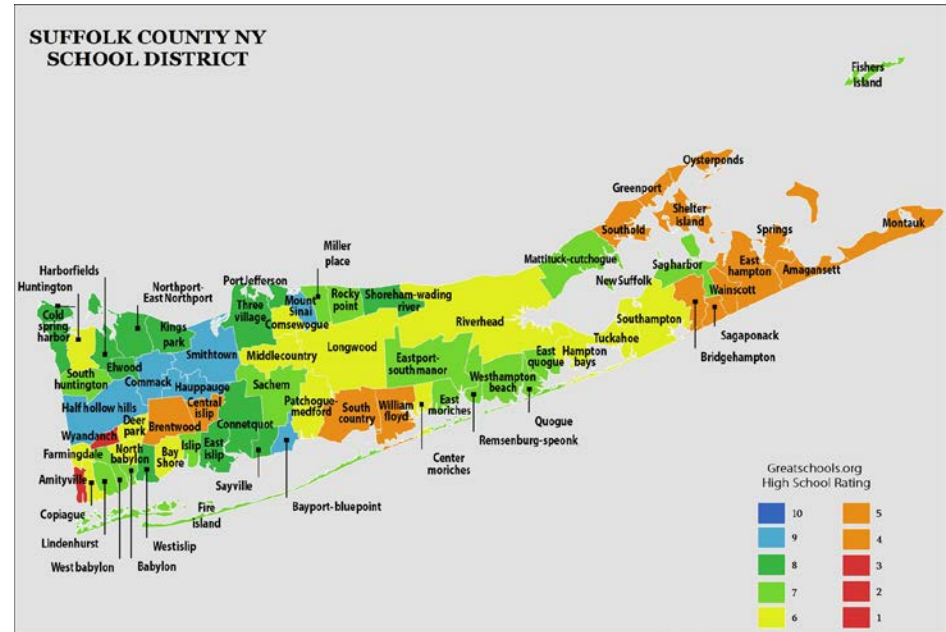
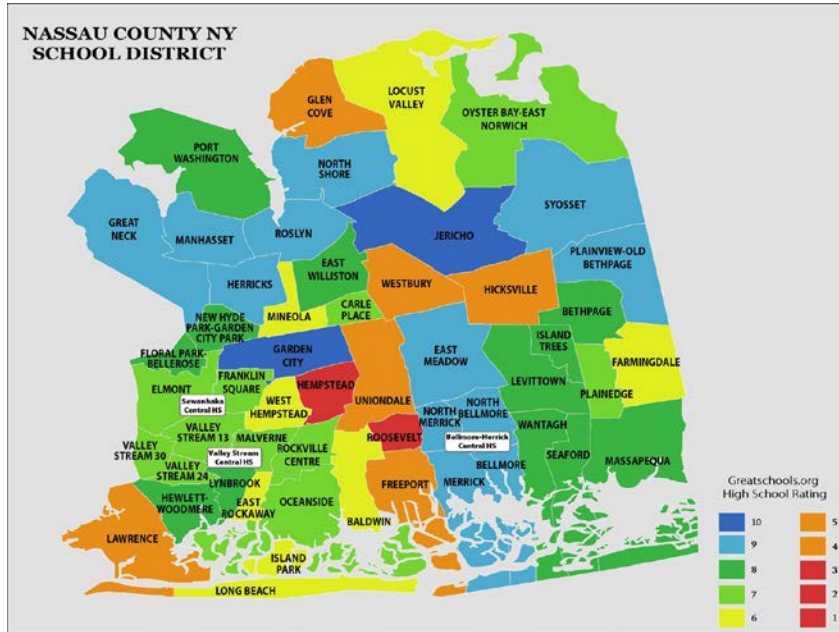
- Wealth—it’s now pockets of wealth amidst poverty
- Demographics of incarcerated—majority now White
- Gangs biggest problem—human trafficking has eclipsed

QUOTES

“Long Island is supposed to be the ultimate place to grow up, and it gets this like...what do you call it? That it’s perfect and everyone has money and that is absolutely not it.”

“And I thought of coming to Suffolk County, and all right, there’s not gonna be as much violence, it’s not gonna be as many issues with the adolescents and youth. And I found the opposite. I found that there really is a need out here for resources, and more understanding of what the issues are for our kids on Long Island.”

One prominent local theme: Long Island is Siloed and Fragmented



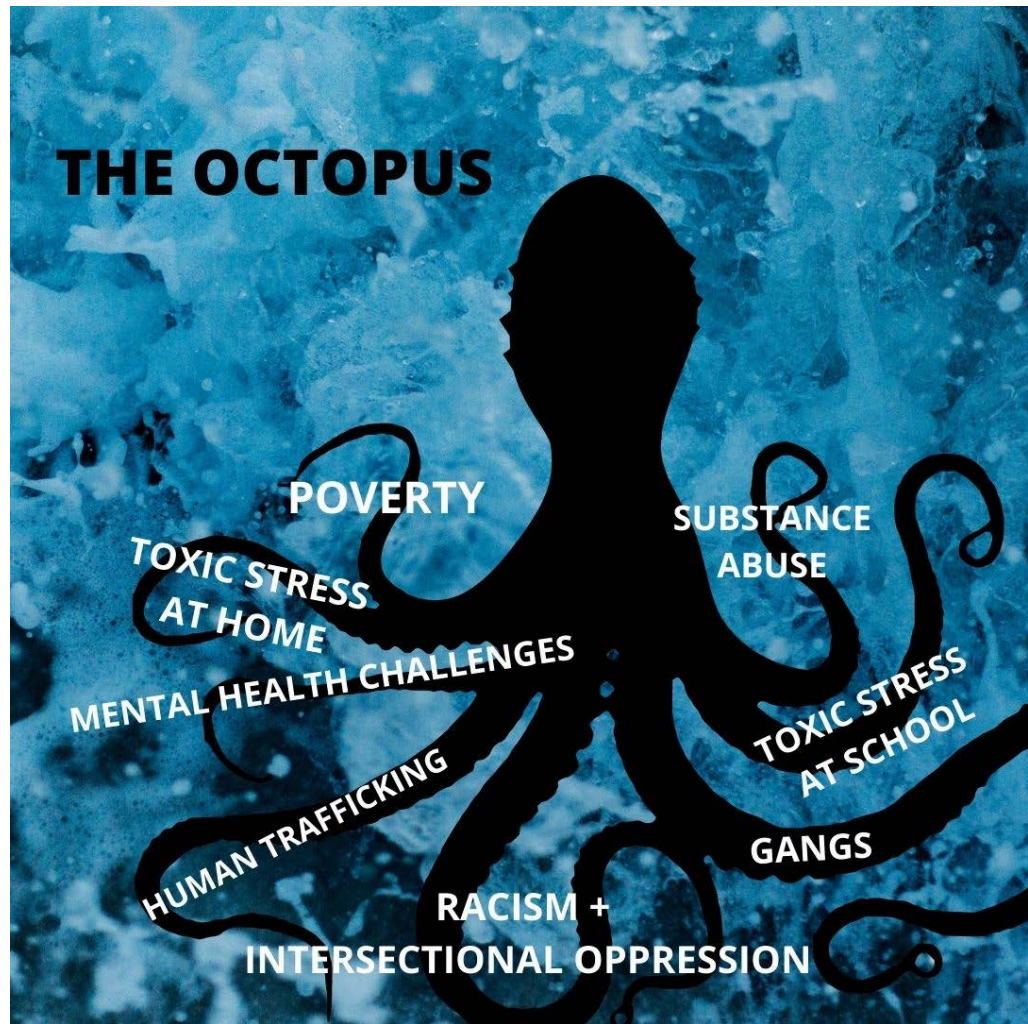
How We Come Together

ANTIDOTE

- Community collaborations are necessary
- Having honest conversations
- Name it and call it out
- There is enough to go around



“A bad movie
that plays over and over”



“They be rocking us to sleep.”

Light bulb moment!

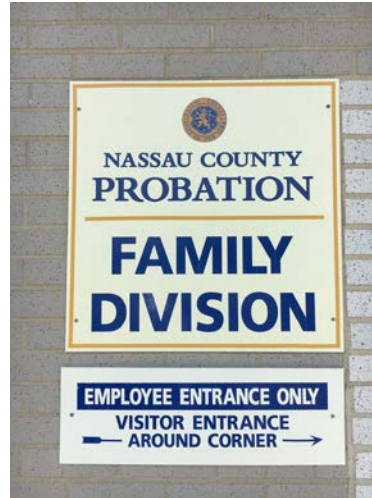


“A big part of our work is getting our clients to understand what trauma is, and why they’ve made the decisions they’ve made, why their brains work that way. Our clients are some of the smartest, most resourceful people. They just need the light bulb to go on ... and unfortunately the systems don’t show them the light, don’t give them the opportunity to see.”

“I blamed myself for everything.”

How do we “decriminalize” youth? WE HUMANIZE!

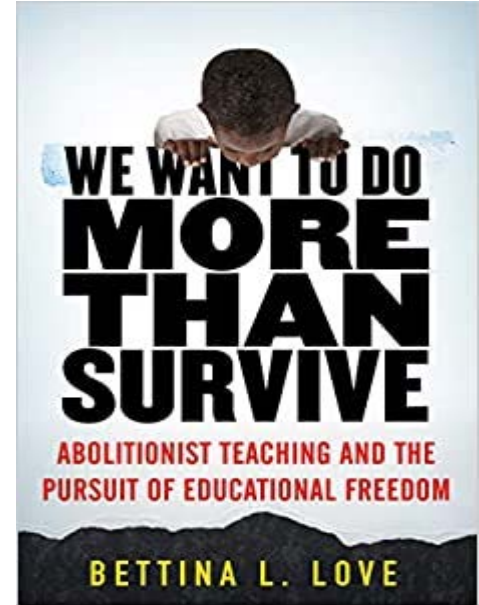
- “It’s as simple as a young person feeling valued when they walk in the classroom, being appropriately greeted, having structure to their day, because we know that young people crave and need more than they let us know that they need.”
- NOT “What’s wrong with you?” It is “What happened to you, kid?”



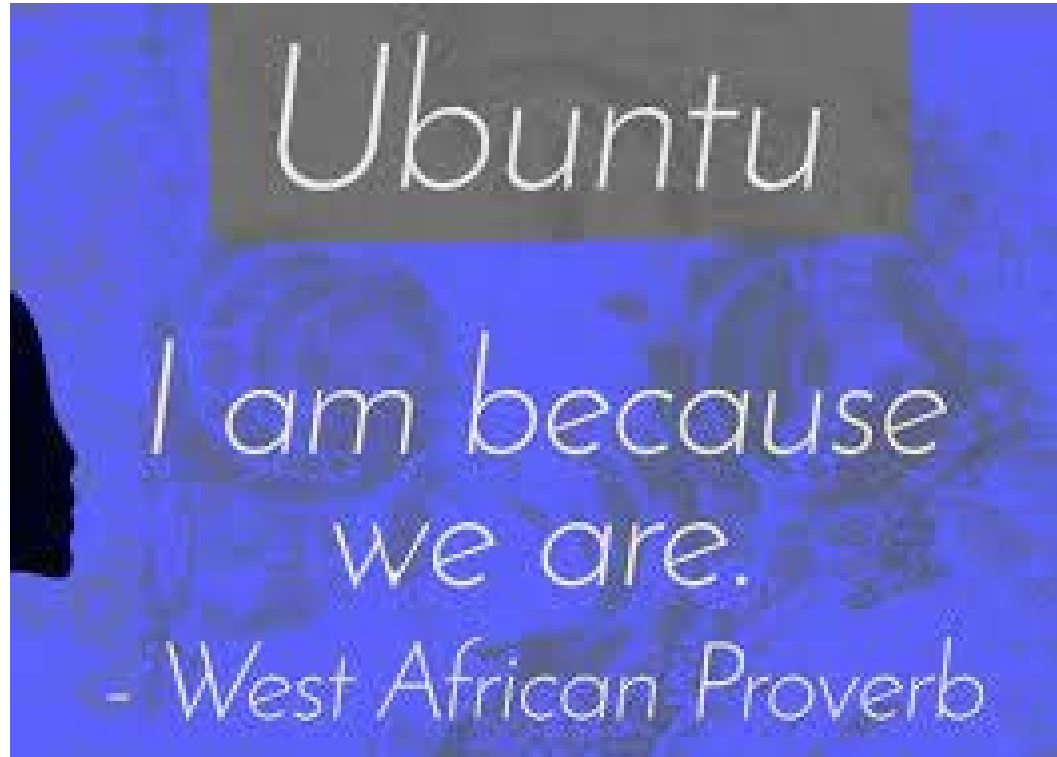
Mattering & Homeplace

Bettina Love says it best...

Mattering and homeplace “is an environment that honors the emotional, spiritual, and financial struggles of living and where people truly matter to each other, where souls are nurtured, comforted and fed” (2019, p.63).



It's about relationships...



What have we learned?



In the chat, please contribute
one thing you learned today
and one thing that you will do tomorrow.

The work ahead: Perspective shifts

- Scarcity → Abundance
- Deficit lens → Asset lens
- Punitive → Restorative



(via @bridgethegapministry)

Future research directions—who's interested?

- Participatory Action Research with Long Island youth
- Deep study of one school or district's work toward change
- Compare schools within or across districts; compare districts
- Qualitative study of relationships between adults and kids
- Study educators' and/or law enforcement officers' perceptions of the power they hold
- Study students' perceptions of their own agency and power
- Close look at a restorative practice, such as mediation (either peer or student/adult); circles
- Zoom in on the Latinx student experience on Long Island
- Racial/ethnic identity of central administrations and school boards on LI
- What else?



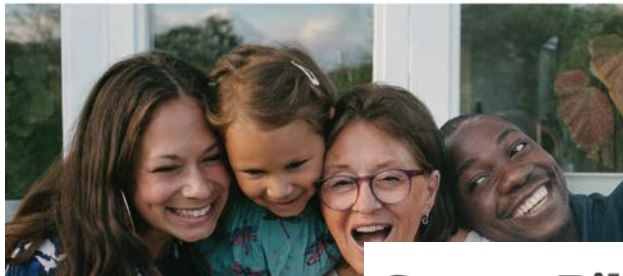
- Partner with students and families: Hear their voices
- Build trust/relationships
- Create safe spaces
- Collaborative partnerships
- Advocacy—call your legislators about the Safe and Supportive Schools Act
- Self-Care
 - Please keep talking: to each other, about your own experiences, and to the kids.

“Communicating fully is the opposite of being traumatized.” —Bessel van der Kolk

Resources

Roadmap for Resilience

The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health



Senate Bill S767B

2019-2020 Legislative Session

Relates to school climate and codes of conduct on school property and disciplinary action following violation of such codes of conduct; and makes conforming amendments

STOLEN TIME

NEW YORK STATE'S SUSPENSION CRISIS

THE NEW YORK EQUITY COALITION

Center for American Progress



Point of Entry

The Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline

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Links

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