

# NATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE NETWORK

## HOW TO USE *MAPPING TRANSFORMATIVE SCHOOLS*

### TIP SHEET

NJJN's Policy Platform [\*Mapping Transformative Schools: From Punishment to Promise\*](#) can help you:

**1. Build coalitions between youth and education justice advocates.**

Use our policy platform as an opportunity to meet and strategize with other advocates in your area working at the intersection of youth and education justice.

**2. Educate administrators and school boards.**

Use our policy examples, youth stories and curated research to educate administrators and school boards on ways they can take action to create positive school environments in your jurisdiction.

**3. Educate legislators and policymakers.**

Arm legislators and policymakers with the policy research and promising programs they need to make the case for transformative schools in your state. Use our table of contents to pull the specific policy ideas that make the most sense or have the most viability for your state.

**4. Engage youth and families.**

Scanning our policy platform may give you ideas about how to engage youth and families in policy discussions around youth and education justice. Consider hosting a roundtable for youth to discuss their school experiences, and brainstorm ways to get more youth and families involved in your policy advocacy.

**5. Develop key messages that will resonate in your area.**

Use our VPSA (Values, Problem, Solutions, Action) messaging framework to develop key messages that will resonate in your state or jurisdiction. See below.

## **How Advocates Can Frame Policy Arguments Changes to Create Transformative Schools - Values, Problem, Solution, Action (VPSA) Framework**

### **Value: Opportunity**

Realizing true youth justice means ensuring youth live in a well-resourced ecosystem of community-based, trauma-informed and healing-centered responses to youth needs that create a pathway to opportunity, success and thriving for young people. An integral part of that ecosystem is a positive school environment that honors who young people are, pushes them to do their best, helps them when they encounter challenges, and extends grace when they miss the mark. When young people have access to positive school environments, they are better equipped to come to school with enthusiasm for learning, discover their dreams and passions, and learn from mistakes when they arise.

### **Problem: Surveillance culture in schools violates our society's value of opportunity.**

- Too many school environments adopt a “surveillance” culture waiting to punish youth rather than proactively helping them achieve their highest goals.
- Black, Brown, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, and disabled students more often experience surveillance school environments that punish them more harshly than other students.
- Surveillance environments that focus on punishment over opportunity cause young people stress, trauma, and alienation, detracting from their ability to learn and grow. Ultimately, it can lead students to become so disaffected that they drop out of school or are forced out through suspension, expulsion, or arrest.

### **Solution: We need transformative schools.**

Central Recommendation: Our nation's schools require a transformational culture shift to create an environment where all students feel honored and supported by teachers, staff, and school administration. School systems must prioritize investing in inclusive, trauma-informed, culturally responsive schools that create a supportive and connected school climate and community. They must end the practices and policies that lead to the easy criminalization of children, particularly Black, Brown, Indigenous, disabled, and LGBTQIA+ students.

### **Action\*: We call on all stakeholders to collectively transform schools away from surveillance and punishment into positive environments for all youth.**

- Educators - Help young people rebound, learn and grow from mistakes.
  - Treat all students with fairness and respect in a positive learning environment.
  - Adopt a trauma-informed approach to teaching focused on getting to the root of behavior and academic challenges.
  - Implement restorative justice practices instead of exclusionary discipline, law enforcement, or restraint and seclusion.
- Administrators and School Boards: Create a consistent culture of opportunity and positive school environments for schools within your jurisdiction.

- Establish a culturally and linguistically responsive multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework for youth as recommended by the U.S. Dept. of Education to meet students' academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs.
  - Invest in social workers, counselors, psychologists, and credible messengers to support youth.
  - Assess and serve children with disabilities instead of punishing their behavior.
  - Implement a robust program of school-wide and targeted restorative practices.
  - End zero tolerance policies, exclusionary discipline, and the use of school-based police.
- State Legislators: Ensure resources are available to create positive school environments in your state.
    - Fund strategies to support positive school climates such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Integrated Support Systems, and Community Schools.
    - Allocate resources to substantially increase school-based mental health staff and require schools to maintain specific ratios of mental health staff to students.
    - Fund robust use of school-based restorative justice programs.
    - Remove laws that promote the easy criminalization of normal adolescent behavior.
    - Pass legislation prohibiting expulsion, out-of-school suspension, school-based police officers, and the use of restraint and seclusion.
- Youth & Families: Organize your collective power to hold school systems accountable.
    - Push for an end to zero-tolerance policies, exclusionary discipline, school-based police, and restraint and seclusion.
    - Fight for restorative practices in your local schools.
    - Advocate for increased school-based mental health staff and credible messenger programs.
    - Demand schools stop criminalizing Black, Brown, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+ students and students with disabilities.

\*See [Mapping Transformative Schools](#) for a full list of action steps.

Need support using [Mapping Transformative Schools](#) in your area? Email [info@njjn.org](mailto:info@njjn.org).