

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

Rerouting the Pipeline

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PRINCIPALS, SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS, probation officers and social workers are typically charged with responding to school discipline problems. But in reality, classroom teachers spend the most time with students. Their daily decisions can help divert students from the school-to-prison pipeline.

MEET MICHAEL

Michael is 15 and repeating the ninth grade. He's in your world history class and habitually tilts his chair back and drums annoyingly on his desk with a pencil. This morning, he was doing it—again—while you were trying to teach.

What do you do? A punitive teacher might take the pencil away, kick Michael out of class, or even refer him for disciplinary action. But there's always the opportunity to reflect and be more responsive.

Responsive teachers shift their reactions in important ways. They adopt a social emotional lens: What does Michael's tapping say about his mood? Is he bored or frustrated? Does the tapping bother other students, or just me?

It's also important to know

students and develop cultural competency. Is Michael comforted by percussive rhythms? Maybe you could encourage him to join the band.

The third shift calls for planning and delivering effective student-centered instruction. For instance, what kinesthetic or rhythmic learning strategies might engage Michael?

Move the paradigm from punishment to development by determining what initial expectations—like not drumming for 10 minutes—Michael can meet.

Finally, resist the criminalization of school behavior. Consider the consequences Michael will face if he misses class because he is suspended.

These five responsive shifts in teacher thinking apply even as a student's behavior escalates—and they can be the key to rerouting the school-to-prison pipeline.

Rerouting the Pipeline

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR

Verbal Disrespect

Michael is defiant and uses inappropriate language when verbally redirected.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

Argue with Michael, kick him out of class or refer him for disciplinary action.

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR

Dress Code Violation

Michael comes to class without a belt on, pants sagging.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

Lecture Michael about the dress code in front of classmates, kick him out of class or refer him for disciplinary action.

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR

Lateness or Truancy

Michael is frequently absent from or tardy to his first-period class and is failing.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

Lock the door after the bell rings and give Michael zeros with no make-up option for work he missed.

	A RESPONSIVE TEACHER'S REFLECTIONS	A RESPONSIVE TEACHER'S REFLECTIONS	A RESPONSIVE TEACHER'S REFLECTIONS
SHIFT 1	How can I address Michael's feelings of powerlessness so he is less defensive when I assert my authority?	Does Michael have a belt? Should I keep an extra one in the classroom?	What personal problems might prevent Michael from getting to school on time?
SHIFT 2	How might my words, tone and body language make Michael feel disrespected?	How can I affirm that clothing norms are different at school and home but neither is good nor bad?	Are there family problems that might prevent Michael from getting to school on time?
SHIFT 3	How can I differentiate my instruction to better meet Michael's needs and tap his strengths?	How does my teaching affect Michael's self-image?	Is my curriculum relevant to Michael's identity and lived experiences?
SHIFT 4	How can I use assertive communication to demonstrate empathy, explain disappointment and set expectations for changed behavior?	Should I sponsor a club where students who consistently meet the dress code get special privileges?	Should I set up a conference with family, teachers and other school staff to design a behavior intervention plan that supports Michael?
SHIFT 5	What are the consequences for Michael if he misses class because he is suspended?	Does enforcement of the dress code target particular groups of students?	Can our school provide free bus passes to prevent truancy and positively impact Michael's future?

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR

Aggressive Physical Behavior

Michael shouldered his teacher out of the way when she blocked the classroom door as he tried to leave.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

Argue with Michael, call the school resource officer, bar him from class or press assault charges.

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR

Fighting

Michael got into a fight in the hallway during first period. There were no serious injuries.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

Avoid involvement or request that Michael not be allowed back in class because he poses a threat.

A RESPONSIVE TEACHER'S REFLECTIONS

What clues did I miss that Michael was upset before he tried to walk out?

What social and cultural capital did Michael risk if he had backed down from me in front of his peers?

Michael is most irritable when we read. Can the literacy coach and special education team suggest reading intervention strategies?

Can Michael and I come up with a signal to let me know he is feeling stressed and needs a three-minute cool down?

How can I encourage my administration to consider creative interventions as alternatives to suspension and adjudication?

A RESPONSIVE TEACHER'S REFLECTIONS

How can I help Michael deal with his feelings about the fight and help him see school in a positive light?

Who can best help Michael through things I've never experienced?

How can I use our curriculum to increase Michael's ability to nonviolently resolve conflict?

Would training students in peer mediation be a positive intervention strategy for Michael?

How can I encourage my administration to consider creative interventions as alternatives to suspension and adjudication?

- SHIFT 1** ADOPT A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LENS
- SHIFT 2** KNOW YOUR STUDENTS AND DEVELOP YOUR CULTURAL COMPETENCY
- SHIFT 3** PLAN AND DELIVER EFFECTIVE STUDENT-CENTERED INSTRUCTION
- SHIFT 4** MOVE THE PARADIGM FROM PUNISHMENT TO DEVELOPMENT
- SHIFT 5** RESIST THE CRIMINALIZATION OF SCHOOL BEHAVIOR



Toolkit

Learn how teachers can shift their behaviors and help reduce student push-out. VISIT >> tolerance.org/school-to-prison