

#SchoolsNotPrisons tour stops in San Bernardino to advocate investment in education

By Ryan Hagen, *The Sun*

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SAN BERNARDINO >> The first of three days of events advocating for less punishment and more investment in education drew dozens Thursday to the Inghram Community Center.

Billed as a roundtable discussion, Thursday's event consisted of speakers pointing to the harmful effects of suspension and imprisonment on students — particularly students of color — and suggestions on how to combat what they call the schools-to-prisons pipeline.

An “artivism” exhibit from 5 to 8 p.m. today at Anne Shirrels Park, 1367 N. California St., and an art and music festival from 5:45 to 9:15

p.m. Saturday at Cal State San Bernardino, 5500 University Parkway, will follow as part of a 10-city #SchoolsNotPrisons tour.

The tour is organized by [Revolve Impact](#), a Los Angeles-based firm that works on justice-related campaigns. San Bernardino is the second stop on the tour, after Sacramento.

Thursday's event ended with participants pledging to join in a San Bernardino County task force on safety and intervention.

Many people already shared the goal, said San Bernardino City Unified School board member Gwendolyn Rodgers afterward, but the unity was inspirational.

“That was the most moving part, taking that pledge,” Rodgers said. “We need to stand together and work on prevention.”

Tia Martinez, a national advocate for school discipline reform, gave a historical perspective behind what she said was a doubling of suspension rates over the past 40 years — nearly a tripling for African American students.

There wasn't an increase in major incidents to account for the increase, she said.

“The explosion is driven by much more small things: the tardies, the not paying attention in class,” Martinez said. “Everything that used to be ‘the teacher is going to talk to you after class,’ ‘the teacher is going to call home,’ got bumped up to suspensions. And everything that was a suspension got bumped up to an arrest.”

According to Martinez, a single suspension doubles risk of being retained a grade and doubles risk of dropping out.

It also means the student is spending more unsupervised time in poor, racially segregated neighborhoods, part of the reason suspensions triple contact with the juvenile justice system.

According to Martinez, 68 percent of black men without high school degrees go to prison by age 35.

Martinez encouraged teachers to go to parents' homes for meetings, work as a school district to agree to a set of values, and implement restorative justice — a system that emphasizes repairing harm rather than punishment.

Kim Carter, founder and executive director of Time for Change, presented on how a criminal record can make it more difficult for people to turn their lives around.

“As one of my clients says, ‘How can I rewrite the story of my life if you keep reading the last chapter?’” Carter said. “It’s great that we’re coming together to fix this. The question is, will our leaders do it?”

Officials from several school districts attended, including San Bernardino City Unified Superintendent Dale Marsden.

“We are grateful our community can come together to strengthen our systems of support for students,” Marsden said in a written statement. “Together we can make hope happen for every child.”

Today’s event, Artivism, will be music, dance, poetry and painting by local young people with the theme of community safety.

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