

(At Least) 10 Things Educators Can Do to End the Prison Industrial Complex

Artwork by Molly Costello from Restorative Posters, rjposters.com

Education for liberation requires bold critique, creative acts, and, particularly for teachers, a willingness to take risks outside the status quo.

Below we offer suggestions based on the ways many teachers and other youth advocates are building the capacity to challenge the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). We know teachers are already practicing, generating and sharing other interventions. This is not a checklist of must-do's, nor is it exhaustive or intended to apply to every context. We offer these starting ideas, in no particular order, as generative possibilities to build the world we know we need, rather than as a prescription for a specific situation.

1 Always Learn: Are terms such as the “prison industrial complex,” “restorative justice” or “transformative justice” new? Start a political education reading-into-action group with other teachers or with your students around a key text, such as *Are Prisons Obsolete?* by Angela Davis. For other reading resources, check out: Critical Resistance (<http://criticalresistance.org/>)

2 Build Communities of Shared Purpose: Work with those in your school who want to end the PIC. Brainstorm different situations that typically involve police or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at or around your school, and discuss how to handle them in ways that don't contribute to feeding the PIC pipeline.

3 Ask, Listen and Imagine: Start and/or participate in dialogues that challenge yourself, your colleagues, students and families to critically reflect on their identities and experiences in schools. How do we define safety? How can we address and prevent harm? How can we support each other? Create opportunities to strategize around ways to be accountable to one another.

4 Policies Matter as Much as Practice: Work to dismantle policies that punish and that mimic our wider prison nation, and disproportionately harm communities of color: “three strikes and you're out,” zero tolerance discipline responses, among others. However, just as important are all of the daily indignities in schools. How are we creating an inclusive and loving environment in our classrooms and school halls? How does our language reinforce or challenge the idea that certain students belong and others are disposable? Create a daily practice of reflecting on how you engage with your most “challenging” students.

5 Know Your Rights, the School's and District's Policies, and Get Data: Can ICE come to your school to question or remove students or staff members? What are your district's and school's policies regarding police involvement? How are Native American students affected by your district's truancy policies? If these policies create more harm than good, collectively organize to educate your community to challenge these policies and reimagine more humanizing responses.

6 Build Power Outside Your Classroom: Connect with community-based organizations that are working to shrink the footprint of policing, to demand gender and racial justice, and to build transformative justice responses to harm. See, for example, the innovative work of organizations such as Mijente (<https://mijente.net/>) and the Audre Lorde Project/Safe Outside the System (<http://alp.org/community/sos>). Also, tap into or start a list of programs/organizations in your community that offer resources to students and families when struggles arise. Invite these groups, if they are not already on your campus, to visit, connect, and to share curricular ideas. And, if you are part of a professional association, a labor union or another collective educators network, support these organizations to do radical political education for

their memberships, to take bold anti-PIC stances, and to support anti-PIC initiatives, campaigns and projects.

7 Discipline, Not Punish: Move from discipline as punishment to discipline as the practice of holding high expectations of each other, supporting one another, and providing access to a wide range of meaningful and rigorous learning opportunities that include art, sports, and curriculum that is strong and relevant, to mention a few.

8 Leave No One Behind!: Work to build community and campaigns that are open to all – from the janitorial staff to the students. For example, in your school's efforts to make classrooms and hallways less harmful for queer folks, don't fall for the notion that tougher suspension policies and zero tolerance will work to address bullying.

9 Create Opportunities to Express Support, to Value People and to Share Love: We all need to feel valued and cared for, particularly in schools. Develop curriculum, pedagogical practices and school cultures that center our visions of liberation (Arts! Music!) and love in its myriad forms, and affirm the lives, histories and communities connected to our students.

10 Educate/Organize/Collectivize: Meet with your people and come up with 10 more ideas and practices!

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When speaking
with someone who
has been harmed...



What's needed to make things right?
How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?