

**This American Life – “Is This Working?” – 19:19-22:35**

- 1 **Chana:** And because of the Texas numbers, we now know that those same kids are at a much higher risk of being arrested. So is there a connection here? One way to look at this is just that our society gives tougher punishments to black and Hispanic kids when they are JJ's age, when they're in preschool, and when they're in high school, and when they're old enough to go to prison. The issue is not school. It's just racism. But Noguera says school is an important part of this picture. And here's the theory he laid out for me. You suspend a kid, he misses school, he finds it hard to catch up, he feels frustrated, falls behind. And maybe just as important, he learns he is bad. Because he feels bad when he's in school, he acts bad.
- 2 **Noguera:** There's this assumption that, if we get rid of the bad people, that the good people will be able to learn, the good people will be safe. Well what we continue to ignore is that we are producing the bad people. We're producing, ah, in school, the bad behavior.
- 3 **Chana:** Producing it through the system of punishment that convinces some kids that they're bad. **(Pause, musical interlude)** In May, 2011, Michael Thompson got a meeting with the Attorney General of the United States. And he showed him the Texas numbers. And two months later, the Attorney General and the Secretary of Education were standing together at a press conference about discipline in schools. They started gathering their own numbers from schools, all over the country this time. And those numbers were worse, even in preschool. In March this year, the Department of Education issued a report that said black children make up 18% of preschoolers, but they make up 48% of preschool children suspended more than once.
- 4 **Tunette:** When I found that, (sigh) it was the same month as the birthday party. And I saw the story and it, the way it just said that, ah, black children are suspended at, um, much higher rates. So I'm thinking to myself, in the same few months that my kids were being suspended, I go to this birthday party, and then I see this report.
- 5 **Chana:** I asked Tunette what the report meant to her. And she found it hard to summarize... So. Many. Things.
- 6 **Tunette:** First, when I saw the report, it made me feel like... (breath) my kids were a target. It just felt like they were a target. You know, I felt like my kids... is this something that I have to worry about forever? Is this not something, ya know, that I could just say was this one-time little thing? It's like something that I'll always have to be ah-aware of and always have to think about and always have to be *more* involved than the next parent in my kids' lives at school because OF these studies. And then, second, the report just kind of made me feel like (5 second pause) maybe I wasn't as bad.
- 7 **Chana:** She's talking about herself there, as a kid. Remember, Tunette was a problem student herself, preschool through high school graduation.
- 8 **Tunette:** Maybe I could have been -- maybe, since there's such this overwhelming number, maybe that meant that they were -- maybe the teachers weren't always doing the right thing.

