



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
GOVERNOR DANIEL P. MALLOY

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## Gov. Malloy: Juvenile Court Referrals See Significant Results Following Expansion of State's School-Based Diversion Initiative

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### Initiative Works to Reduce Juvenile Justice Involvement and End the School-to-Prison Pipeline Among Youths

(HARTFORD, CT) – Governor Dannel P. Malloy and State Department of Education Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell today announced that schools participating in the state's School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) saw significant results during the 2015-16 school year, with school-based court referrals declining by 21 percent and behavioral health service referrals to Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) increasing by 24 percent, surpassing the statewide average by 15 percentage points and 14 percentage points, respectively. Among the schools that adopted the program early in the school year, results are even more impressive, with a 33 percent drop in referrals to the juvenile court system and a 42 percent increase in referrals to mobile crisis interventions.

The goal of SBDI is to reduce juvenile justice involvement among youth with certain mental, emotional, and behavioral health needs. It was expanded during the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years as part of Governor Malloy's Second Chance Society reforms.

"Ending the school-to-prison pipeline remains a priority for our state and expanding SBDI has played a crucial role in bringing that vision to fruition," Governor Malloy said. "Schools that participate in the program consistently decrease the number of students referred to court for nonviolent behavioral infractions and do a better job of connecting students with the resources and supports they need. This shift away from punitive discipline better serves our students, families, and communities, and helps to ensure a brighter future for Connecticut's children."

SBDI provides training to help teachers, staff, administrators, and school resource officers identify children with behavioral health needs and connect them to community-based mental health services. Additionally, the program provides school personnel with customized professional development and works with schools to review and revise disciplinary policies.

“In our five-year plan, we’ve promised to ensure that students’ non-academic needs are met so they are happy, healthy, and ready to learn,” Commissioner Wentzell said. “By expanding SBDI and increasing students’ access to mental health services, Governor Malloy is ensuring that we are able to keep our promise to Connecticut’s students and their families.”

Since 2009, Connecticut has seen an 82 percent decline in inmates under the age of 18, which have dropped from 347 in that year to just 63 in 2016. Governor Malloy noted that these statistics are a positive sign that crime rates will continue to decline over the coming years, as one of the most powerful indicators whether someone will become a career criminal is if they have entered the prison system at a young age. These decreases can largely be attributed to criminal justice reforms like raising the age of juvenile offenders to 18, which took full effect in July 2012, as well as school-based diversionary programs like SBDI.

“School-based arrests are a nationwide problem, but Connecticut has made significant strides through innovations such as the School-Based Diversion Initiative,” Dr. Judith Meyers, President and CEO of the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI), a nonprofit organization that partnered with the state and serves as the coordinating center for SBDI. “By diverting youth from juvenile justice involvement and connecting them to resources that address the underlying issues that contribute to challenging behaviors, there is a triple benefit of better outcomes for youth, better outcomes for schools, and significant cost savings.”

Governor Malloy and Commissioner Wentzell today visited Wallace Middle School in Waterbury, where notable progress has been made implementing SBDI. During the 2015-16 school year, school-based court referrals at Wallace decreased by 55 percent, while EMPS referrals increased by the same amount. Additionally, over the past year the school has seen a 53 percent decrease in out-of-school suspensions and a 43 percent decrease in in-school suspensions. School-based arrests also have decreased 71 percent to a total of seven so far this year.

The progress is the result of a network of school and community-based programs that are working in concert to meet students’ unique mental, emotional and behavioral health needs. For example, Wallace hosts Staywell Health Center, a health clinic that offers medical, dental, and mental health services to students and their families on the school’s campus. The school has also convened chronic absenteeism and prevention teams in order help to ensure students are consistently in school and connected to the resources they need to be successful.

Community-based collaborators include Wellmore Behavioral Health, the Waterbury Police Athletic League, the Waterbury Youth Services Truancy Program, and Intensive In-home Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services, among others. Waterbury Public Schools has established a memorandum of agreement with Wellmore and meets with them monthly to review data, track referrals, and improve care for local youth and families.

Waterbury Public Schools Superintendent Kathleen Ouellette said administrators and staff have tackled this issue by enhancing working relationships among staff, students and families in order to enrich the overall school climate. This focus has yielded a number of benefits, including a consistent yearly decrease in the use of exclusionary discipline from 2012 to the present.

“We are grateful to Governor Malloy and Commissioner Wentzell for their support of the School-Based Diversion Initiative at Wallace Middle School and other district schools,” Superintendent Ouellette said. “Wallace Middle School, along with other Waterbury schools, has been committed to improving the discipline practices by identifying those techniques that have proven effective and those that need to be improved. Waterbury has experienced remarkable success through implementation of the SBDI program.”

During the 2016-17 school year, a total of 18 schools serving 14,798 students in Bridgeport, Waterbury, New Haven, West Haven, Windham, and within the Connecticut Technical High School System are participating in SBDI. To date, the program has served 37 schools across 13 school districts.

Among the first cohort of 18 schools participating in SBDI from 2010-2015, school-based court referrals decreased by 45 percent and referrals to behavioral health services increased 94 percent in their first year of participation.

More information about SBDI can be found on [CHDI’s website \(http://www.chdi.org/our-work/mental-health/school-based-mental-health/sbdi/\)](http://www.chdi.org/our-work/mental-health/school-based-mental-health/sbdi/).

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