

Preventing Student Arrests in Schools:
The Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative

Although overall numbers of juvenile arrests are declining, the arrest of students while in school continues to be a growing concern in Connecticut as well as nationally. This issue is gaining considerable attention. In fact, in just the last week an article published in the journal *Pediatrics* reported that approximately 1 out of 3 American youth are arrested for a crime by age 23.[1] Another article, published by the New Haven Independent CT Health I-Team and featured on NPR-CT, reported that from March through May of this year, more than 700 arrests were made in Connecticut schools and describes statewide and local efforts to tackle the problem.[2] One such effort is the Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative ([SBDI](#)).

The Connecticut Center for Effective Practice ([CCEP](#)) of the Child Health and Development Institute ([CHDI](#)) coordinates implementation of this initiative in 13 schools across seven school districts over the past three years including: Bridgeport, Southington, East Hartford, Meriden, Manchester, Stamford, and Waterbury communities. SBDI was developed as a component of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation *Models for Change Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network*. SBDI is currently supported and overseen by the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division and the Department of Children and Families.

The goals of the Connecticut SBDI are to:

- Enhance knowledge and skill development among key school professionals relating to mental health, juvenile justice, and collaborating with community resources
- Reduce the use of in-school arrests and other exclusionary discipline practices
- Increase utilization of school- and community-based mental health services and supports

To prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system, SBDI works with schools to:

- Partner with their local Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) team to provide immediate, face to face crisis stabilization and linkage services
- Work with local police and School Resource Officers to increase the capacity to appropriately respond to youth with mental health needs
- Train school professionals to recognize mental health symptoms and needs and increase awareness of community-based resources for meeting those needs
- Review and revise school policies and procedures to ensure disciplinary practices that are fair and equitable for all students
- Develop and implement a Graduated Response Model of discipline intervention
- Collect and analyze data to evaluate program implementation and outcomes

SBDI is working. Results of a 2011 external evaluation by Yale University indicated that communities with SBDI have reduced rates of arrest and re-arrest, compared to non-SBDI communities—even after controlling for race, age, gender, and previous arrests. Data also indicate that increased utilization of EMPS is an effective alternative to arrest.

To learn more about this initiative, please contact Jeana Bracey at: bracey@uchc.edu or 860-679-1524.

[1] Brame, R., Turner, M.G., Paternoster, R., & Bushway, S.D. (2010). Cumulative prevalence of arrests from ages 8 to 23 in a national sample. *Pediatrics*; Originally published online December 19, 2011; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2010-3710

[2] Chedekel, L. (2011, December 13). School arrests bring new scrutiny, reforms. Retrieved from http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/health/entry/school_arrests_bring_new_scrutiny_reforms/

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