



FACT SHEET

School-based arrests

Across Connecticut, there are examples of arrests in our public schools that simply don't make sense. A fifth-grader gave another child a weggie on the bus and was arrested. One district has students arrested for possession of tobacco. In our state and nationally, people who work in the juvenile justice system say that more kids get arrested in school today than a generation ago.

How common are school-based arrests?

That's the million-dollar question. Neither police nor school districts are required to track them. Though people who work with at-risk kids tell us that there's been a radical increase in school arrests over the past 20 years, no one can put an exact figure on the problem because until recently little public information was available.

A reasonable balance

Schools need to be safe and orderly places for all children to learn. But behavior can be managed in most cases without resorting to arrest. In school districts that have made a commitment to minimizing arrest, disturbing incidents such as students bringing weapons to school actually decreased. That's because adults were connecting with kids and working on appropriate behavior long before problems escalated to the danger point.

What's being done in Connecticut?

Connecticut is beginning to collect school-based arrest data. State courts recently began tracking arrests by school location, as have some police departments. This paves the way to address the problem locally. For example, we now know that between March and May 2011, approximately two-thirds of arrests in Connecticut schools were for minor offenses like breach of peace. We know that more than half of all 2008 juvenile arrests in Waterbury occurred during school hours. Moving forward, more data will help us understand which schools and districts are the biggest offenders, and for which minor offenses kids are disproportionately arrested instead of handled by teachers or school administrators.

Many teachers never receive instruction in classroom management as part of their training, happily, this training will be a requirement in teacher preparation programs beginning in 2012.

School-wide efforts to build community in schools have shown great success in reducing disciplinary problems while raising academic achievement. More attention is being paid to "school climate," meaning the overall atmosphere of a school, in particular the quality of relationships between adults and students.

What can I do?

A new law (PA 11-232) requires for the first time that Connecticut public schools assess their climate and create Safe School Climate Plans. You can ask your local school or district about this plan.

On our project website (ctjja.org/forum), you'll find a how-to guide for citizen groups to get school arrest information in their own communities.