



Questions about School-Based Arrests

1. When you were in school, what happened if a child was disobedient or disruptive in class?

People will likely say things like: get sent to the principal's office, parents called, detention. Were these kinds of discipline generally effective?

2. Is there a public perception that kids are “out-of-control” and that they need a stronger hand? Where does this perception come from?

According to the FBI Universal Crime reports, youth crime (particularly violent crime) has been decreasing since the 1990s. If we hear of one horrible crime committed by a teen, why do we tend to generalize that to apply to all kids? Is it reality or the media?

3. We heard a lot in the documentary about low student achievement. Would you like to see the resources we spend arresting kids in school instead spent on appropriate school resources like guidance, social workers, etc.?

Every time a child is arrested in school, that means time spent by school administrators and police officers and often judges, public defenders, parole officers, workers in juvenile facilities and DCF social workers. It's one of the most expensive things we can do with a child.

Would those resources be better used: hiring more classroom aides, starting a mentor program, developing more afterschool activities to engage kids?

4. What kinds of resources do educators need to avoid arrests in schools?

Schools and individual teachers are judged on how well children do on standardized tests. Is this the best – or the only – measure that should get attention? Does your school offer teachers training in classroom management? What about programs that foster citizenship or improve the “climate” throughout the school? Is there peer mediation, peer tutoring, mentoring, etc.?

In some communities, schools, police and others have entered into formal agreements to limit school arrests. (You'll find copies of those agreements on the project website if you'd like to undertake a similar project in your community.) These agreements use a “Graduated Response Model,” and identify which types of ‘acting out’ behavior should be handled by a teacher, an administrator, and (last resort) by a police officer.

A new law (PA 11-232) requires for the first time that CT public schools assess their climate and create Safe School Climate Plans. School climate is the overall atmosphere of a school, in particular the quality of relationships between adults and students. You can ask your local school or district about this plan.

5. Zero tolerance policies were originally meant to apply only to guns.. Now they are much broader. What do we lose when we stop taking the actual circumstances of an incident into consideration?

Of course we cannot tolerate acts that endanger children or school personnel. But does a shoving match on the playground rise to that level? If a Boy Scout brings a camping utensil to school, should we consider that a weapon?

Should teachers and administrators have more opportunity to use their experience and common sense?

Should families be more involved in discipline matters?