



Keeping Kids in Class: School Discipline in Connecticut, 2008-2013 Executive Summary

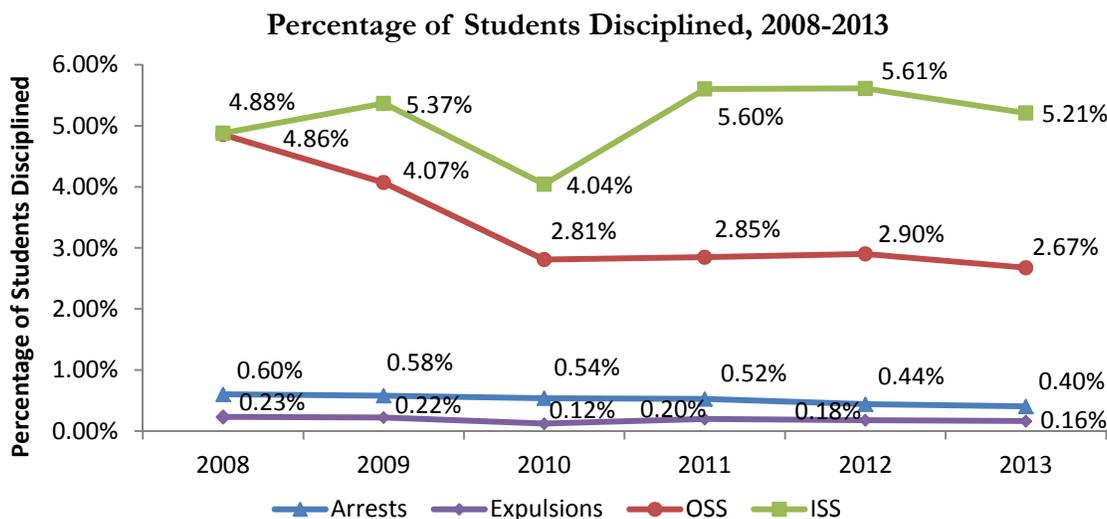
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Children learn best when they are in school. Despite this commonly-held (and common sense) wisdom, exclusionary discipline practices like school arrests, expulsions, and suspensions occur all too often in Connecticut. Extensive research shows that excluding children from school for disciplinary problems is often ineffective and even counterproductive. Pushing children out of school increases the likelihood of later dropout, as well as a host of other negative life outcomes with significant financial and social harm to both the individual and his community. In many cases, behaviors for which students are being arrested, expelled, or suspended could be prevented through earlier intervention and better access to services, or handled more effectively with lower-level school-based sanctions that address the true source of the misbehavior and work to correct it. Arrests, expulsions, and suspensions are often costly, ineffective, and unnecessary.

Key findings for 2008-2013 include:

The number of students arrested, expelled, and suspended in Connecticut has decreased significantly since 2008. In the 2012-13 school year (hereinafter 2013):

- Connecticut schools arrested **34.8%** fewer students than in 2008.
- Connecticut schools expelled **31.0%** fewer students than in 2008.
- Connecticut schools suspended **46.5%** fewer students out-of-school than in 2008.



Despite the overall reduction in exclusionary school discipline, too many students are pushed out of school for “School Policy Violations” (such as skipping class, insubordination, or using profanity) that could be more effectively handled in the classroom. In 2013:

- Almost one in ten (9%) of student arrests involved non-criminal violations of school policy.
- 6% of expulsions in 2013 involved non-criminal violations of school policy.
- 50% of all out-of-school suspensions involved non-criminal violations of school policy.
- 79% of all in-school suspensions involved non-criminal violations of school policy.

Schools continue to suspend, expel, and arrest minority students, special education students, and students from poorer districts at rates disproportionate to their representation in the student population. In 2013:

- Black students were **4.7 times** more likely to be arrested, **4.9 times** more likely to be expelled, and **6.5 times** more likely to be suspended out-of-school than white students.
- Hispanic/Latino students were **3.1 times** more likely to be arrested, **2.6 times** more likely to be expelled, and **4.4 times** more likely to be suspended out-of-school than white students.
- Special education students were **3.0 times** more likely to be arrested, **1.8 times** more likely to be expelled, **2.6 times** as likely to receive out-of-school suspensions, and **2.0 times** more likely to receive in-school suspensions than general education students.
- Students in the poorest urban areas were arrested nearly **23 times** more often, expelled over **17 times** more often, suspended out-of-school **24 times** more often, and suspended in-school nearly **10 times** more often than students in the wealthiest suburban areas.

Conclusion and Recommendations

While the percentage of students arrested, expelled, and suspended from Connecticut schools has significantly declined since 2008, the absolute number of students forced out of school remains high, and troubling racial, educational, and socioeconomic disparities continue to exist and must be addressed. The following recommendations arise from successful community programs as well as state and national best practices:

Understand the scope of the school discipline problem in order to effectively address it:

- **Clearly define “student arrest.”** A clear definition will help eliminate inconsistencies in how various stakeholders and data reporters interpret the term and allow for more accurate comparisons across districts.
- **Collect and publish complete data on student arrests.** Districts should be required to report any and all school arrests, with data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, education status, English Language Learner (ELL) status, and free and reduced price lunch status. These data should be made easily accessible to the general public in a timely, consistent fashion.

Ensure schools, police, and the community work together to keep students in class:

- **Implement memoranda of agreement (MOAs) between schools and police.** MOAs, which are already being used successfully in some communities, delineate what situations should be handled by school staff instead of police, and improve the transparency, uniformity, and fairness of school discipline policies.
- **Promote police and educator training,** such as that provided by the state’s Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, which offers instruction to officers and educators in understanding and responding productively to adolescent behavior.
- **Establish and support community collaboratives across the state.** National studies show that engaging all stakeholders in the discipline process positively impacts student behavior and achievement.

Implement preventative strategies and alternative disciplinary measures that take into account racial and other disparities and ensure those excluded from school are provided equal opportunities:

- **Conduct ongoing conversations with educators about disciplinary disparities and biases** in order to ensure that disciplinary measures are meted out fairly.
- **Promote restorative practices** which teach students how to de-escalate conflict and take responsibility for their actions in order to repair relationships.
- **Provide high-quality alternative educational settings and support services for students who must be removed from school** in order to ensure that these students do not fall behind and thus face further barriers to achievement.
- **Expand access to behavioral and mental health services and utilize Juvenile Review Boards (JRBs),** locally-run groups that offer a diversionary alternative to the court system for youth who have committed minor delinquent acts or misdemeanors.