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## **Report: Fewer Students Excluded from Classroom in CT But Racial and Income Disparities in School Discipline Remain**

Fewer students are being excluded from the classroom through suspensions, expulsions, and arrests in recent years, according to a new report by Connecticut Voices for Children. However, many of these discipline measures were used for behaviors that were probably not criminal and could likely have been handled within the school. In addition, racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline rates suggest a need for more uniform criteria in decisions about suspensions, arrests, and expulsions of students.

“This report tells us that many schools in Connecticut have reformed their disciplinary practices and reduced student arrests, expulsions and out-of-school suspensions,” said Ellen Shemitz, Executive Director of Connecticut Voices for Children. “Yet these reforms have not benefited all children equally. How can we hope to reduce the yawning achievement gap when school disciplinary practices push minority children out of school at disproportionate rates?”

Among the findings of the report, which examined school records for the 2012-13 school year:

- **The number of students arrested, expelled, and suspended in Connecticut has decreased significantly in recent years.** In the 2013 school year, Connecticut schools arrested 35% fewer students, expelled 31% fewer students, and gave out of school suspensions to 47% fewer students than in 2008.
- **Despite the overall reduction in these “exclusionary” school discipline practices, many students are still removed from the classroom for non-criminal behaviors that could be managed in the classroom.** “School policy violations” – such as skipping class, insubordination, or using profanity – were involved in 9% of student arrests, 6% of expulsions, 50% of out-of-school suspensions, and 79% of in-school suspensions in 2013.
- **Suspension, expulsion and arrest rates were much higher for minority students, special education students, and students from poorer districts.** 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. Similarly, Hispanic 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 arrested at 3 times the rate of general education students, and they were 1.8 times more likely to be expelled,

and 2.6 times more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions. Students in the poorest urban areas (District Reference Group, or DRG I) were arrested nearly 23 times more often, expelled over 17 times more often, and suspended out-of-school 24 times more often than students in the wealthiest suburban areas (DRG A).

To reduce unnecessary exclusion of students from the classroom, Connecticut Voices' report made several recommendations, including proposals that state policymakers and the State Department of Education should:

- Improve data collection by clearly defining “student arrests” (not currently defined by the state) and collecting and publishing data on all student arrests (currently not required for all incidents resulting in arrests).
- Require districts with police stationed in schools to create a memorandum of agreement between the schools and police that sets ground rules concerning arrests.
- Implement preventive strategies and alternative discipline measures to reduce racial and other disparities and ensure those excluded from school are provided equal opportunities.

“Children need a respectful learning environment, but excluding children from school for disciplinary reasons is not effective and may widen our educational achievement gaps,” said Sarah Iverson, Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices and co-author of the report. “Many schools are effective at managing problem student behaviors while keeping children in the classroom, and we should share lessons about what works.”

Connecticut Voices for Children is a research and advocacy organization that works to improve opportunities for the state’s children, youth and families. The report, “Keeping Kids in Class: School Discipline in Connecticut, 2008-2013,” is available on the Connecticut Voices website at [www.ctvoices.org](http://www.ctvoices.org).

**[Note to reporters: For district-level data on student arrests, expulsions, and suspensions see the appendix of the full report.]**

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