

## Persistent Racial Inequality in School Arrest Rates in Connecticut

Alexandra Ricks

November 2016

School arrests—and other forms of exclusionary discipline that cause students to miss class time—are associated with lower graduation rates and lower academic achievement.<sup>1</sup> If the arrest leads to juvenile justice system involvement, negative outcomes for youth can also include higher unemployment and adult incarceration rates.<sup>2</sup> In 2016, the Connecticut General Assembly passed P.A. 15-168, an act that defines school-based arrests and draws attention to racial disparities in exclusionary discipline rates across the state. Developments such as this call for an updated examination of racial disparities in student arrests.

Connecticut Voices for Children’s report of 2010-11 data “Arresting Development: Student Arrests in Connecticut”<sup>3</sup> and our report of 2012-13 data in “Keeping Kids in Class: School Discipline in Connecticut”<sup>4</sup> provided evidence of racial disparities in school arrest rates. In this analysis of 2014-15 data, we find that those gaps still exist.<sup>5</sup> **Although the overall number of school arrests has decreased across the state, the decline has not been equal across racial groups and large racial/ethnic gaps in arrest rates persist.**

Figure 1: School Arrest Rates per 1,000 Declined in Connecticut

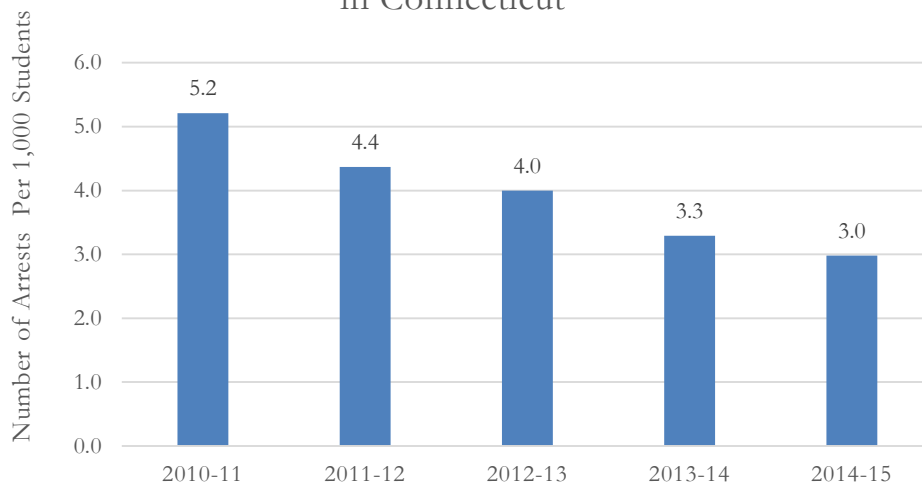


Figure 1 Source: State Department of Education (SDE) data

School arrest totals and rates are declining in Connecticut, but the decline has not occurred at the same rates for all students. Between 2010-2011 and 2014-15, the yearly count of school arrests decreased from 2,942 to 1,628 total arrests, a decline of 45%. Moreover, Figure 1, above, shows that this decline was not only due to declining student enrollment; the school arrest rate declined by more than two arrests/1,000 students between 2010-11 and 2014-15, a 42% decrease.

While the rates of school arrests declined across the board, the decline was unequal; improvements occurred more substantially for white, Asian, and Latino students than for black, mixed (two or more races), and American Indian students. The data shows:

- The arrest rate decreased 71% for Asian students, 49% for Latino students, and 47% for white students between 2010-11 and 2014-15.
- However, it only decreased 37% for black students and 35% for mixed students.
- Moreover, it did not decrease for American Indian students in that period.

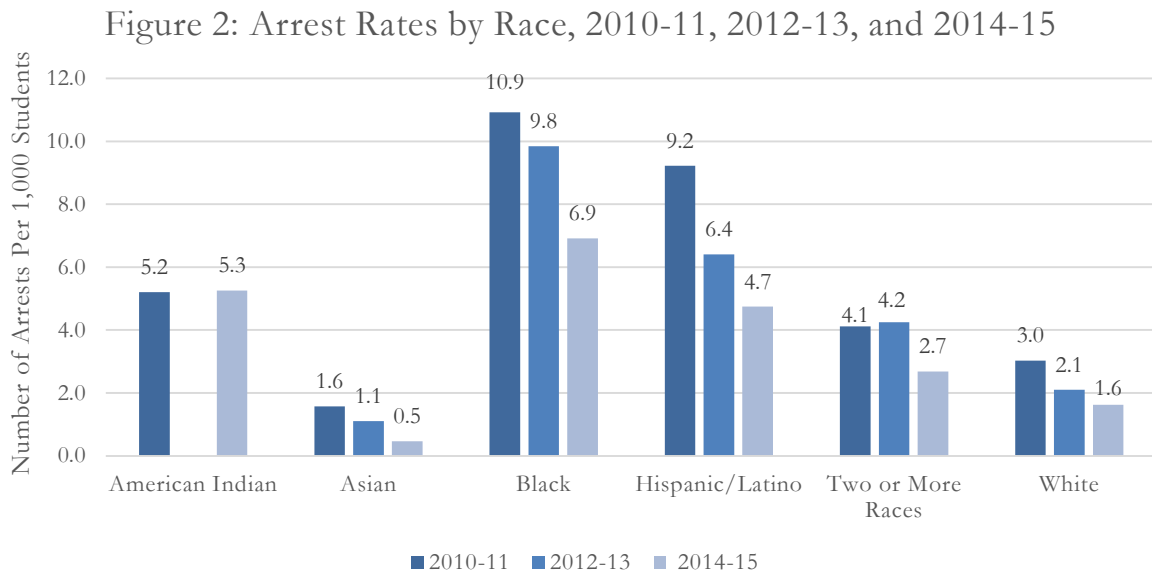


Figure 2 Source: State Department of Education (SDE) data. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander data is excluded, as is American Indian data for 2012-13.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 2 depicts how, despite the decreased school arrest rates, racial disparities remained, for instance:

- Black students had the highest school arrest rates of 6.9 arrests/1,000 black students, a rate over four times higher than that of white students.
- The school arrest rate of Latino students—4.7/1,000 Latino students—was nearly three times that of white students.

Together, on average, black and Latino students experienced school arrests rates 3.4 times higher than white students in 2014-15. This disparity is similar to in 2010-11, when blacks and Latinos had an arrest rate 3.3 times higher than white students and in 2012-13 when these students had an arrest rate 3.7 times higher than white students.

The credit for the declines in student arrest rates across the board could be attributable to ongoing programs aimed at decreasing student arrests and the racial disparities in school arrest rates. First, in 2009, the Children’s Health and Development Institute began the School Based Diversion Initiative to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, including school arrests. The program currently works with 21 schools in 10 school districts to 1) train school professionals, 2) forge connections between schools and community mental health service providers, and 3) revise exclusionary discipline policies.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, in 2011, in an effort to encourage schools to handle typical adolescent behavior in-house, the Judicial Branch’s Court

Support Services Division began to refuse to process arrests for minor complaints and return them to the schools for handling.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, several organizations have promoted arrest reduction through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between school districts and local police departments where schools have school-based law enforcement officers called School Resource Officers (SROs); by 2013, at least 11 districts had implemented them through a Juvenile Justice Advisory Council competitive grant and several others had participated in a pilot program promoted by the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance.<sup>9</sup> Recently, the importance of MOUs was codified by the Connecticut General Assembly's law (PA 15-168) mandating that districts with SROs must develop such MOUs with local police.<sup>10</sup>

While the decline in school arrest rates and the ongoing existence of multiple programs and pieces of legislation to further reduce them is encouraging, the persistence of racial disparities causes concern. That the declines did not occur as quickly for black, mixed, and American Indian students begs further research into why the programs are less effective for these groups and what additional work can be done. Additionally, while the correlation of the creation of programs and legislation to reduce student arrests with declining rates represents a promising trend, we need more research to establish true causality. Answers to these questions, hopefully, can extend these successful efforts to further decrease student arrests for all students.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gary Sweeten, "Who Will Graduate? Disruption of High School Education by Arrest and Court Involvement," *Justice Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (December 2006): 462–80., [http://www.masslegalservices.org/system/files/library/H.S.ed\\_and\\_arrest\\_-\\_ct\\_involvement\\_study\\_by\\_Sweeten.pdf](http://www.masslegalservices.org/system/files/library/H.S.ed_and_arrest_-_ct_involvement_study_by_Sweeten.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> John Hagan and Ronit Dinovitzer, "Collateral Consequences of Imprisonment for Children, Communities, and Prisoners," *The University of Chicago*, 1999, [http://individual.utoronto.ca/dinovitzer/Publications/Hagan\\_Dinovitzer\\_1999.pdf](http://individual.utoronto.ca/dinovitzer/Publications/Hagan_Dinovitzer_1999.pdf); Robert Sampson and John Laub, *Crime in the Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Etsy, "Arresting Development: Student Arrests in Connecticut | Connecticut Voices for Children" (Connecticut Voices for Children, September 2013), <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/arresting-development-student-arrests-connecticut>.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Iverson, Edie Joseph, and Cyd Oppenheimer, "Keeping Kids in Class: School Discipline in Connecticut, 2008-2013 | Connecticut Voices for Children" (Connecticut Voices for Children, February 2015), <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/jj15schoolarrestsreport.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> These rates were calculated using data from an August 2015 data request from the State Department of Education (SDE). In keeping with "Arrested Development" these rates were calculated as the number of arrests per 1,000 students. For example, if there were 1,500 students in category A and there were 14 counts of arrests of students in category A, that would be a rate of 9.3 arrests/1,000. To ensure student confidentiality, counts between one and five were redacted by SDE. As such, counts of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students for all years and American Indian students for 2012-13 were not included.

<sup>6</sup> In 2010-11 and 2014-15, the numbers of arrests of American Indian students were ten and eight respectively. As SDE redacts counts from one to five, the redaction of 2012-13 school arrests of American Indian students means that fewer than five arrests were made in schools that year.

<sup>7</sup> Associated Press, "Connecticut Focuses on Reducing School Arrests," *Connecticut Post*, January 24, 2015, <http://www.ctpost.com/local/article/Connecticut-focuses-on-reducing-school-arrests-6037936.php>; Jeana R. Bracey, Yecenia Casiano, and Jeffrey Vanderploeg, "Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative" (Connecticut School Based Diversion Initiative, January 2015), [http://www.ctsbdi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/SBDI\\_ONEpager\\_brief\\_Jan2015.pdf](http://www.ctsbdi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/SBDI_ONEpager_brief_Jan2015.pdf); "Improving School Discipline Practices and Reducing School-Based Arrests in Connecticut," Issue Brief (Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Inc., January 15, 2014), [http://www.chdi.org/files/1314/1168/2848/issue\\_brief\\_28.pdf](http://www.chdi.org/files/1314/1168/2848/issue_brief_28.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> "Adult Decisions: Connecticut Rethinks Student Arrests" (Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, January 2013), <http://www.ctjja.org/resources/pdf/CTJJA-AdultDecisions-WhitePaper.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *An Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and School Resource Officers and the Collection and Reporting of Data on School-Based Arrests*, 2015, <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2015/act/pa/2015PA-00168-R00HB-06834-PA.htm>.