

Police Can Reduce Student Misbehavior Without Arrest

Three-Prong Strategy Has Reduced Racial Disparities

Executive Summary

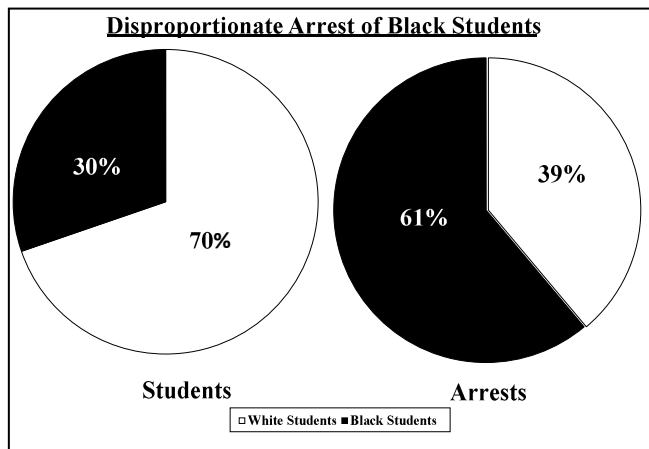
Student arrests are not effective at reducing acting out behavior, and the overuse of arrest is particularly harmful to minority students. Maryland can become a leader in reducing racial disparities by training police in: the availability and effectiveness of alternatives to arrests; the use of objective risk assessments and arrest protocols; and understanding of youth development across diverse cultures, ethnicities and races.

Background

Some students act out in school. The challenge is what to do about it. One approach is to arrest students and send them through the formal juvenile justice system. Another approach is to provide students with services that address the reasons for the misbehavior. This issue brief examines the extent to which these two approaches are used in Maryland for minority and non-minority students and discusses effective strategies to reduce disruptive behavior in school.

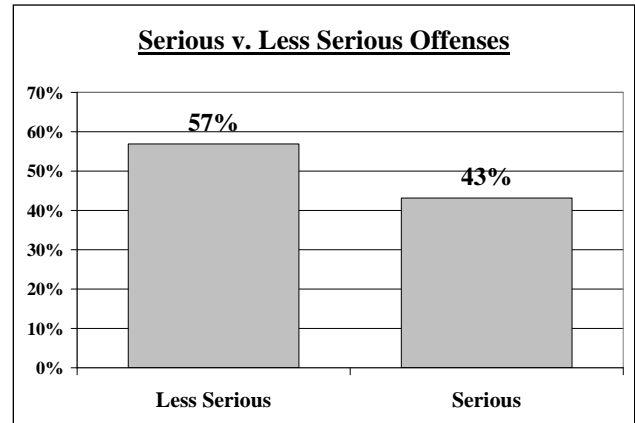
Use of Arrests for Student Misbehavior

Black students in Maryland are arrested at 3.6 times the rate as white students, as reflected below:¹



¹ The percentage of total arrests in school is 14 percent, based on an analysis by the Family League of Baltimore City. ACY applied this to the statewide arrest figures for Black and white youth and compared it to the student population by race for the 2008-09 school year.

Nearly 60 percent of these arrests are for less serious offenses.²



Strategies to Reduce Disruptive Behavior

Additional training of police can significantly reduce disruptive behavior. This cultural competency training has three important parts.

Three Prongs

First, police are trained about the availability and effectiveness of alternatives to arrests. Some police officers may not know about the various programs available to help students and their families address the causes of misbehavior. They may not fully appreciate the effectiveness of these services or realize that students may be less likely to receive services in the formal juvenile justice system.

Clayton County Public Schools in Georgia, for example, created school conflict workshops, with roundtable discussions with adults exiting the criminal justice system, role playing of actions, and teaching youth the legal definitions and consequences of their crimes. Police agreed to refer students to these workshops for initial, non-serious offenses.

Second, police are trained on the use of objective risk assessments and arrest protocols. These help

² Less serious offenses: fighting, disorderly conduct, destruction of property, misdemeanor possession of a controlled substance and trespassing. Source: Family League for Baltimore City.



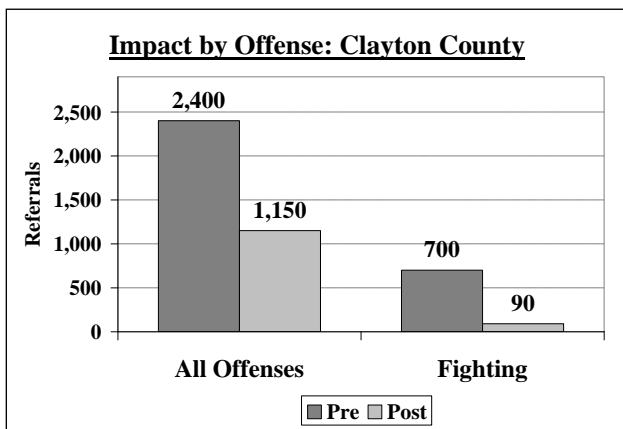
officers use consistent criteria in deciding whether to make an arrest. They do not preclude discretion and judgment, but they help reduce unintended bias in making complex decisions.

In Clayton County, the public school system, police department and juvenile court agreed to a three-tiered approach. For the first offense, students received a warning notice and were required to attend a school conflict workshop. For the second offense in the same year, students received another warning and were required to attend another workshop, this time with their parent or guardian. Only after the third offense was arrest an option.

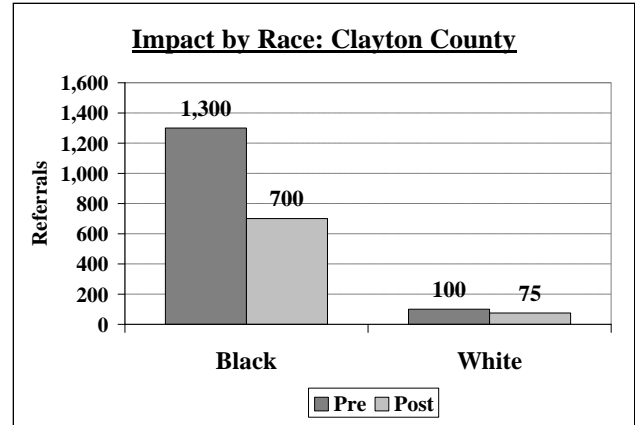
Third, police are taught about how to communicate with and understand youth, particularly those from different cultures, ethnicities and races. In Connecticut, police officers are trained in specific areas for dealing with youth and reducing juvenile arrests, particularly among minorities. They discuss disproportionate minority contact, information on adolescent development and ways to increase positive interaction with youth. Similar training has occurred in Baltimore City.

Impact

The results of this approach in Clayton County were immediate and significant. There was a 52-percent drop in student misbehavior, including an 87-percent drop in student fighting. The impact was particularly strong for African-American students.³



³ Clayton County Public Schools, *Blue Ribbon Commission on School Discipline* (Jan. 2007).



Implications for Maryland

Based on a survey of school districts by Advocates for Children and Youth, the vast majority of arrests in schools are made by officers employed by local police and sheriff’s departments. They are not employed by school districts, and they did not take the job specifically to work in schools or with students. These officers, even those based in schools, have not received the full benefit of the three-part cultural competency training described above. Pre-service training requirements are set by the Maryland Police Training Commission. Police officers must then take 16 hours of in-service training annually. None of these hours need relate to cultural competency in working with students.

Recommendations

Maryland can become a national leader in reducing student misbehavior without arrests by combining the best parts of the strategies used by Clayton County and Connecticut.

1. The Maryland Police Training Commission can require cultural competency pre- and in-service training by police.
2. The Maryland State Board of Education can require local school districts to establish agreements with local police departments and juvenile courts to provide services in lieu of arrests for the first instances of non-serious offenses in schools.
3. The Maryland State Department of Education can require school districts to report on arrests for school-based behavior by offense and race each school year to enable tracking of disproportionate use of arrests for minority students.