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Gov. Malloy: Program that Effectively Disrupts School-to-Prison Pipeline Should be Expanded

(HARTFORD, CT) - Governor Dannel P. Malloy today visited the Sarah J. Rawson School in Hartford to highlight the school's success in disrupting the pathway to the juvenile justice system through Connecticut's School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI). Expansion of the SBDI program into the six school districts with the highest arrest rates for school offenses is part of Governor Malloy's Second Chance Society legislative package.

"We need to end the school-to-prison pipeline, because our focus should be on building modern classrooms, not modern jail cells. This expansion is simply a smart decision today to give children a brighter future tomorrow," said Governor Malloy. "We need to become a Second Chance Society, but we also need to take steps towards preventing crime in the first place. This is a program that delivers for our students, families and communities. Even as we have driven crime down to historic lows, we need to redouble our efforts to reduce it even more-and an expansion of SBDI will do just that."

SBDI has successfully helped 21 schools in 10 Connecticut school districts reduce school-based arrests while connecting at-risk students to behavioral health services. Since 2010, SBDI schools on average reduced court-referrals by 45% in their first year of participation and increased behavioral health service referrals to Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) by 94%.

"We need to do our best to keep kids in school and out of court, especially for behavioral and non-violent offenses," said Judge Bernadette Conway, Chief Administrative Judge, Juvenile Matters, State of Connecticut. "The costs of incarceration to the child, family, school and state are too great."

Incarcerating a child in Connecticut can cost up to \$607 per day and \$221,705 per year according to data from the [Justice Policy Institute \(http://www.justicepolicy.org/StickerShock\)](http://www.justicepolicy.org/StickerShock) . Unfortunately, schools are one of the primary referral sources to the juvenile justice system. Once a child is arrested they are twice as likely to drop out of school.

Research also shows that court referrals and suspensions disproportionately impact children of color and children with special education and mental health needs. In fact, 65-70 percent of youth in juvenile detention have a diagnosable behavioral health condition.

SBDI equips schools to connect students with behavioral issues to community-based behavioral health services using Connecticut's Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) and promotes the use of restorative disciplinary practices as alternatives to arrest.

School leaders at Hartford's Rawson School implemented SBDI in the 2012-13 school year. In that first year, they decreased court referrals by 92% and increased their EMPS referrals five times over the previous year. These results have been sustained over time.

"SBDI shifted our focus from punishing behavior problems to promoting behavioral health and from crisis management to prevention," said Michael Valerio, dean of students. "The initiative improved every aspect of our school from classroom management to school climate to parent engagement."

The Governor's budget proposal increases the state's investment to \$1 million per year to help disrupt the pathway to the juvenile justice system in more schools and ensure that more students are connected to the mental health supports they need.

"It's clear from the research that young people who are at-risk of arrest, expulsion and suspension have higher rates of mental health needs and are at risk for academic difficulties. A coordinated partnership between state agencies to address this issue is a unique and effective strategy," said Dr. Jeffrey Vanderploeg, Vice President for Mental Health Initiatives at the Child Health and Development Institute.

The Child Health and Development Institute (<http://www.chdi.org/>) serves as the SBDI Coordinating Center. Currently, the program is jointly funded by four State agencies: the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division, the State Department of Education, the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

"The Court Support Services Division is pleased to be part of the School Based Diversion Initiative to reduce school-based arrests, while increasing access to behavioral health services for students in need. This program has been very successful and we hope that every school, student, and parent in the state can have access to this wonderful opportunity to keep students in school and out of court," said Court Support Services Division Executive Director Stephen R. Grant.

"Keeping children out of court and keeping them engaged in school is a critical component for positive life outcomes for our students," said Interim Education Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell.

"Unmet behavioral and mental health needs pose a serious challenge for some students. That's why

programs such as SBDI are critically important to ensuring we prepare all our students for success."

"Giving schools access to services to respond to children with mental health or substance abuse treatment needs is a key strategy for enhancing the children's behavioral health service system and is a far better response than to invoke law enforcement and the court system," said Department of Children and Families Commissioner Joette Katz. "Connecticut's School-Based Diversion Initiative is a tremendous partnership across our sister agencies and the private service sector and represents an important step forward in improving our response to youths with treatment needs."

"I believe there is a real benefit to the state's diversion programs, particularly those focused on early engagement with our youth population," said Department of Correction Commissioner Scott Semple. "The Connecticut Department of Correction is grateful to be part of these critical conversations, as we move forward with our agency strategies that complement the Governor's Second Chance Society."

"Our experiences with young adults have demonstrated how interventions that link to age appropriate school- and community-based services can improve outcomes" said Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Acting Commissioner Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon.

"Connecticut's School-Based Diversion Initiative is another example of a similar intervention that can change the path children with behavioral health needs may take, promoting healthier choices, offering support and alternatives."

Learn more at www.chdi.org/sbdi (<http://www.chdi.org/sbdi>) .

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