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**Innovative Program Reduces Arrests in Connecticut Schools
by Addressing Unmet Student Mental Health Needs**

*State's School-Based Diversion Initiative Unique in Helping Schools
Prevent Arrests through Coordinated Mental Health Interventions*

There is a growing concern in Connecticut and nationally about the negative and lasting impact school arrests have on youth. School arrests are often the first contact youth have with the juvenile justice system, often followed by a cycle of repeat arrests, academic failure and eventually school drop-out. An innovative intervention program, the [School-Based Diversion Initiative](#), is attempting to change that cycle in Connecticut by identifying at risk students and providing them with effective mental health services as an alternative to arrest.

"We know that many youth arrested in schools have unmet mental health needs," said Bob Franks, Vice President of the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut ([CHDI](#)). "In fact, up to 65% of youth in juvenile detention have a diagnosable behavioral health condition. The good news is that we are now diverting many of these kids from police to community-based mental health providers who can offer them the services they need."

Connecticut's School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) is a comprehensive and highly effective intervention program aimed at reducing the use of in-school arrests and other exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension or expulsion. SBDI offers training to teachers and school professionals to identify children with behavioral health problems and connect them to school and community-based mental health services and supports. The program also uses Connecticut's statewide Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services ([EMPS](#)) teams to provide immediate, face-to-face crisis stabilization and linkage to services. This service is available for all schools to use throughout the state as an alternative to calling law enforcement.

SBDI was developed in Connecticut as a component of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Models for Change Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network. SBDI is currently supported and overseen by the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division and the Department of Children and Families. The [Connecticut Center for Effective Practice](#) at CHDI coordinates implementation of the initiative. Started as a pilot program in two communities in 2009-10 and now serving 13 schools across seven school districts, SBDI was recognized nationally as part of the MacArthur Foundation's 2011 Champions for Change Awards. Participating communities include: Bridgeport, Southington, East Hartford, Meriden, Manchester, Stamford, and Waterbury.

Results show that the program is working. A 2011 external evaluation indicated that communities with SBDI have reduced rates of arrest and re-arrest compared to non-SBDI communities - even after controlling for race, age, gender, and previous arrests. Further

data collected from participating SBDI schools in 2010-2011 indicate that in-school arrests dropped 50-59% per school. In addition, crisis intervention by utilization of EMPS tripled, while ambulance calls decreased by up to 22%.

The 2011 evaluation results are leading many to advocate for statewide expansion of the SBDI program as a means of reducing in-school arrest rates and enabling schools to address disciplinary problems in a more effective, sustainable manner. This initiative has the potential not only to help children access the services and supports they need and divert them from the juvenile justice system, but also to save taxpayers the enormous costs related to arrests, court involvement and incarceration.

For more information, see CHDI's latest Issue Brief: [Preventing Student Arrests in Schools: The Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative](#)

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