

Love what we do? Become a supporter of journalism today!

Powered by PressPatron

Paid for by shareholders.

“We have a bold vision to be a catalyst for clean energy.”
—Joe Nolan

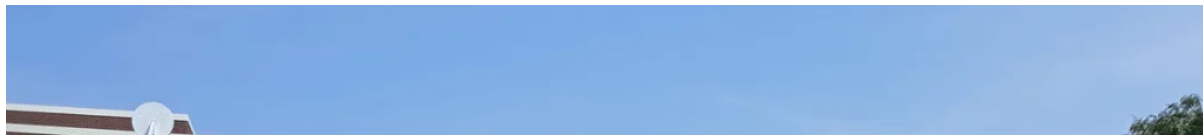


Juvenile Justice

Study: Police Referrals Disproportionately Affect Students With Disabilities

by **Lisa Backus**

September 13, 2021, 5:00 am

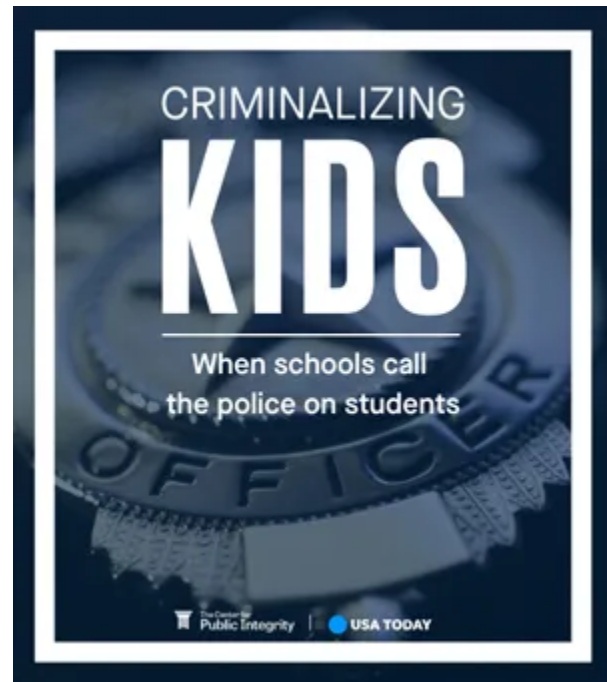


Close



In more than two dozen high schools throughout the state, students with disabilities made up nearly half of the referrals to police for in-school behavior during the 2017-18 school year according to federal data analyzed by the Center for Public Integrity.

The organization **analyzed** U.S. Department of Education data from all 50 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico and found that school policing disproportionately affects students with disabilities, Black children and, in some states, Latino children.



In Connecticut, at least one school – Bristol Eastern High School – showed all 28 referrals to a police officer that year were for students with a federally recognized disability. data showed



Schools are not required to submit demographic data on students who are identified as having a disability under Sec. 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The demographic information for those students was not included in the tallies of the race of students with referrals analyzed by the Center for Public Integrity. However, schools do have to disclose information on student race and under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. As such, information on the race of students with disabilities involved in referrals is incomplete.

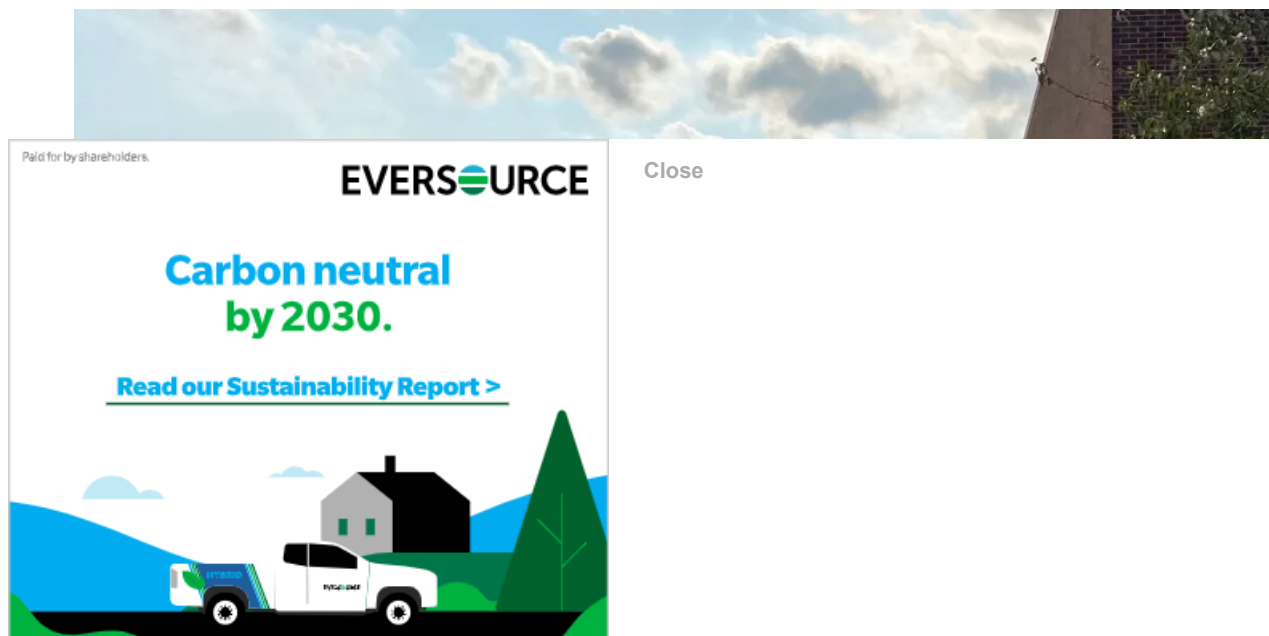
New Britain High School had the highest number of students referred to police in the 2017-18 school year – 81 – with 39 of the referrals going to students with a disability. Of the 81 referrals, six were white students, 62 were Hispanic, and five were Black, according to the data. New Britain High School has more than 2,200 students. About 23% of students have a disability that requires an individual education plan according to information the district provided to the state Board of Education for the annual **“Connecticut Report Card.”**

New Britain school officials recognized that the number of referrals to police was high, so in subsequent years, high school administrators took steps to delineate which actions need to occur before a school resource



But the school proceeded with the plan to reduce conflict and opened a student assistance center that provides students with interventions that don't require removal from school or the involvement of police, he said. As a result, in the 2020-21 school year, there were few, if any, incidents that involved a referral to a school resource officer, Foran said.

"We were very close to zero, but I can't say for sure we were at zero," he said. "We are providing better interventions prior to an SRO's involvement."



South Windsor High School. Credit: Christine Stuart / CTNewsJunkie

South Windsor High School had the second-highest number of student referrals to police at 68, which included 36 students with a disability. Of the 68 referrals, 33 were white students, six were Hispanic and 13 were Black. The school has a population of 1,283 with 15% of students being designated as having a disability, the district's report card said.

Officials from South Windsor High School did not grant a request for an interview and Bristol school district officials did not return repeated phone calls.

Danbury High School had the third-highest number of student referrals to police, 64, including 20 students with a disability. Of the 64 referrals, 17 were white students, 33 were Hispanic and seven were Black. The school has 3,340 students with 13.6% having a disability, according to the district report card.

In several schools, including Bristol Central High School, Pomperaug Regional High School in Southbury, Greenwich High School, and Watertown High School, more than 60% of the referrals concerned



"It's easy to look at this as a disability problem, but it's an intersectional problem with Black males with disabilities," Dorfman said. "These are the kids who are getting pushed out of school at higher rates."

Students with disabilities who are placed in alternative therapeutic settings often don't get the same opportunities or curriculum as their peers, Dorfman said. "Children have to have opportunities in integrated settings," she said. "If they need extra support they should be given that support in a neighborhood school."

Children with disabilities also should be offered the same opportunities for extra-curricular activities, Dorfman said.

The issue is so pressing that the agency is shifting its priorities to advocating for requiring schools to use trained professionals – rather than police – to support children with disabilities who are having behavioral issues related to their disability at school.

“We’re focusing on kids with mental health disabilities, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries who tend to be the ones who are pushed out of neighborhood schools,” Dorfman said



“The implications are very significant,” Egan said. “The reliance on police is a serious sign that there could be an indication of bias and likely there are programmatic deficiencies for children with disabilities.”

2017-18 CT Student Referrals to



Close

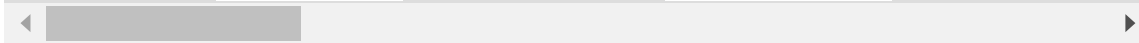
NEW BRITAIN SCHOOL DISTRICT	Britain High School	2272	81	558
SOUTH WINDSOR SCHOOL DISTRICT	South Windsor High School	1312	68	302
DANBURY SCHOOL DISTRICT	Danbury High School	3120	64	399
WATERBURY SCHOOL DISTRICT	John F. Kennedy High School	1269	42	296
WATERBURY SCHOOL DISTRICT	Wilby High School	1075	40	257

NAUGATUCK SCHOOL	Naugatuck High	1241	38	255
------------------	----------------	------	----	-----



Close

ANSONIA SCHOOL DISTRICT	Ansonia High School	567	28	159
-------------------------	---------------------	-----	----	-----



< 1 / 6 >

Source: [Center for Public Integrity's analysis of U.S. Department of Education data](#), [Click HERE to read the Data Dictionary](#). • This chart only shows a portion of the data columns available in the original analysis. We reduced the amount

A Flourish data visualization

© 2021 Your trusted, authentic, locally owned and operated news source at the state Capitol since 2005.
Proudly powered by Newspaper by Automattic