

HOW YOU CAN HELP END THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE FOR PPS STUDENTS

PPS refers students to law enforcement at rates higher than in 95% of other large cities across the U.S.¹

The behavior of students in Pittsburgh is not worse than that of students in other cities, so why do we have such a high rate of referral to law enforcement? This is not a rhetorical question.

This fact sheet has information addressing this question and on how you can help disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline in Pittsburgh, especially for our Black students for whom it is most common and harmful.

First, and most importantly, you can ask the school board to eliminate the PPS police force and reallocate those funds to hire additional school counselors, social workers, and psychologists.

Why is this needed? Extensive research documents the harmful, punitive effects of police in schools,² and local data show that this is particularly affecting our Black students. For example:

- **Two-thirds of all arrests of Black girls in Pittsburgh in 2019 were made by PPS police.³** In fact, both Black and White girls in Pittsburgh are more likely to be arrested by PPS police than they are to be arrested by City of Pittsburgh police. This is particularly striking when you consider that young people are only in school for about half of the 365 days in a calendar year.
- **About half of school-based arrests of Black youth (54% for Black girls and 42% for Black boys) in 2019 ultimately resulted in a charge of disorderly conduct** (compared with just 10% and 20% of school-based arrests of White girls and boys respectively),⁴ a highly discretionary offense that extensive research has demonstrated to be subject to implicit and explicit biases.
- **A large proportion of all referrals of Black youth to juvenile justice in Allegheny County – 32% of Black girls and 19% of Black boys – come from PPS police.⁵** Keep in mind that these totals are for the entire county – less than half of Black youth in the county live in the city and not all attend PPS.
- **45% of Black boys referred to juvenile justice by the PPS police have a disability.⁶** This fact suggests that these students are not being provided with adequate support, as we know that the behaviors for which they are referred are often manifestations of their disabilities. PPS has lower than the recommended ratios for school counselors, social workers, and psychologists.⁷
- **Black boys are 5 times more likely than White boys to be referred by PPS to juvenile justice and Black girls 9 times more likely than White girls.⁸**

¹ Howell et al. (2019). *Pittsburgh's Inequality Across Gender and Race*. Pittsburgh, PA: Gender Equity Commission. https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/7109_Pittsburgh's_Inequality_Across_Gender_and_Race_09_18_19.pdf Specifically, Black girls are referred to law enforcement at rates higher than in 99% of other cities, Black boys at rates higher than 98%, White boys at rates higher than 94%, and White girls at rates higher than 93%.

² E.g., Devlin, D. & Gottfredson, D. (2018). The roles of police officers in schools: Effects on the recording and reporting of crime. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 16, 208-223.

³ Analyses of data provided by the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police Crime Analysis Unit. The percent of arrests made by PPS police of other groups are also high – 59% of White girls and 41% & 47% for Black and White boys, respectively.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Data analysis provided by Melanie King of Allegheny County JPO.

⁶ As evidenced by IEPs, GIEPs are not included. Analysis by Natalia Perez Pena of Allegheny County DHS.

⁷ Office of Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, available online at <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>

⁸ Calculated based on analysis by Natalia Perez Pena of Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

The PPS Board is voting on the 2020-2021 Code of Conduct at their June 22 meeting. Ask them to:

- *Not add "199 – other disruptive behavior" as an infraction code. **Why?*** If a behavior arises that is not covered in one of the current list of infractions, it should be added to a code or a new, specific offense created. For context, Chicago Public Schools recognized that suspensions under "catch-all codes" have contributed to racial disparities in student removals from schools.
- *Remove "228 – repeated level 1 or level 2 infraction" as an infraction code. **Why?*** PPS does not suspend students for level 1 infractions; however, IF a student repeats a level 1 infraction three times (speaking out of turn, chewing gum in class, etc.), then schools are given the discretion to suspend the student. This allows teachers and administration too much discretion. Again, these types of discretionary determinations are where we see the largest affects of implicit racial biases.
- *Remove "229 – disorderly conduct" (found only in the 6-12 code of conduct) as an infraction code. **Why?*** This infraction is unnecessarily punitive and inherently subjective. It was the most frequent charge listed in arrests of youth in the 2018- 2019 school year. Like 199 (above), it is broad and vague, and research has shown it has been used in arbitrary and discriminatory ways largely against Black and Brown students and has contributed to racial disparities in student removals from school.

The PPS School Board has delayed their vote on the MOU between PPS and the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police. PPS is out of compliance with state law by not having an MOU in place. The current (May 2020) version of the MOU overuses city police in interventions with youth. Ask the board to:

- *Remove the following 7 offenses from the list of offenses for which schools are required to call the police. **Why?*** The continued inclusion of this requirement will exacerbate racial disproportionality in arrest & referral of Black students and students with disabilities. No other PA district requires that the police be called in these cases (though schools always have the discretion to call the police):
 - Section 2701 (relating to simple assault)
 - Section 2705 (relating to recklessly endangering another person)
 - Section 3127 (relating to indecent exposure)
 - Section 3307 (relating to institutional vandalism), when the penalty is a misdemeanor of the second degree
 - Section 3503(b)(1)(i), (ii), (iii) and (iv), (b.1) and (b.2) (relating to criminal trespass)
 - Chapter 39 (relating to theft and related offenses)
 - Section 5502 (relating to failure of disorderly persons to disperse upon official order)
- **Adopt the following [list of behaviors](#) for which schools are NOT allowed to call police (which Philadelphia has created and adopted):**
 - Failure to follow classroom rules/disruption
 - Dress code violation
 - Failure to carry hall-pass/appropriate ID
 - Failure to participate in class/unpreparedness
 - Truancy/excessive tardiness/cutting class
 - Possession of beepers/pagers/cell phones/other electronic devices
 - Possession of other inappropriate personal items
 - Public display of affection/inappropriate touching
 - Inappropriate use of electronic devices
 - Verbal altercations