



Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative

Jeana R. Bracey, Ph.D., Project Coordinator
Jeffrey J. Vanderploeg, Ph.D., Project Coordinator

Although overall numbers of juvenile arrests are declining, in-school arrests continue to be a growing concern in Connecticut. Current research demonstrates that students with mental health needs and students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds are among those who are most likely to be arrested or expelled. In order to meet the needs of students who are at-risk of arrest or expulsion, schools report a need for better linkage to a range of outside community-based mental health services and supports, particularly rapid response and support for managing crises.

The School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) was developed 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 (CSSD) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The Connecticut Center for Effective Practice (CCEP) of the Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI) coordinates implementation of this initiative. Participating schools include:

- 2009-2010: Luis Munoz Marin School (Bridgeport) and John F. Kennedy and Joseph A. DePaolo Middle Schools (Southington)
- 2010-2011: East Hartford Middle School (East Hartford) and H.C. Wilcox Technical High School (Meriden)
- 2011-2012: Selected districts are Manchester, Stamford, and Waterbury Public Schools

The goals of the Connecticut SBDI are to:

- Enhance knowledge and skill development among key school professionals relating to mental health, juvenile justice, and collaborating with community resources
- Reduce the use of in-school arrests and other exclusionary discipline practices
- Increase utilization of school- and community-based mental health services and supports

SERVICE DESCRIPTION

To prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system, SBDI works with schools to build stronger relationships with community-based resources including mental health service providers; increase school professionals' awareness of children's mental health concerns; and develop new policies and procedures including a Graduated Response Model of disciplinary intervention. SBDI works with schools to:

- Partner with their local Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) team to provide immediate, face to face crisis stabilization and linkage services on school grounds or at the student's home
- Identify other key stakeholders to partner with the school in the areas of juvenile justice, mental health, and non-traditional services and supports
- Work with local police and School Resource Officers to increase the capacity to appropriately respond to youth with mental health needs
- Train school professionals to recognize mental health symptoms and needs and increase awareness of community-based resources for meeting those needs
- Review and revise school policies and procedures to ensure disciplinary practices that are fair and equitable for all students
- Develop and implement a Graduated Response Model of discipline intervention
- Collect and analyze data to evaluate program implementation and outcomes

SAMPLE TRAINING MENU

SBDI Coordinators conduct a needs assessment with each participating school to develop a customized initiative. Although some training modules are considered indispensable to the initiative, there are several elective trainings that are identified each year. Past training modules have included the following:

- Parents and Teachers as Allies: Understanding and Increasing Empathy for Families with Mental Health Needs
- Effective Collaboration with EMPS and Care Coordination
- Understanding and Partnering with Juvenile Justice and Local Law Enforcement
- Overview of the CT Behavioral Health System
- Introduction to the Graduated Response Model
- Classroom Behavior Management and Crisis De-Escalation Strategies
- Normal Adolescent Development and Recognizing Mental Health Symptoms in Youth
- Promoting Positive School Climate and School Connectedness
- Uniform Crisis Prevention Planning and Response

OUTCOMES

SBDI collects and analyzes program evaluation data related to both implementation and outcomes at the individual, school, and community levels. The results of a 2011 external evaluation indicate:

- SBDI enhances partnerships with community-based agencies and increases utilization of EMPS as an alternative to arrest
- Youth referred to EMPS rather than CSSD at the time of an in-school behavioral incident have a lower likelihood of being arrested regardless of a students' age, gender, race, ethnicity or prior history of CSSD involvement
- Compared to similar communities without SBDI, communities with SBDI have lower rates of juvenile arrests.

To learn more about this initiative or to partner with a participating SBDI school in your community, please contact the Project Coordinators from the Connecticut Center for Effective Practice.

Please contact us for more information!

Jeana Bracey, Ph.D.
bracey@uchc.edu
 860.679.1524

Jeff Vanderploeg, Ph.D.
jvanderploeg@uchc.edu
 860.679.1542