

# Student Arrests in Pennsylvania & Allegheny County

# Excerpt from “Cops at the Schoolyard Gate”

*“For many students, schools have become a literal and figurative extension of the criminal legal system. As schools increasingly rely on police officers to monitor the hallways and control classroom behavior, students feel anxious and alienated by the constant surveillance and fear of police brutality. Over time, students transfer their distrust, resentment, and hostility toward the police to school authorities. Teachers become interchangeable with the police, principals become wardens, and students no longer see school staff as educators, advocates, and protectors.*”

*Black students who feel devalued by unfair disciplinary practices are more likely to withdraw and become delinquent. Policing in schools creates a vicious vortex. Students in heavily policed environments are less likely to be engaged and more likely to drop out. Youth who drop out are more likely to be arrested. ”*

Henning, Kristin, “Cops at the Schoolyard Gate,” *The Highlight by Vox, Schools Issue* (28 July 2021). Retrieved from:  
<https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22580659/police-in-school-resource-officers-sro>

# POLICE IN SCHOOLS

- Police officers have become more ingrained in the fabric of education, and the line between disciplinary and criminal matters has grown increasingly blurry.
- School shootings
  - Parkland
  - Expectations vs. Reality
- Student arrests for minor offenses
- Police can make school climates less inclusive and reduce trust, which undermines effective behavior management.
- Racial Disproportionality
  - Cannot be explained by differences in misbehavior

*“Punitive school discipline policies serve as a tool that perpetuates, reenacts, and polices the boundaries of deeply engrained American racial hierarchies.”*

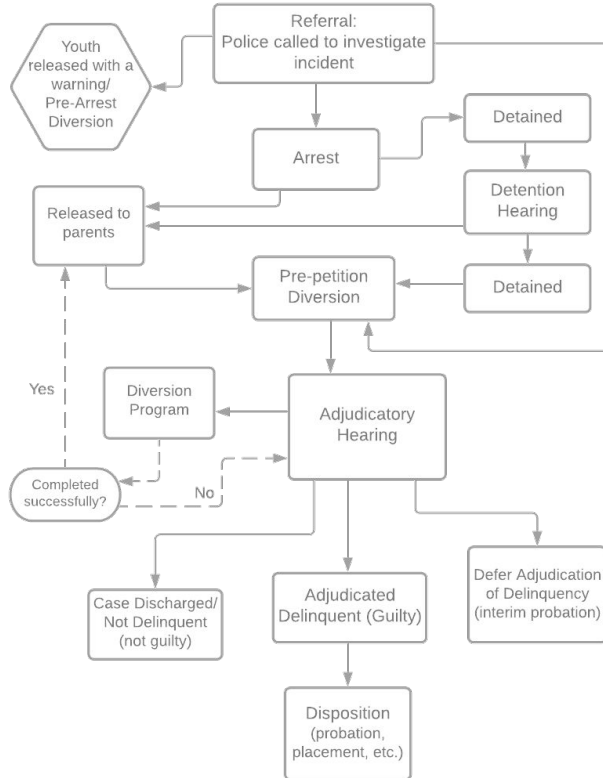
*-David Simson*

# Goals of our work and reports

- To inform school leaders, parents, students, and the community about which groups of students are disproportionately arrested and about the gaps that exist in data reporting.
- Provide guidance on how to address these issues:
  - How to improve the collection and reporting of student arrest numbers and trends
  - How to reduce arrests and referrals for minor infractions.

## Juvenile Legal System (Youth)

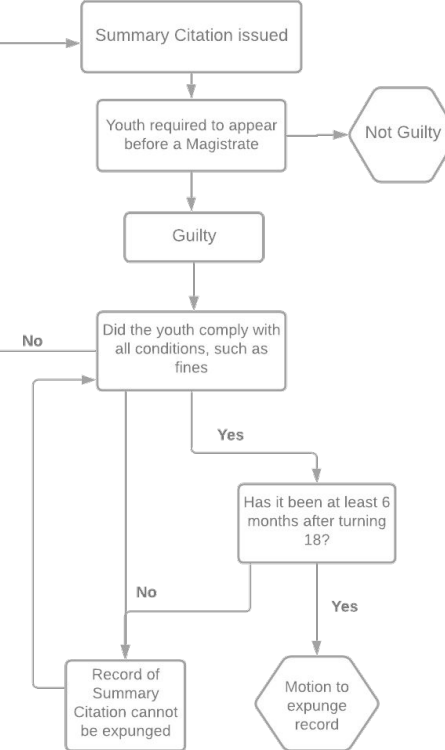
A youth who is between 10 and 21 alleged to have committed a delinquent act before reaching 18 or to have violated the terms of juvenile probation prior to termination of juvenile court supervision.



Expungement - immediately if not guilty; 6 months after successful diversion program; 5 years after supervision if adjudicated delinquent or deferred adjudication. Felony sexual assaults cannot be expunged.

## Summary Citations (Adult Criminal Legal System)

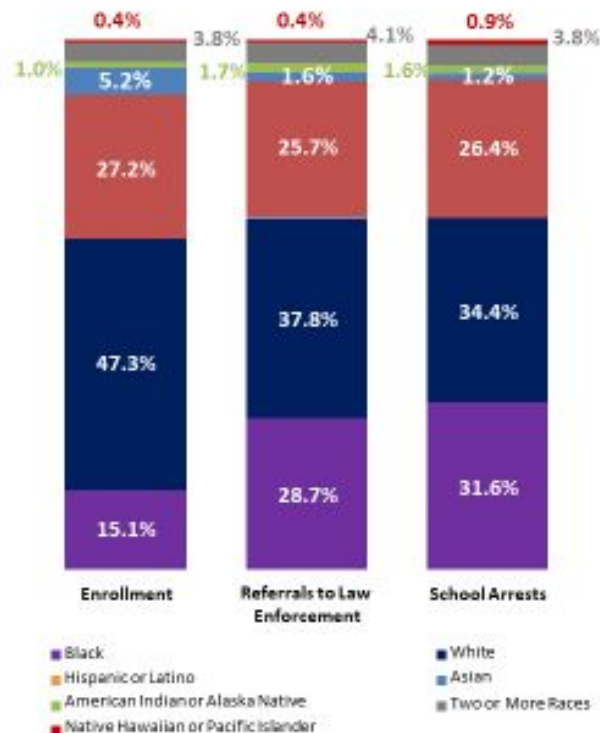
No minimum age at which a person can be issued a summary citation



# Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) 2017-18

## School-Related Arrests and Referrals to Law Enforcement in 2017-18\*

\*A referral to law enforcement includes situations where a school official reports a student to a law enforcement agency or official, including a school police unit, for an incident that occurs on school grounds, during school-related events, or while taking school transportation, regardless of whether official action is taken. Citations, tickets, court referrals, and school-related arrests are considered referrals to law enforcement.

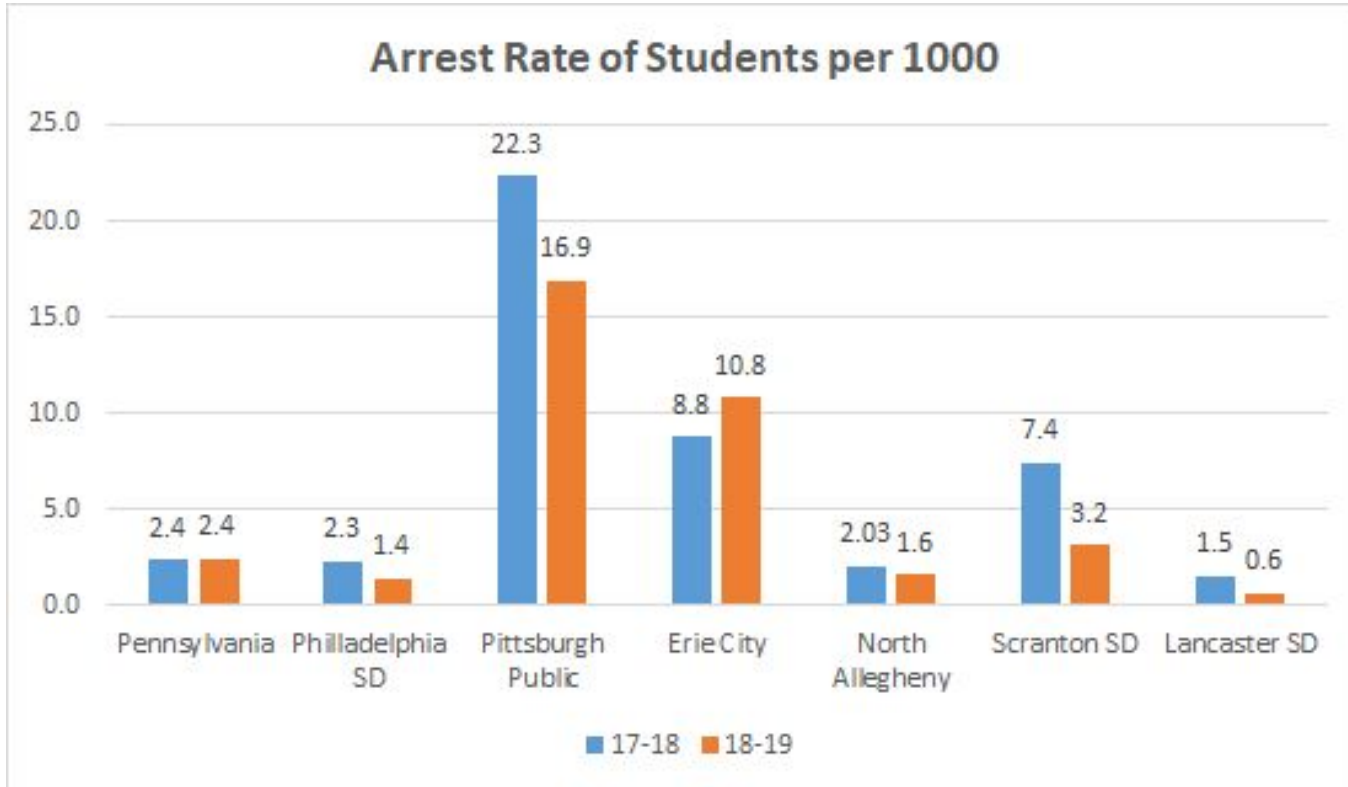


In 2017-18, Black students accounted for 28.7% of all students referred to law enforcement and 31.6% of all students arrested at school or during a school-related activity—twice their share of total student enrollment of 15.1%.

Similar patterns of disparities were observed for Black students served under IDEA who accounted for 2.3% of total student enrollment, but 8.4% of students referred to law enforcement and 9.1% of students who were arrested.

Source: U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-18 State and National Estimations, released June 2021, available at <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/estimations/2017-2018>.

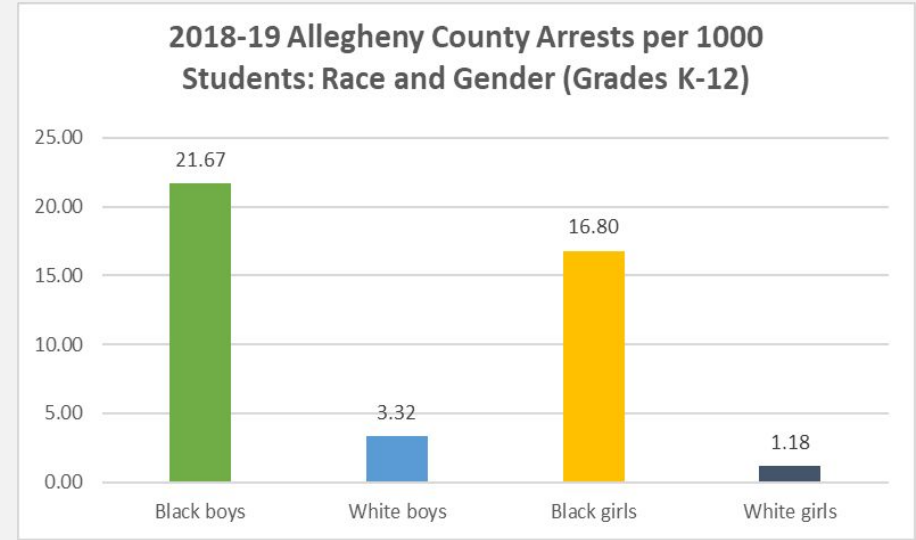
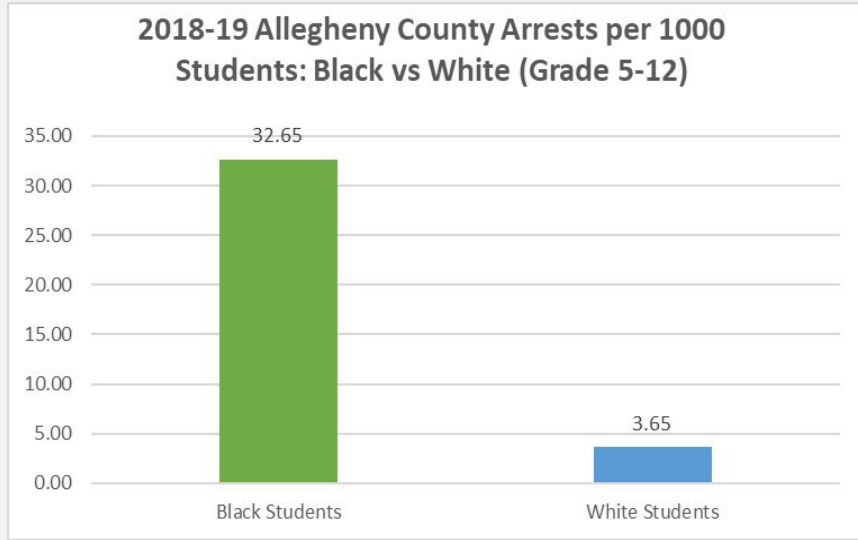
# Arrest rate of students per 1000 - Pennsylvania Districts



High rates of arrest stand out in some districts in Pennsylvania, namely Pittsburgh Public and Erie City compared to state rates and other school districts.

\*Not a comprehensive analysis of all districts

# Student Arrests by Race & Gender (Black vs White)



- Allegheny County's Black public school students were arrested at nearly **9 times the rate** of White public school students during the 2018-19 school year.
- In 2018-19, **Black boys were arrested at over 6.5 times the rate of white boys**
- In 2018-19, **Black girls were arrested at over 14 times the rate of white girls.**
- More than half of all arrests for Black girls were school-related. The only demographic that was true for.



# Top 10 School Districts with the Highest Arrest Rate of Black Students (2018-19)

2018-19 School District Name	% White Student Enrollment	Arrest of White students	Arrests per 1000 of White students	% Black Student Enrollment	Arrest of Black students	Arrests per 1000 of Black students	Arrest Rate Gap (Black-White)
South Allegheny SD	89.81%	7	5.09	6.86%	9	85.71	80.62
Baldwin-Whitehall SD	72.66%	11	3.47	5.61%	14	57.14	53.67
Moon Area SD	78.45%	9	2.98	5.04%	9	46.39	43.41
West Jefferson SD	91.79%	6	2.17	2.38%	3	41.67	39.50
North Hills SD	85.65%	4	1.04	3.93%	7	39.77	38.73
Sto-Rox SD	28.04%	3	8.62	56.49%	27	38.52	29.90
Chartiers Valley SD	80.57%	11	4.16	3.05%	3	30.00	25.84
Pittsburgh Public SD	32.22%	52	7.36	51.72%	332	29.29	21.92
Upper St. Clair SD	82.02%	0	0.00	1.28%	1	19.23	19.23
North Allegheny SD	77.79%	11	1.66	1.78%	3	19.87	18.20

- ❖ Eight out of the ten school districts with the highest gap in arrest rate between Black and White students had an enrollment of Black students that was less than 10% of their total student population.
- ❖ In South Allegheny School District, 1 out of 13 Black students were arrested compared with 1 out of 196 White students arrested in 2018-19 looking at K-12 enrollment numbers.

# Disparities in Arrests and Charges of Black Students

**Exposure to police:** Black children are substantially more likely to attend public schools that have police officers stationed in them.

**Implicit bias:** Unconscious attitudes and stereotypes can impact how adults deal with youth, including the decisions that police make about how or whether to charge youth.

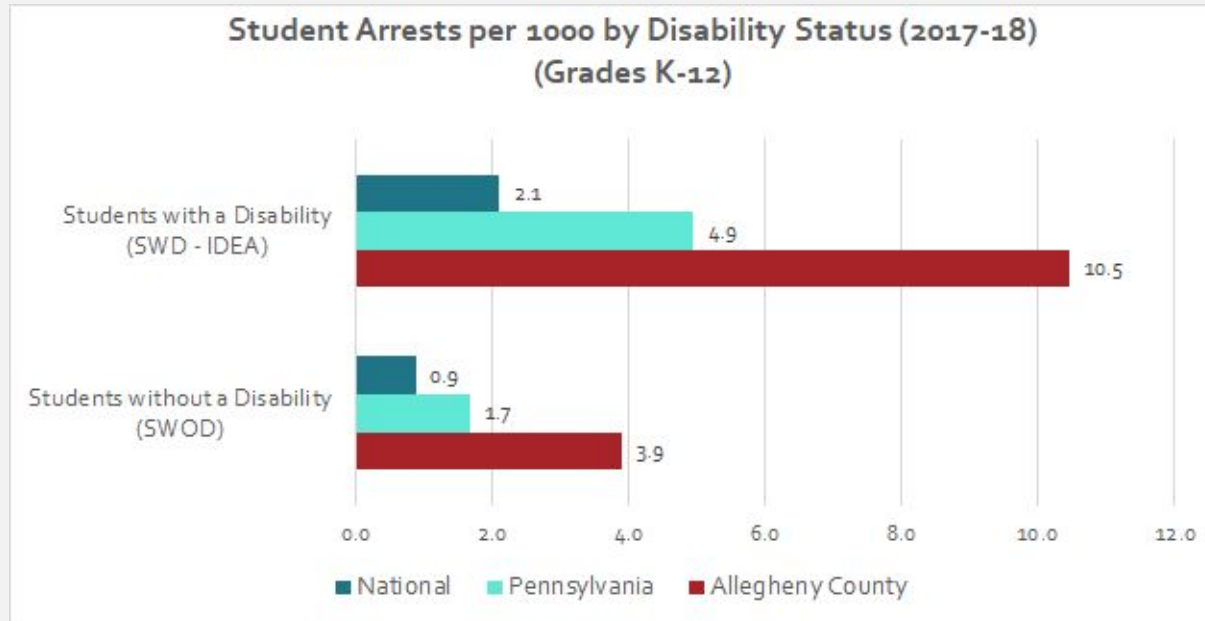
**Adultification bias:** Some adults see Black children as less deserving of the protections traditionally afforded to young people.

**Overcharging:** This is when police or prosecutors add more serious charges than are ordinarily warranted by the situation, add multiple charges for the same infraction, or add charges that may not be provable with the goal of getting an accused person to plea bargain.

**Selective punishment:** In some instances, Black students are punished more frequently and more harshly than other students.

# Students with Disabilities - Arrest Rates

- Students with disabilities (under IDEA) were arrested at higher rates compared to national arrest rates of students with disabilities.
- In Pennsylvania, students with disabilities account for 17% of the student population, but 37% of arrests of students.

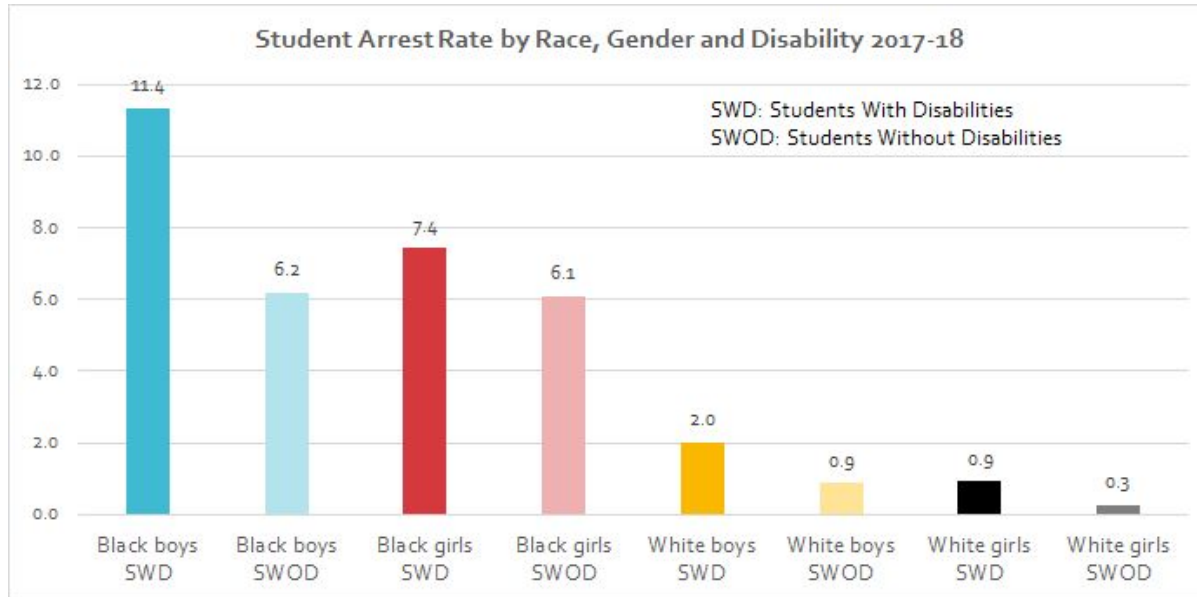


In Allegheny County, students with disabilities are arrested at *three times* the rate of students without disabilities.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

# What About Black Students With Disabilities?

- Nationally, Black boys with a disability are arrested at higher rates than all other students.
- Within Allegheny County:
  - Black boys with a disability are arrested at nearly 6 times the rate of White boys with a disability.
  - Black girls with a disability are arrested at 8 times the rate of White girls with a disability.

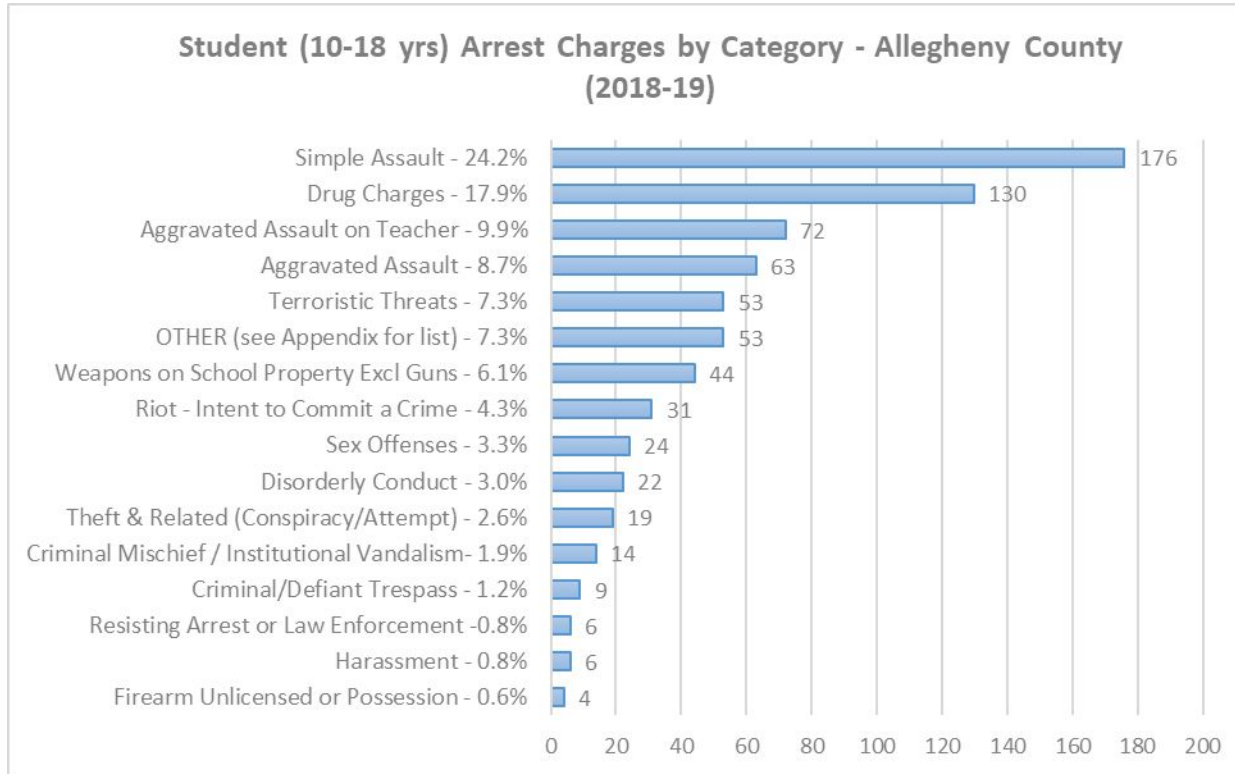


*This data does not include Pittsburgh Public Schools as they reported zero arrests to the CRDC.*

# Students with Disabilities - Disparities

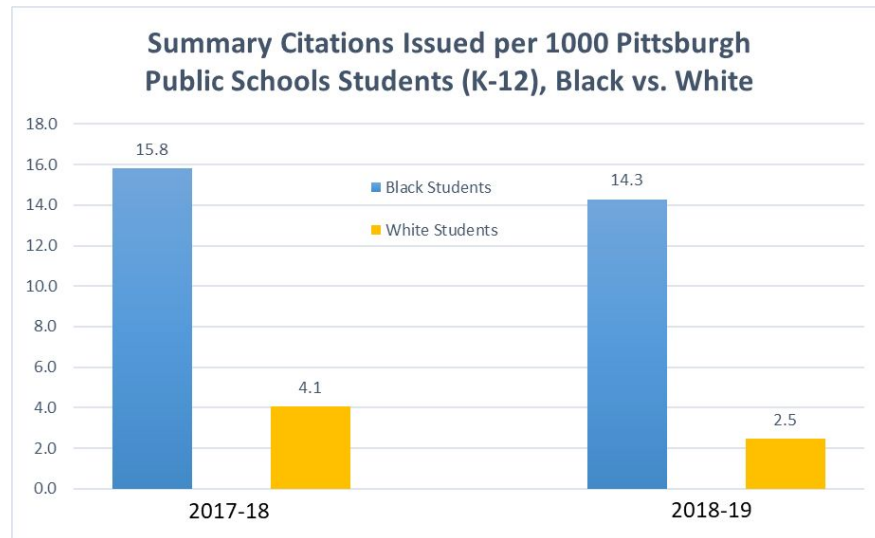
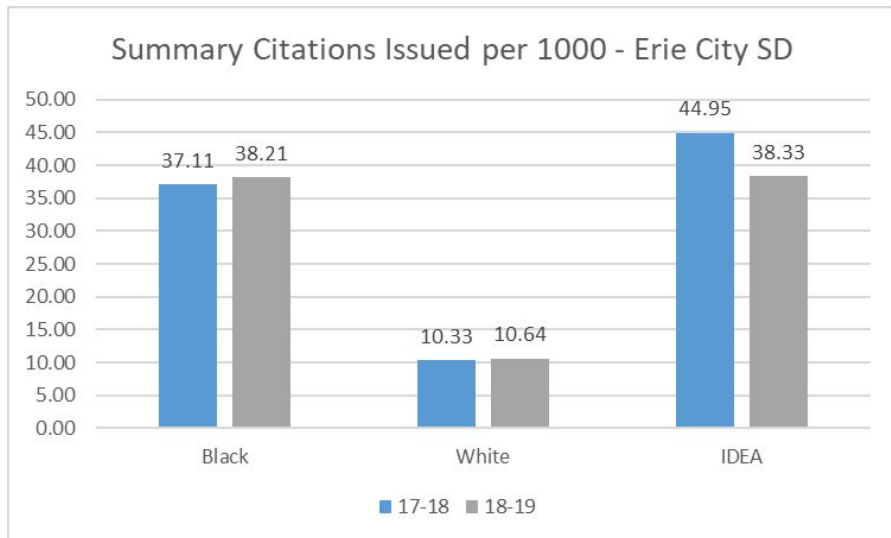
- In a July 2019 report, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights noted that “with the exception of Latinx and Asian American students, all other students of color with disabilities were more likely to be referred to law enforcement compared to white students with disabilities.”
- The high rates of punishment of students with disabilities reflect a choice by some school officials to turn students over to the police rather than to provide them with appropriate interventions, services, and supports required under federal law.

# What are students arrested for?



# Summary Citation Data

- Data on summary citations for juveniles is not publicly accessible. Currently only available if schools choose to disclose the data.
- Black students and students with disabilities are disproportionately issued summary citations as you can see in the examples below.
- Most common infraction listed - Disorderly Conduct (including obscene language and gestures)



# Why Is It Important for School Districts To Report Accurately?

- The underreporting of student arrests is a problem that extends beyond Pennsylvania, and includes such large districts such as New York City and Los Angeles.
- School districts in Allegheny County underreported arrests to the PA Dept of Education by over 82% for the 2017-18 school year (and underreported by 78% to the CRDC).
- Within Allegheny County, we do have Burgh's Eye View and the Juvenile Offense Dashboard, resources not available in other cities, however:
  - Burgh's Eye View only reports for the city of Pittsburgh, and doesn't differentiate between school and community arrests.
  - Allegheny County Juvenile Offense Trends, while the most accurate source, only reports referrals to juvenile court by neighborhood and not by school district.
  - **Neither site provides data on arrests of students with a disability.** The CRDC is the only source of this data, so, it is vital school districts reports student arrests and referrals accurately.
- If school districts reported accurate arrest and referral data to the Civil Rights Data Collection, we would have a much clearer picture of the disparities in student arrests by gender, race and disability.



“Widespread reporting noncompliance has meant that the public cannot tell how often most districts called upon police and security to enforce school rules. Without reliable public reporting of the data, the true extent of the school policing disparities and their impact on students by race and **disability** remain hidden. Further, without a substantial improvement to the collection and reporting of the school policing data it will remain difficult to evaluate reform efforts.”

*- Lost Opportunities report from UCLA's Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project*



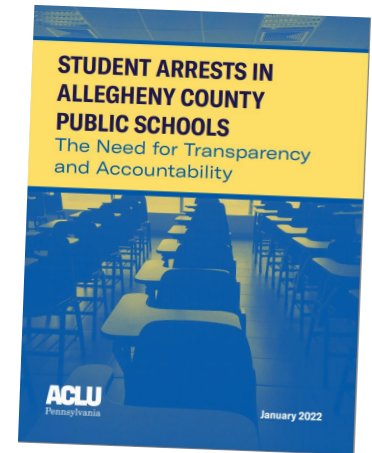
*Photo by Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels*

**It should not be this difficult to find accurate, reliable data on student arrests.**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Adopt a policy** restricting police involvement in ordinary school discipline for low-level infractions.
- **Limit** the immediate notification of local law enforcement to infractions on the mandatory reporting list.
- **Protect students** who receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) from inappropriate law enforcement referrals.
- **Adopt a moratorium** on summary citations issued at school.
- **Eliminate the everyday presence of police in schools.**
- **Reinvest funds** allocated for police into student support resources.
- **Accurately collect** and publicly report arrest, referral, and citation data.
- **Update ESSA Annual Report Cards.**

# RESOURCES



- Student Arrests in Allegheny County: The Need for Transparency and Accountability <https://www.endzerotolerance.org/student-arrest-report>
- Police and Pennsylvania Schools: What Education Leaders Need to Know <https://www.endzerotolerance.org/what-educators-need-to-know>
- Simson, David (2014). *Exclusion, Punishment, Racism and Our Schools: A Critical Race Theory Perspective on School Discipline*
- [Endzerotolerance.org](https://www.endzerotolerance.org) - provides resources on school discipline and policing. Whether you want to research the issues, learn about successful campaigns, prepare testimony, prepare a media story, or work to improve school communities, this site is a great place to start.
- Understanding And Addressing Institutionalized Inequity: Disrupting Pathways to Juvenile Justice for Black Youth in Allegheny County [https://www.gwensgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/20-011-BGEA\\_JuvenileJustice-BlackYouth\\_v4.pdf](https://www.gwensgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/20-011-BGEA_JuvenileJustice-BlackYouth_v4.pdf)

