



## Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative

Project Coordinators: Jeana R. Bracey, Ph.D., Rebekah Behan, Yecenia Casiano, MS, and Tianna L. Hill, MSW

Although overall rates of juvenile arrests are declining, in-school arrests continue to be a concern in Connecticut, particularly among youth of color and youth with unmet mental health needs. In the 2014-15 school year, 20% of juvenile court referrals were from school-based incidents. The Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative (**SBDI**) is a school-level intervention designed to prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system by helping schools meet the following **goals**, to:

- **Reduce** use of in-school arrests, out-of-school suspensions, and other exclusionary discipline practices
- **Build** knowledge and skills among key school professionals to recognize and manage behavioral health crises in the school, and access needed community resources
- **Link** youth who are at-risk of arrest to appropriate school and community-based services and supports

### KEY ACTIVITIES:

- **Community Coalition Building/Linking to Mental Health Resources.** SBDI helps schools understand and access existing mental health services and supports in their community to more effectively meet the needs of students and their families. Partnerships include (but are not limited to): community-based behavioral health service providers, local law enforcement, youth and family engagement advocates, youth service bureaus, community collaboratives (e.g. systems of care, LISTs), and pediatric care providers.
- **Customized Professional Development in Mental Health and Juvenile Justice.** Teachers, support staff (guidance, social workers, school psychologists), administrators, and school resource officers receive training, technical assistance, and support on understanding adolescent development and recognizing child trauma; managing classroom behavior; and promoting positive school climate among other topics.
- **School Disciplinary Policy Consultation.** SBDI reviews school disciplinary policies and works with key stakeholders to revise these policies to align with diversion values. This includes development of a graduated response model for school discipline that emphasizes diversion from arrest, expulsion, and out of school suspension; access to mental health resources; and integration of restorative practices.

**OUTCOMES:** SBDI has been implemented in 43 schools across 15 Connecticut school districts. On average since 2010-2018, participating schools have **reduced court referrals by 34%** and have **increased mobile crisis intervention service (EMPS) referrals by 47%** (see Figure 2). Many schools have sustained or even further improved these outcomes over time.

**PARTNERS:** SBDI was developed as a component of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Models for Change Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network. The Connecticut State Board of Education (“CSBE”), the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (“CSSD”), and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (“DMHAS”) currently fund SBDI and participate on the oversight committee. The Department of Children and Families (“DCF”) also serves on the oversight committee. CHDI is the Coordinating Center for SBDI.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** Jeana Bracey, PhD, phone: 860-679-1524, email: [bracey@uchc.edu](mailto:bracey@uchc.edu)

**RESOURCES:** Free **SBDI Toolkit** available for schools at [www.chdi.org/sbditoolkit](http://www.chdi.org/sbditoolkit) and additional information is on our website.

[www.ctsbsdi.org](http://www.ctsbsdi.org)