

Education



Youth with learning disabilities have a **2-3 times** greater risk of coming into contact with the juvenile justice system.²

Up to **85%**

of youth in the juvenile-justice system have disabilities that make them eligible for special-education services.

Only **37%**

of these youth receive special-education services in school.⁹

Students who are chronically absent are **3 times** more prone to violent behaviors, and **4 times** more prone to substance use.¹⁰



Massachusetts Alliance of Juvenile Court Clinics (MAJCC) www.majcc.org



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Youth who are court-involved face many educational challenges. Due to higher rates of behavioral and emotional disorders, court-involved youth are more likely to experience school discipline, suspension, and expulsion.¹

‘Zero tolerance’ discipline encourages consistent, harsh punishment, thus intensifying school surveillance and security, and pushing students out of school.³

Contact with the juvenile justice system:

- Takes time away from education
- Lowers the likelihood of graduating high school
- Limits post-secondary education and employment opportunities.⁴

Special Education: Learning Disabilities and Emotional Disturbance

Court-involved youth require high quality educational services and supports to help them succeed. The effects of trauma often show up as academic difficulties, like low test scores and poor grades.⁵ Youth in the juvenile justice system are disproportionately retained in a grade at the end of the school year, and many perform under grade level.⁶

The two most common special education disabilities are:

- Specific learning disabilities
- Emotional disturbance

Combined with generally lower academic skills, these educational hurdles put court-involved youth at risk for higher rates of delinquency and recidivism.⁷

Youth with learning disabilities are also more likely to suffer from poor impulse control, and to more frequently violate court orders. This puts them at significantly higher risk for deepened court involvement and leads to their disproportionate representation among detained youth.⁸

Truancy

Truancy is the **most common status offense** processed in juvenile court. Truancy increases youth risk of delinquent behavior and juvenile justice system involvement.

Risk factors common to justice-involved youth that increase the likelihood of truancy are:

- Poverty
- Family dysfunction
- Violence
- Trauma
- Learning disabilities
- Mental health difficulties¹¹

Truancy rates are at about **20%** nationally, putting a significant number of school-aged children in contact with both academic and social and behavioral risk factors.¹²



Education

Suspension/Expulsion

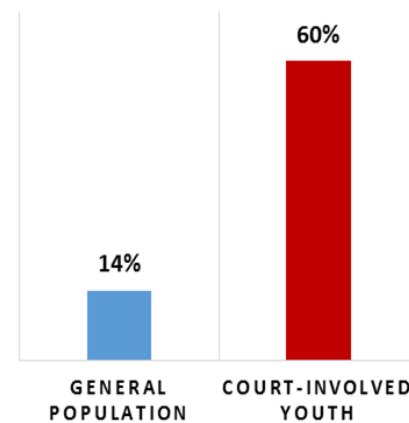
School suspensions and expulsions have been on the rise since the 1990s as a result of the “get tough on crime” attitude that ushered in zero-tolerance policies. However, contrary to the belief that these practices foster school safety, the increased use of suspension and expulsion has heightened the risk for student misbehavior, school dropout, and delayed graduation.¹³ Suspension and expulsion are correlated with antisocial behavior including:

- Aggression
- Substance use
- Higher rates of contact with the juvenile justice system

These factors in turn put youth at greater risk for academic failure. In fact, evidence suggests that attending school during adolescence can be a protective factor against delinquent behavior.¹⁴

Youth held in custody report not being enrolled in school at a rate **4 times greater** than the general population.¹⁵

SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION RATES



(see source 16)

The School-to-Prison Pipeline & Zero Tolerance

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to how school policies and practices can push students to criminal justice involvement.¹⁷ The school-to-prison pipeline is often furthered through zero tolerance policies: disciplinary measures which set security measures to enforce student behavior, typically removing students from school or involving law enforcement for behavioral violations. Zero tolerance policies contribute to high dropout rates, **especially among students of color.**

42% of all students suspended multiple times are Black, while Black students only make up **16%** of public schools.¹⁸ Black students are **3x more likely** to be suspended or expelled than white students. In turn, suspended or expelled students are **3x more likely** to become involved with the juvenile justice system the next year.

School Resource Officers (SROs) are police who are stationed within school buildings. SROs contribute to higher rates of youth being charged with crimes, and the over-policing of students of color. One study found that in schools with a majority of white students, SROs perceived threats as external to the school building, but in schools with a majority Black student body, SROs perceived primary threats as being the students themselves.¹⁹

“A more positive learning environment... can be accomplished through the use of tools like interventions, administrative discretion, cultural competency training, and other disciplinary responses, to repair and reconcile harm done to individuals or groups within the school community.”³

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