Florida State University and Florida Department of Juvenile Justice Researcher-Practitioner Partnership

Assessing the Causes and Consequences of School-Based Referrals
Zero Tolerance Era in Schools

- Accelerated in the late 1990s and early 2000s
- Moral panic and high-profile school shootings
- Adoption of mandatory disciplinary policies
- Enactment of federal laws
- Increased security measures
- Increased contact with juvenile and adult justice systems
- Youth are pushed out of the educational system
- Increased contact with juvenile and adult justice systems

School-to-Prison Pipeline

- Enactment of federal laws
- Increased security measures
- Adoption of mandatory disciplinary policies
- Moral panic and high-profile school shootings
- Accelerated in the late 1990s and early 2000s
Prior Research

Criminalization of Minor Behavior

Youth are arrested at school for relatively minor offenses.

Formal System Contact Leads to Future Offending

School characteristics affect crime.

School Referred Rates

Decreases high school graduation and college enrollment.

Educational Attainment

Labeling theory

Youth are arrested at school for relatively minor offenses.

Prior Research
Project Overview

Project Purpose

• Examine variation in and consequences of school-based referrals
• Addressing major limitation of prior research

Individual-Level

• Examining variation in and consequences of school-based referrals

School-Level

• Compare schools by their in-school referral rate as well as a school-to-community referral ratio
• Compare youth with first-time referrals for community-based offending to youth with first-time referrals for school-based offending
Research Questions

Individual-Level Research Questions

1. For school-based referrals relative to community-based referrals,
   1. what types of offenses are youth referred for?
   2. what is the effect on high school completion?
   3. what is the effect on subsequent juvenile offending?

School-Level Research Questions

1. Among mainstream schools,
   1. are schools “over-referring” students?
   2. what characteristics are associated with higher referral ratios?

Research Questions
DATA AND METHODS

Sample Restrictions

- Youth enrolled in a Florida public school at time of offense
- School and district characteristics
- School records for first-time offender cohort
- Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT)
- Indicator of offense location
- Accelerated cohort of first-time offenders between 2004-2009
Types of Offenses

- School youth were most likely to be referred for school-based offending
- Felony weapon/firearm offenses
- Misdemeanor drug offenses
- Disorderly conduct
- Simple assault and/or battery

Subsequent Juvenile Offending

- School youth were more likely to be re-referred for school-based offending
- School youth were less likely to be re-referred within a year

High School Completion

- Community youth completed high school at a higher rate

Individual-Level Findings
School-Led Findings

District characteristics
- Demographics, student behavior, academics, teacher/staff, school size,

High schools
- Free/reduced lunch, truancy rate, in-school suspension rate

Middle schools
- Low school referral rate but high school-to-community referral ratio
- High school referral rate but low school-to-community referral ratio

Characteristics Associated with High Referral Rates
- Middle schools
  - Free/reduced lunch, truancy rate
- High schools
  - Free/reduced lunch, truancy rate, in-school suspension rate

Schools “Over-Refer” Students
Policy Considerations

Work with Schools to Increase Civil Citation Use

• School youth tend to commit minor offenses

Target the Right Schools with Interventions

• Identify schools that are truly “over-referring” youth

Collect Additional Data on School Referrals

• Who arrested the youth (SRO versus local LEO)

• Whether the youth was a student at that school

• School where the offense/referral occurred

• Whether the youth was a student at that school
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