

By Lizzie Schiffman for [the Huffington Post](#)

CHICAGO -- As Chicago Public Schools have become increasingly dependent on the police department to control student behavior on school grounds, a disproportionately high number of black juveniles are being thrust into the criminal justice system too early and too easily, according to [data from a new report](#) issued Wednesday by the [Chicago youth advocacy group Project NIA](#)

The group analyzed [Chicago Police Department arrest data](#) and found that 20 percent of all juvenile arrests in 2010 took place on school grounds. Nearly one-third of those arrests were for simple battery charges -- offenses that in previous years would have been written off as schoolyard skirmishes and punished with suspensions or other penalties doled out by the school.

"I think our main purpose with trying to put the study out is that it's long overdue; the last study focusing on Chicago was released in 2003," said Mariame Kaba, director of Project NIA and co-author of the report. "We think the most important thing is to operationalize how the schools-to-prison pipeline works. There are a lot of ways that happens, one of which is youths being funneled directly into the system by being arrested at schools."

Police presence at schools in Chicago and nationwide has seen a sharp uptick in the last 20 years, according to the report, titled "Policing Chicago Public Schools: A Gateway to the School-to-Prison Pipeline." In Chicago, administrators have become so reliant on in-school police officers that only four of the system's 122 high schools were willing to give up their assigned officers in return for a \$ [25,000 incentive offered this summer by the cash-strapped district](#)

The vast majority of those affected by the criminalization of in-school behavior in Chicago are

black students, who accounted for 74 percent of school-based juvenile arrests in 2010, Project NIA reports. Only 45 percent of the system's students are African American.

The study also turned up geographical biases. Nearly 40 percent of the city's school-based juvenile arrests in 2010 came from five police districts: the 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th and 22nd, all on the city's South and South West sides.

Youth intercepted by the criminal justice system at a young age can find themselves trapped in a cycle of repeat incarcerations. [A recently released report by the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission](#) found major problems with the way the system handles juvenile cases.

The problem of criminalizing student misbehavior isn't limited to Chicago schools. [A national study released recently by the Justice Policy Institute](#), titled "Education Under Arrest," finds the trend is spreading with dangerous results.

"Students are needlessly arrested for offenses as minor as disorderly conduct, which can include swearing at a teacher or throwing spitballs," said Amanda Petteruti, the institute's associate director, [in a release that accompanied the report](#). "[In-school police] lead to discipline applied without the filter of school administrators or policies. This in turn leads to a troubling disruption of the educational process ... the result of which is some students who never become re-connected to school."