

THURSDAY 14TH OF NOVEMBER 2013

# public news service

NEWS IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

## CT Program Successfully Tackles Youth Incarceration

Melinda Tuhus, Public News Service - CT  
November 14, 2013



Connecticut youth advocates have joined forces to ensure that kids of color are being treated fairly in the juvenile justice system.

NEW HAVEN, Conn. - Black and Latino youth have a greater chance of being funneled into the juvenile justice system than white youths who commit the same offenses, current statistics show. A new committee in New Haven has joined similar groups in Hartford and Bridgeport to address the issue, according to Leon Smith, director of the Alternative Schools Project at Connecticut's Center for Children's Advocacy.

"We find that youth of color, particularly, are getting sent to court and moving through the juvenile justice system for this, as opposed to getting an opportunity for diversion," Smith said.

He said that by bringing school officials, police and other parties to the table, the committees have been able to significantly reduce the number of young people, and especially African-American and Latino youth, arrested for such minor infractions as talking back to a teacher.

Smith said another goal is to reduce bias at various decision points in the juvenile justice system, "and also try to ensure that the youth are served, where possible, either in the community or in the least restrictive environment required to meet their needs and also meet public safety."

He said the efforts seem to be paying off. Between 2011 and 2013, the numbers of African-American and Latino students arrested and referred to court in Hartford fell by more than 30 percent.