

PHILADELPHIA POLICE SCHOOL DIVERSION PROGRAM EVALUATION

DECEMBER 2021



JUVENILE
JUSTICE
RESEARCH &
REFORM LAB ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
DR. NAOMI GOLDSTEIN AND THE JUVENILE JUSTICE RESEARCH & REFORM LAB AT
NEG23@DREXEL.EDU

THE PHILADELPHIA POLICE SCHOOL DIVERSION PROGRAM

Designed to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, the Diversion Program was developed via collaboration among the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD), School District of Philadelphia (SDP), Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS), and other city agencies. Implemented across all city schools in 2014, this innovative policing strategy diverts—in lieu of arrest—students with no delinquency history who commit one of several specified offenses in school and, based on identified needs, offers voluntary, community-based prevention services to diverted youth and their families.

THE DIVERSION PROCESS:



BEHAVIORAL INCIDENT OCCURS IN SCHOOL

A school staff member (e.g., teacher, principal, school safety officer) may call police to report the incident. School personnel retain the authority to enact school-based discipline (e.g., suspension, referral for expulsion).



POLICE DETERMINE OFFENSE ELIGIBILITY FOR DIVERSION

Responding PPD officer identifies whether the reported incident meets diversion eligibility criteria based on a pre-determined list of low-level offenses, such as disorderly conduct, possession of a non-firearm weapon, and trespassing.



DIVERSION INTAKE CENTER REVIEWS DELINQUENCY HISTORY

PPD officer calls the Diversion Intake Center to determine whether a given youth has any prior adjudications or open court cases which would disqualify them from diversion.



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES HOME VISIT

A DHS social worker conducts a preliminary home visit to evaluate the youth's and family's strengths and needs and offers a referral to Intensive Preventive Services (IPS).

DEMOGRAPHICS OF EXAMINED YOUTH

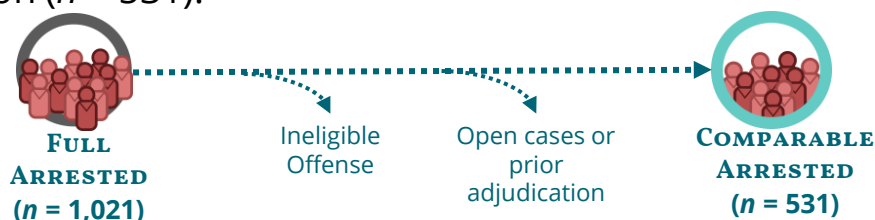
To evaluate the impact of the Philadelphia Police School Diversion Program, we compared diverted youth outcomes to those of comparable youth arrested in schools the year before Diversion Program implementation.

DIVERTED YOUTH SAMPLE

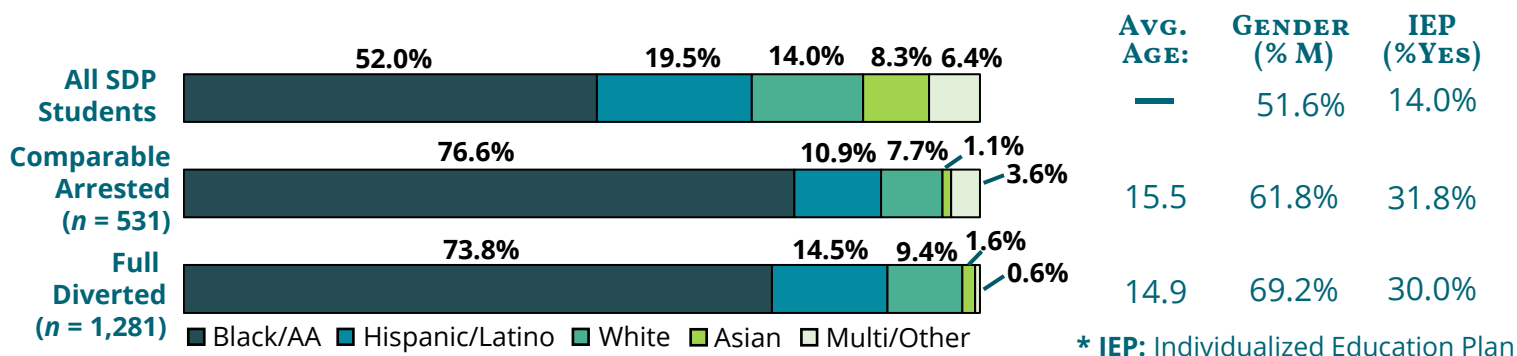
The full diverted sample included all youth diverted from arrest through the Philadelphia Police School Diversion Program for a school-based incident during the 2014-2015, 2015-2016, or 2016-2017 school year ($n = 1,281$).

IDENTIFYING THE COMPARABLE ARRESTED SAMPLE

Youth in the comparable arrested sample included all students arrested in schools during the 2013-2014 school year (i.e., the year before the Diversion Program began) who committed a diversion-eligible offense and who did not have an open case or prior adjudication ($n = 531$).



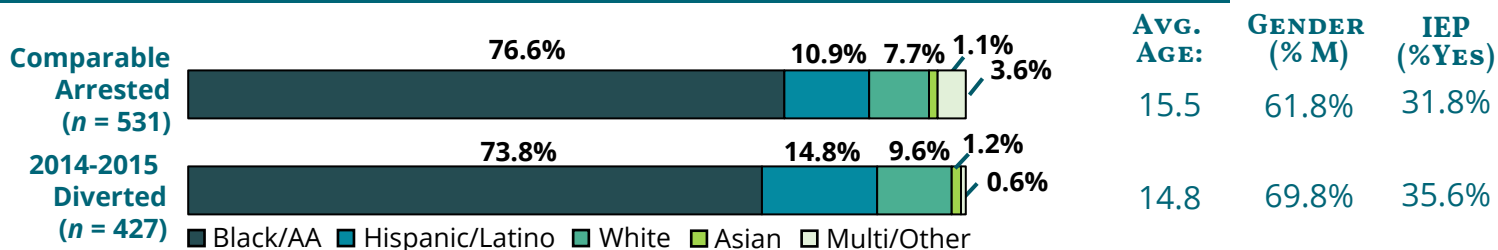
SAMPLES FOR 1- AND 2-YEAR FOLLOW-UP ANALYSES



Compared to the broader SDP population, Black youth and male youth were overrepresented among arrested and diverted youth.

Additionally, 30% of diverted youth and 33% of comparable arrested youth had a history of child welfare involvement at the time of their school-based incident.

SAMPLES FOR 4- AND 5-YEAR FOLLOW-UP ANALYSES

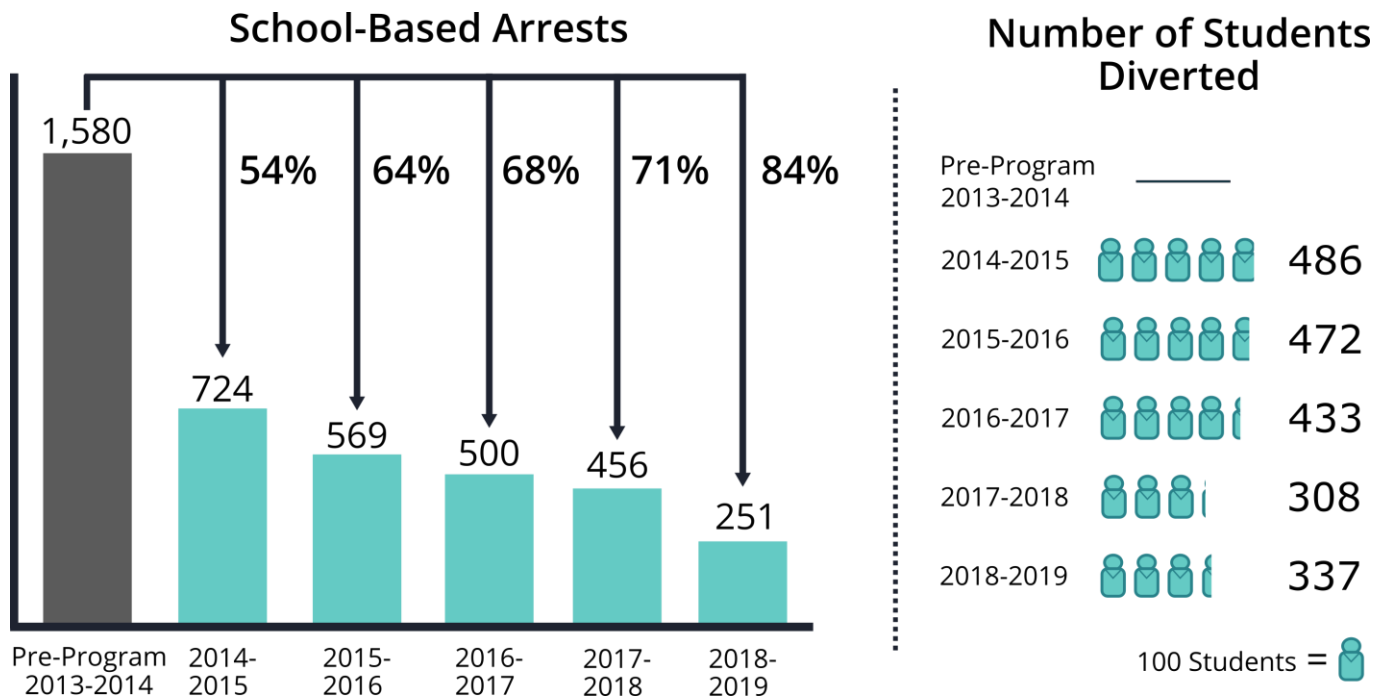


At the time of this study, 4- to 5-year follow-up data were only available for the first cohort of diverted youth (i.e., those diverted during the 2014-2015 school year).

REDUCED ARRESTS

REDUCED # OF SCHOOL-BASED ARRESTS BY **84%** FROM THE YEAR

BEFORE PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION TO YEAR 5 OF PROGRAM OPERATION



From the year before program implementation to year 5 of the program, the number of school based arrests **decreased by 84%**. Notably, the number of school-based arrests for possession of non-firearm weapons, marijuana possession, and disorderly conduct **decreased by more than 90%**.

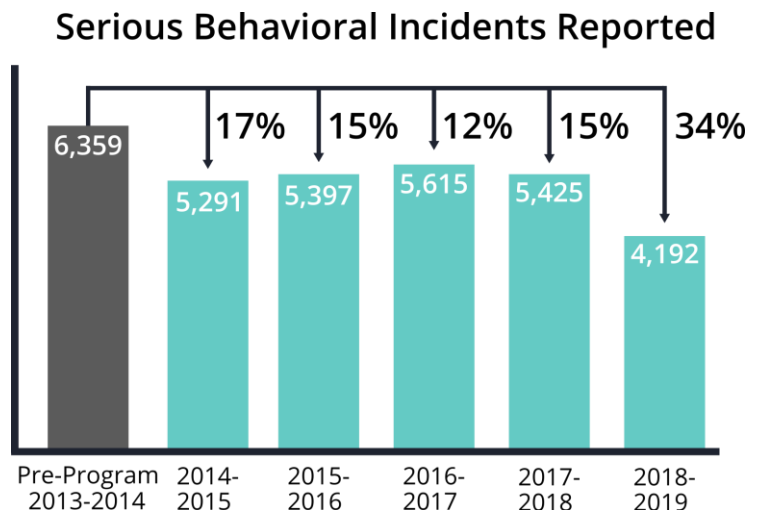
WHILE MAINTAINING SCHOOL SAFETY

34%

REDUCTION IN ANNUAL # OF REPORTED SERIOUS BEHAVIORAL INCIDENTS

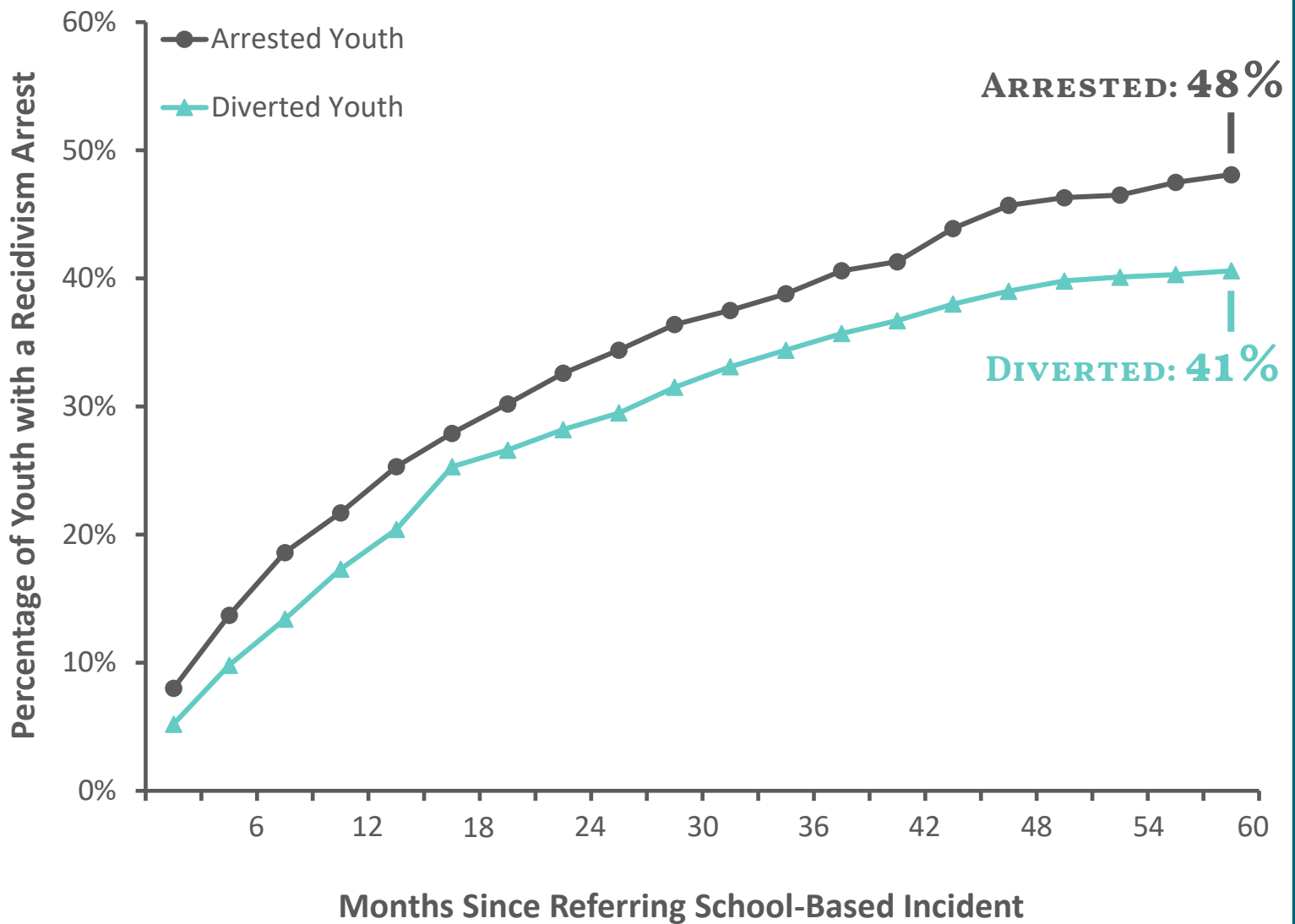
The annual number of **serious behavioral incidents** reported in schools declined 34% from the year before program implementation to the program's fifth year of operation.

This finding suggests that even as arrests decreased, school safety was not compromised.



REDUCED FUTURE JUSTICE SYSTEM CONTACT

REDUCED RECIDIVISM ARRESTS AMONG DIVERTED YOUTH



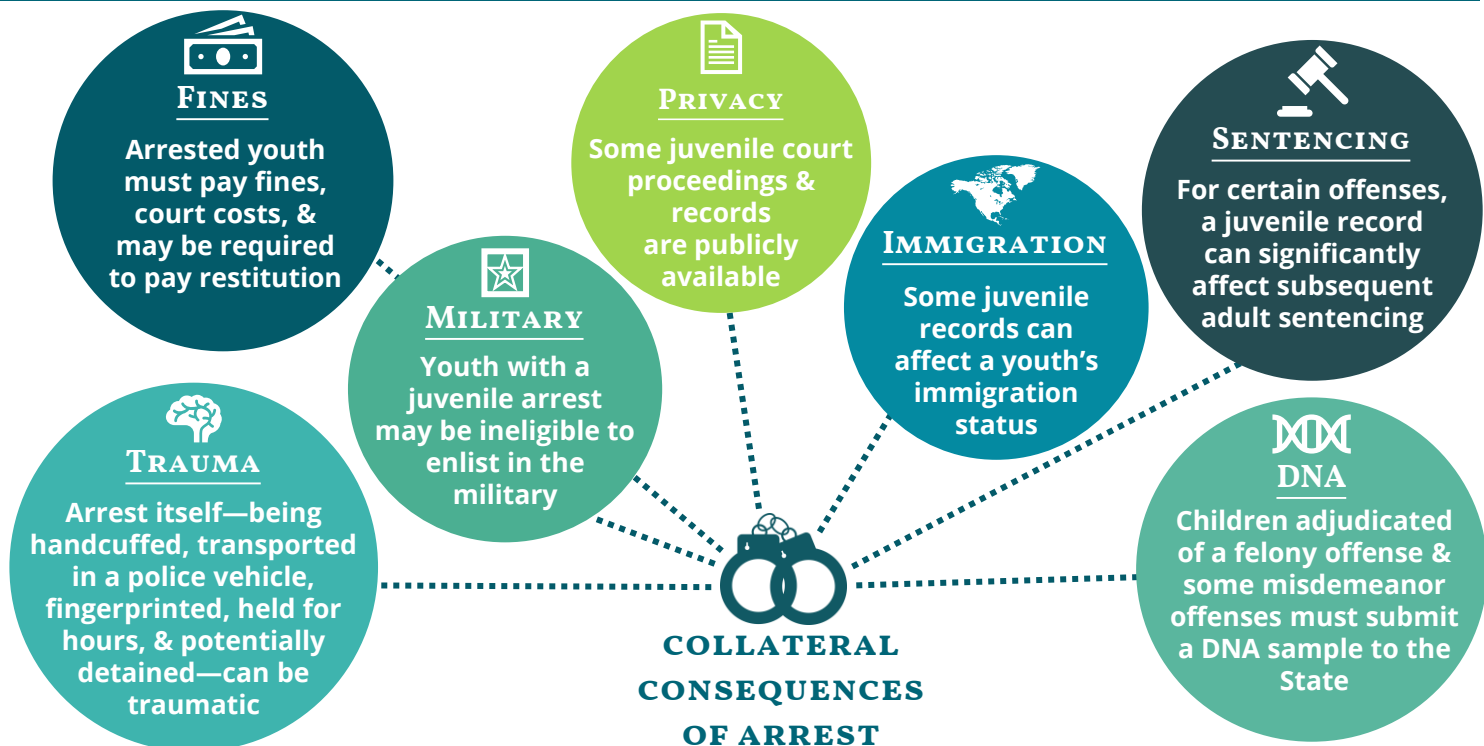
Diverted youth were significantly less likely to have a recidivism arrest than comparable arrested youth five years after their referring school-based incident (40.6% vs. 48.1%, respectively).

ARRESTED YOUTH WERE 1.4 TIMES MORE LIKELY THAN DIVERTED YOUTH TO HAVE A RECIDIVISM ARREST IN THE FIVE YEARS FOLLOWING THEIR SCHOOL-BASED INCIDENT*

** This finding was generated while accounting for youth characteristics (i.e., age, race/ethnicity, gender) and offense type.*

PREVENTED COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES

A PRIMARY GOAL OF THE DIVERSION PROGRAM WAS TO SPARE YOUTH THE TRAUMA OF ARREST AND ITS COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES.



Not only did program implementation eliminate school-based arrest for the referring incident, but in the five years following that referring incident, **the majority of diverted (59%) youth did not go on to experience a future arrest.**

% ARRESTED AT THE TIME OF THE ORIGINAL SCHOOL INCIDENT



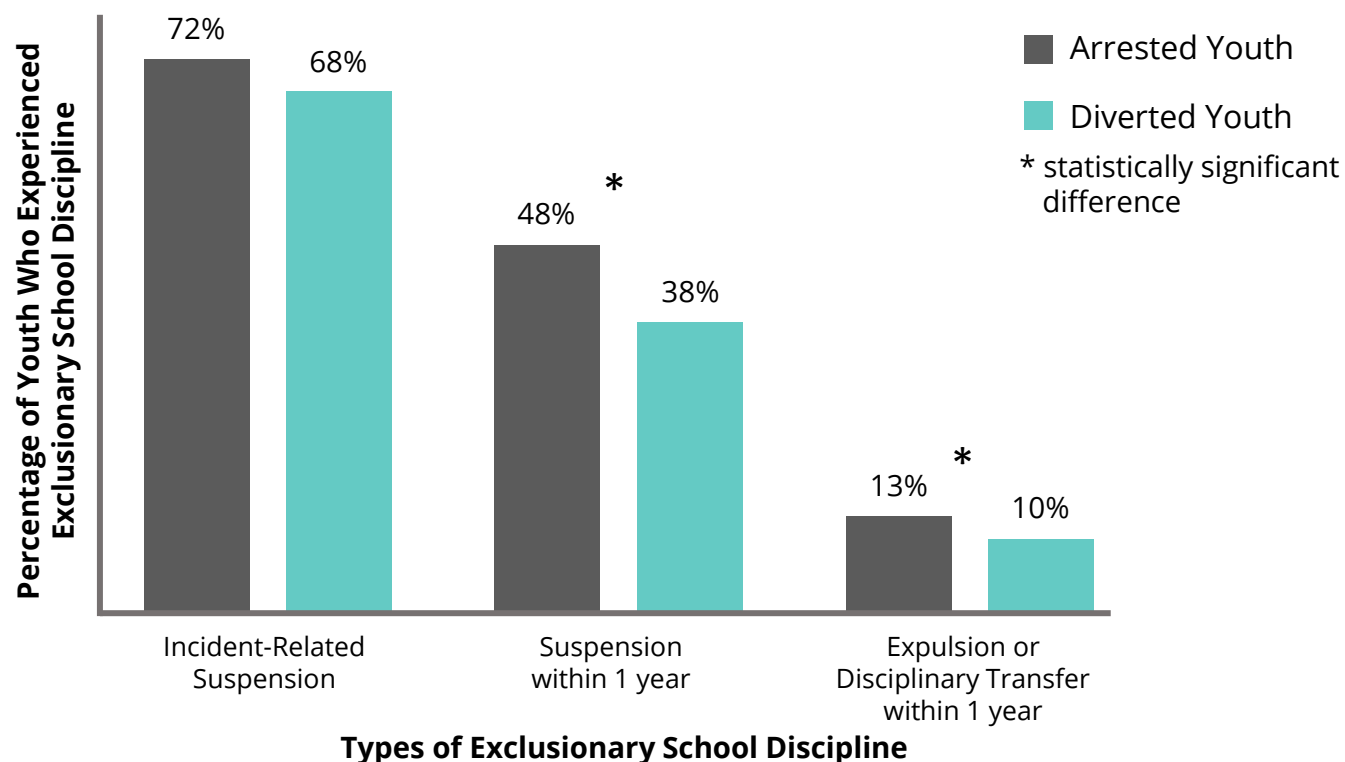
% WITH A RECIDIVISM ARREST WITHIN 5 YEARS OF THE SCHOOL INCIDENT



100% OF YOUTH ARRESTED IN SCHOOLS IN THE PRE-DIVERSION PROGRAM PERIOD CARRIED THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL-BASED ARREST INTO THE FUTURE, WHILE **59%** OF DIVERTED YOUTH NEVER EXPERIENCED AN ARREST—NOT AT THE TIME OF THE SCHOOL INCIDENT NOR IN THE FOLLOWING FIVE YEARS.

AIMED TO KEEP KIDS IN SCHOOL

DIVERTED YOUTH WERE LESS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE EXCLUSIONARY SCHOOL DISCIPLINE IN THE YEAR FOLLOWING THEIR REFERRING INCIDENT



Diverted and arrested youth did not differ significantly in likelihood of suspension *for their referring school-based incident*. However, after controlling for youth characteristics and suspension history, arrested youth were **1.6 times** more likely than diverted youth to be suspended *and 1.6 times* more likely to be referred for expulsion or disciplinary transfer in the year following their referring incident.

HOWEVER, THE LONG-TERM PICTURE IS MORE COMPLEX

When examining outcomes four years after a referring incident for the *first cohort of diverted youth* (i.e., diverted in the 2014-2015 school year), we observed mixed findings related to school discipline and academic achievement.

Although the likelihood of suspension in the four years following a referring incident appeared to differ significantly between diverted and comparable arrested youth, **this difference was not statistically significant** once we accounted for other important youth characteristics and suspension history, implying that factors other than diversion or arrest were driving the difference.

Additionally, diverted and comparable arrested youth demonstrated **no significant differences** in school dropout or on-time graduation in the four-year follow-up.

CONNECTED YOUTH TO VOLUNTARY PREVENTION SERVICES

DHS SUCCESSFULLY CONTACTED

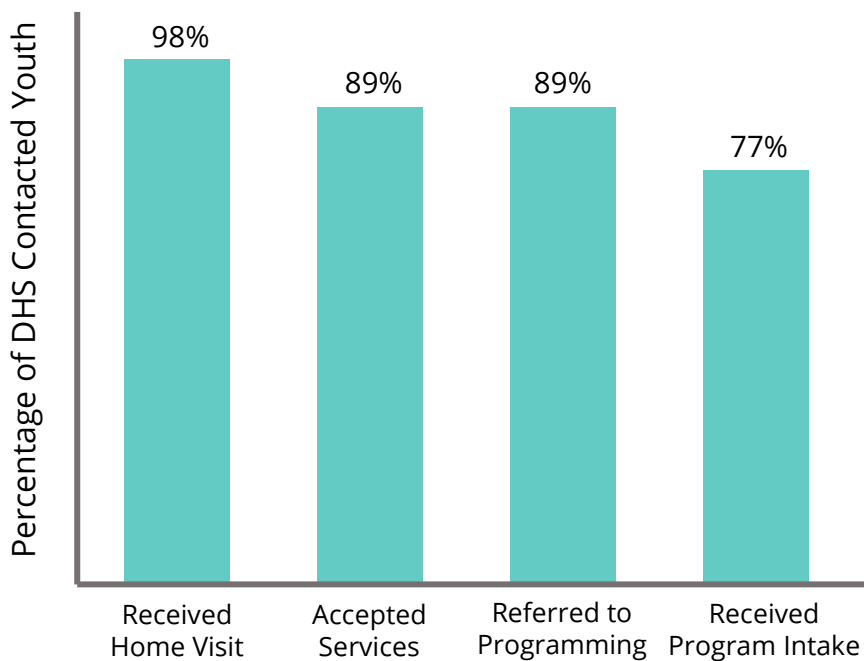
74%

OF FAMILIES

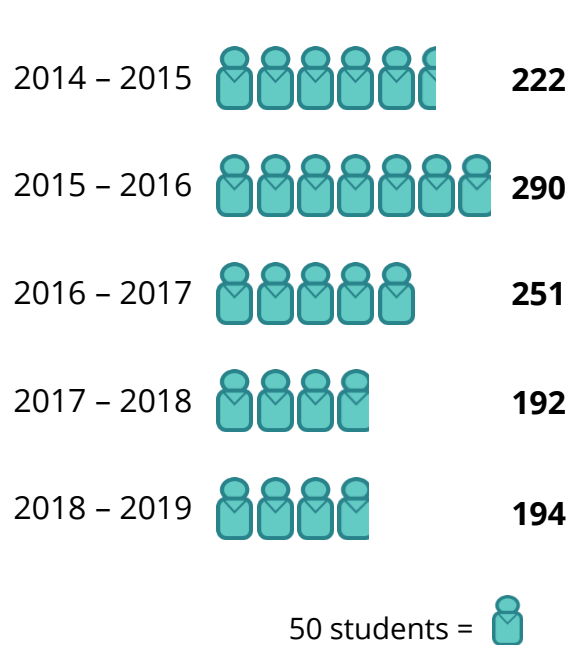
89%

OF THESE FAMILIES ACCEPTED SERVICES

When Contact was Made with Families, Most Diverted Youth Connected with Services



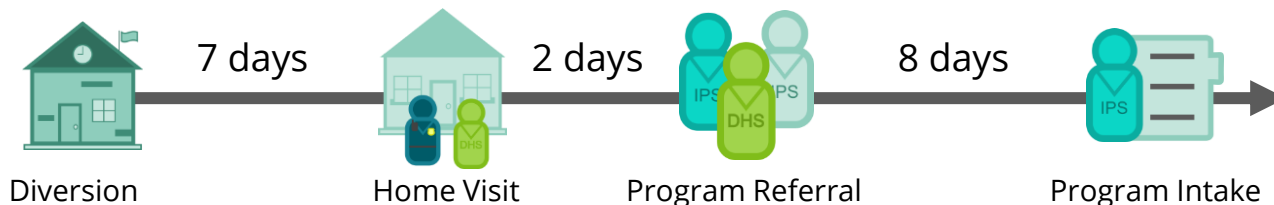
Number of Diverted Youth Connected with Services



Importantly, **youth who could and could not be contacted did not differ significantly** in their demographic characteristics (e.g., age, race, gender) or the type of incident that prompted their diversion.

TIMELINE TO CONTACT

Youth who accepted services after DHS contact typically completed a program intake **within 20 days** of their diversion incident.*

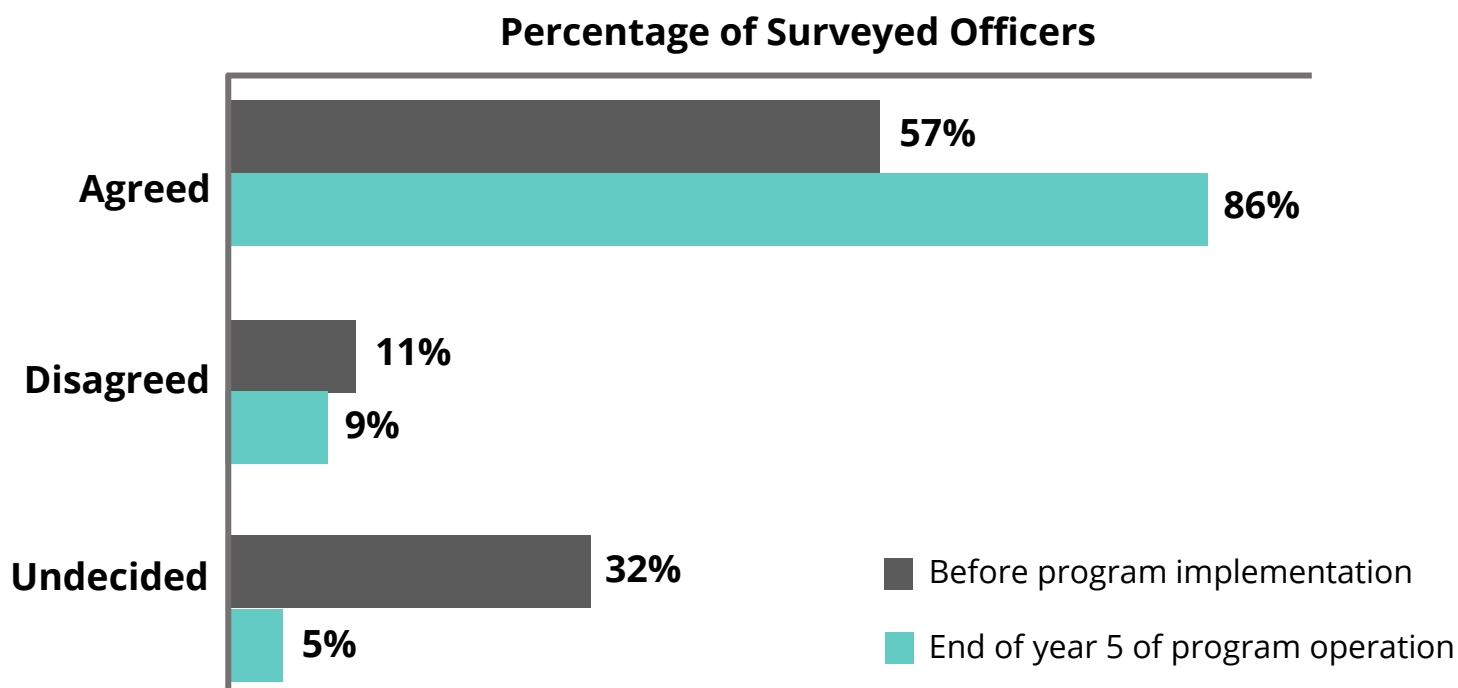


In addition to intensive prevention programming, providers linked youth and families with supplemental resources, such as mentoring, mental health services, and community organizations to address food and housing insecurity.

*Due to the skewed nature of the data, the median was used to determine the typical time between service points.

POLICE SUPPORT FOR THE DIVERSION PROGRAM GREW OVER TIME

BY YEAR 5 **86%** OF OFFICERS AGREED WITH THE PROGRAM



Surveyed officers reported that the Diversion Program **improved their relationships with students**; they also reported the program **improved school safety** (e.g., reduced the number of youth carrying weapons into school).

IN OFFICERS' OWN WORDS, POSITIVES OF THE DIVERSION PROGRAM INCLUDE:



PRODUCED NET FINANCIAL BENEFITS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

REDUCED DIRECT AND INDIRECT COSTS BY \$1.6 MILLION TO \$1.9 MILLION ANNUALLY

With partners from the Vera Institute of Justice, we conducted a cost-benefit analysis based on data from the first year (2014-2015) and fifth year (2018-2019) of the Diversion Program to capture both “start-up” and “mature” program costs.

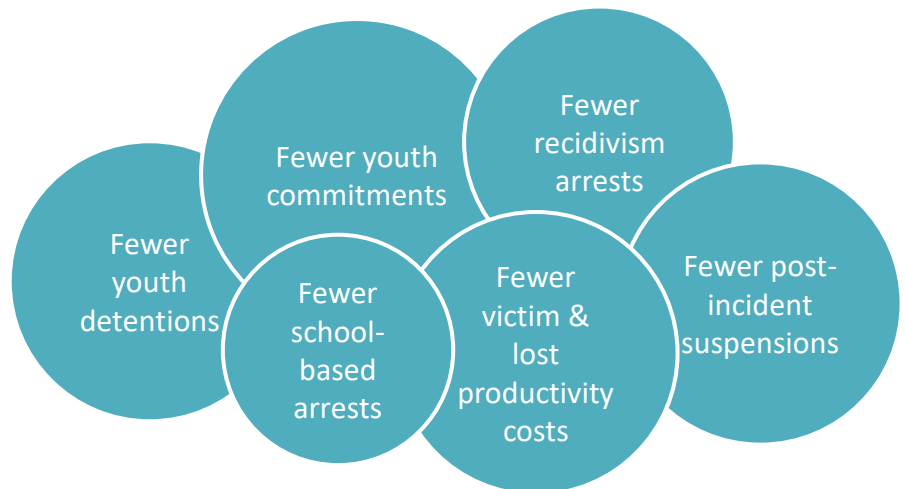
Program implementation increased some costs (e.g., salary, benefits, service provider contracts) to the Philadelphia Police Department and the Department of Human Services. The School District of Philadelphia reported no additional costs related to the Diversion Program. All costs were outweighed by considerable cost-savings from fewer school-based arrests, associated youth detentions and commitments, and recidivism arrests, as well as fewer costs to victims and lost productivity costs associated with recidivism arrests.

Compared to the year before program implementation, the Diversion Program produced more than **\$1.6 million in net annual savings** in 2014-2015 and more than **\$1.9 million in net annual savings** in 2018-2019.

PROGRAM COSTS TO AGENCIES:



PROGRAM-RELATED COST SAVINGS:



2014-2015

2018-2019

COSTS TO AGENCIES:

\$748,667

\$706,398

COST SAVINGS:

\$2,352,112

\$2,636,112

NET TOTAL SAVINGS:

\$1,603,445

\$1,929,714

*All values are adjusted to 2019 dollars.

TAKEAWAYS AFTER FIVE YEARS

The Philadelphia Police School Diversion Program **disrupted the school-to-prison pipeline**, substantially reducing school-based arrests *without* compromising school safety.

- In the Diversion Program's first five years, **2,036 students** were spared the traumatic experience of an arrest and its many negative collateral consequences.
- Arrested youth were **1.4 times more likely** than diverted youth to have a subsequent arrest in the five years following their school-based incident.
- Arrested youth were **1.6 times more likely** than diverted youth to be suspended from school in the year after their examined school-based incident.
- When social workers offered diverted youth and families voluntary services, **89%** accepted them and received a referral to a local provider.
- **86%** of school police officers reported strong agreement with the Diversion Program, and officers reported observing the program's benefits to school safety.
- Program implementation **saved stakeholders** between **\$1.6 million and \$1.9 million annually** compared to prior school-based arrest practices.

CONSIDERATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Diversion Program reflects a **change in police policy**, creating automatic diversion in lieu of arrest for all eligible youth. This change resulted in clear reductions in school-based arrests.

However, school staff maintained discretion for responding to youth incidents (e.g., with exclusionary discipline). We saw **few differences in long-term school related outcomes** between youth diverted in the program's first year (i.e., 2014-2015) and comparable youth arrested in the previous year. This finding may suggest a need for more structure in school personnel decision making, which could similarly improve school outcomes for diverted youth.

Recently, the School District of Philadelphia has been working to address this issue with targeted reforms; results of these efforts may be reflected in future long-term analysis of additional diverted cohorts.

Implementing school-based diversion produced **no negative outcomes** and resulted in several important positive outcomes: an **84% reduction** in the annual number of school-based arrests, a significant **decrease in likelihood of recidivism arrest**, and connection of youth with voluntary community-based intensive prevention services.

AUTHORS

Naomi E. Goldstein
Amanda NeMoyer
Rena Kreimer
TuQuynh Le
Angela Pollard
Alexei Taylor
Nivedita Anjaria
Chris Mai
Fengqing Zhang

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- Commissioner Kimberly Ali
- Former Deputy Mayor Cynthia Figueroa
- Former Deputy Commissioner Timene Farlow
- Deputy Commissioner Gary Williams
- Director of Court & Community Services David Bruce
- Program Administrator Damon Trent

CONTACT DR. NAOMI GOLDSTEIN AND THE JUVENILE JUSTICE RESEARCH & REFORM LAB AT: NEG23@DREXEL.EDU

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Juvenile Justice Division
Department of Human Services
City of Philadelphia

Philadelphia Police Department

School District of Philadelphia

RESEARCH PARTNERS

Juvenile Justice Research and Reform Lab
Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences
Drexel University

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