School Justice Partnership
NORTH CAROLINA

A PROGRAM TO KEEP KIDS IN SCHOOL AND OUT OF COURT
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GOALS







The School Justice Partnership (SJP) is a group of community stakeholders from schools, law enforcement, and the court system who develop and implement effective strategies to address student misconduct within the school system and the community rather than by a referral to the justice system. As the "convener," the chief district court judge brings key stakeholders together and chairs meetings, but is an equal participant in the process. A successful SJP requires commitment from a diverse group of local leaders.

ABOUT

The North Carolina Commission on the Administration of Law and Justice recommended statewide implementation of SJPs, which is an important component to the successful implementation of North Carolina's Raise the Age legislation.

The School Justice Partnership North Carolina (SJP) program is managed by the North Carolina Judicial Branch's Administrative Office of the Courts.
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SCHOOL JUSTICE PARTNERSHIPS (SJPs) ARE BEING DEVELOPED THROUGHOUT THE STATE TO KEEP KIDS IN SCHOOL AND OUT OF COURT.

North Carolina's 2017 Raise the Age law (S.L. 2017-57 § 160.4.(aa)) authorized the director of the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) to establish policies and procedures for chief district court judges and local stakeholders to establish SJPs to help reduce in-school arrests, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions.

Statistics show that contact with the juvenile justice system increases the likelihood that youth will reoffend. The SJP consequently seeks to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension, expulsion, and school-based court referrals, which push students out of school and into court.

EACH SJP DEVELOPS A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) WHICH ESTABLISHES GUIDELINES FOR ADDRESSING STUDENT MISCONDUCT WITHOUT COURT OR LAW ENFORCEMENT INVOLVEMENT.

Using a graduated response model, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) identifies age-appropriate graduated responses that increase in severity as misconduct persists.

EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE PRACTICES PUSH STUDENTS OUT OF SCHOOL AND INTO COURT FOR MINOR MISCONDUCT.

In North Carolina school-based referrals accounted for 45% of referrals to the juvenile justice system for the 2019 calendar year. In FY 2024-2025, school-based referrals accounted for 26% of the referrals to the juvenile justice system, which reflects a reduction in referral rates since 2019. Most of these referrals were for minor nonviolent offenses. In the FY 2024-2025 school year, 88% of school-based referrals were for misdemeanors and status offenses.

RESPONDING TO STUDENT MISCONDUCT WITH EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE PRODUCES NEGATIVE OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS.

Suspension and expulsion increase the risk that students

will drop out of school, repeat a grade, and engage in future delinquent conduct. A single suspension can triple the likelihood that a student will enter the juvenile justice system.

Court involvement for minor misconduct increases the likelihood that youth will reoffend, and outcomes worsen with deeper involvement in the system. For example, confinement in a juvenile facility increases the risk that a youth will be rearrested as an adult.

For some students, a school-based referral can lead to a permanent criminal record, which creates barriers to college financial aid, employment, housing, and military eligibility.

SJPs IN NORTH CAROLINA ARE HELPING TO KEEP KIDS IN SCHOOL BY REDUCING SCHOOL-BASED REFERRALS.

New Hanover County implemented an SJP in November 2015, which resulted in a 67% decrease in school-based referrals since FY 2013 - 2014. In the same time period, the dropout rate in New Hanover County declined, and the high school graduation rate increased. Since the 2015 SJP implementation in New Hanover County, school-based referrals to the juvenile justice system have remained substantially below pre-implementation referral rates. The rate of school-based offenses in New Hanover County was 21% for FY 2023-2024.

Other SJP counties in North Carolina have seen similar declines since FY 2015-2016:

- In Lenoir County, school-based delinquency referrals have decreased by 76%.
- In Brunswick County, school-based delinquency referrals have decreased by 13%.
- In Mecklenburg County, school-based delinquency referrals have decreased by 70%.

Data Sources: https://www.nccourts.gov/programs/school-justice-partnership/sjp-data and https://www.ncdps.gov/our-organization/juvenile-justice/datastatisticsreports/school-justice-partnership-dashboard

NCAOC RELEASED A TOOLKIT FOR JUDGES TO FACILITATE THE STATEWIDE IMPLEMENTATION OF SJPs.

A collaborative workgroup completed the development of an "SJP Toolkit" for chief district court judges to convene local community stakeholder groups. The SJP Toolkit, which was updated in February 2023, provides resources needed to implement an SJP and adopt an SJP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) setting out appropriate responses to student misconduct.

As of June 30, 2025, SJPs have been developed in 61 North Carolina counties. To learn more about SJPs in North Carolina, visit www.nccourts.gov/sjp.

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