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## With Police in Schools, More Children in Court

NY times.com

12/4/2013

As school districts across the US consider placing more police officers in schools, youth advocates and judges are raising the alarm about what they have seen in the schools where police officers are already in place: a huge rise in criminal charges against children for misbehavior that many believe should be handled in the school principal's office.

Since the early 1990s, thousands of districts have paid local police agencies to provide armed "school resource officers" for high schools, middle schools and sometimes even elementary schools. Hundreds of additional districts, including those in Houston, Los Angeles and Philadelphia, have created police forces of their own, employing thousands of officers.

Last week, after the shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, a task force of the National Rifle Association recommended placing police officers or other armed guards in every school. The White House has proposed an increase in police officers based in schools.

The effectiveness of using police officers in schools to deter crime or the threat of armed attacks is unclear. The new N.R.A. report cites the example of a Mississippi assistant principal who in 1997 got a gun from his truck and disarmed a student who had killed two classmates, and another in California in 2001 when a school police officer wounded and arrested a student who had opened fire with a shotgun.

Yet the most striking impact of school police officers so far, critics say, has been a huge increase in students being arrested and sent to court for essentially nonviolent behavior — including non-serious fights, absenteeism from class and using bad language with teachers.

"There is no evidence that placing officers in the schools improves safety," said Denise Gottfredson, a criminologist at the University of Maryland who is an expert in school violence. "And it increases the number of minor behavior problems that are referred to the police, pushing kids into the criminal system."

Hundreds of thousands of students are arrested at schools each year. A large number are sent to court for relatively minor offenses, with black and Hispanic students and those with disabilities most affected, according to recent reports from civil rights groups. In February, one study found that black students in one school district are arrested four times more often than white students.

In some cases, such criminal charges could have a long-term effect or even affect the students' ability to find jobs later on.

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