

# Referrals to Law Enforcement and School-Related Arrests in U.S. Public Schools During the 2020-21 School Year

2020-21 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)



U.S. Department of Education  
Office for Civil Rights

## About the Civil Rights Data Collection

The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) is a mandatory survey of all public schools and school districts in the 50 states, Washington, D.C., and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. It gathers information about student access to educational programs, activities, staff, and school climate factors from public schools serving students in preschool through 12th grade. For more information about the CRDC or to download the full 2020-21 CRDC public-use data file, please visit <https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov>.



Since the 2009-10 CRDC, schools and school districts have reported the number of students who were referred to law enforcement and arrested at the nation's public schools.

### REFERRAL TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

Is an action by which a student is reported to any law enforcement agency or official, including a school police unit, for an incident that occurs on school grounds, during school-related events, or while taking school transportation, regardless of whether official action is taken. Citations, tickets, court referrals, and school-related arrests are considered referrals to law enforcement.

### SCHOOL-RELATED ARREST

Is an arrest of a student for any activity conducted on school grounds, during off-campus school activities (in-person or virtual), while taking school transportation, or due to a referral by any school official. All school-related arrests are considered referrals to law enforcement.

## Student Referrals to Law Enforcement and School-Related Arrests

**49.2**  
Million

Overall Student Enrollment

**61,900**

Referrals to Law Enforcement

**8,900**

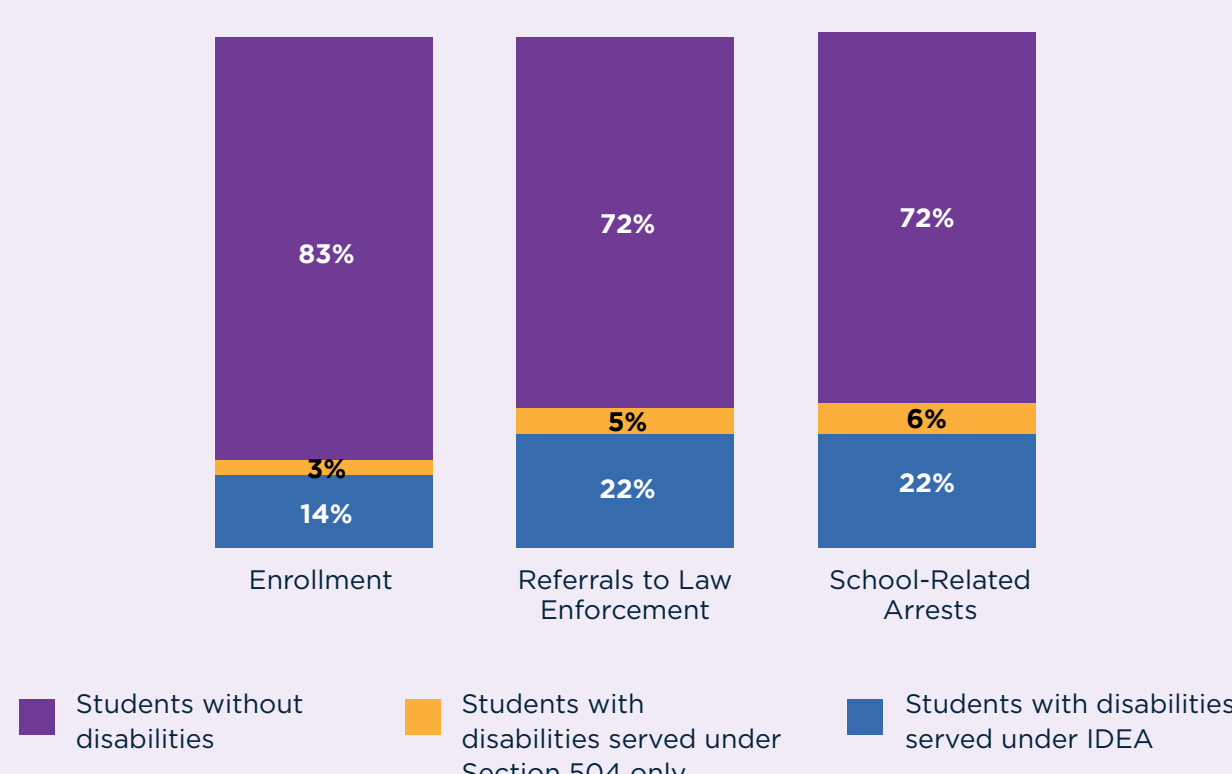
School-Related Arrests

**During the 2020-21 school year, 14% of referrals to law enforcement resulted in a school-related arrest.**

FIGURE 1

### Referrals to Law Enforcement and School-Related Arrests by Disability<sup>1</sup>

Students with disabilities attending public school were overrepresented in referrals to law enforcement and school-related arrests.



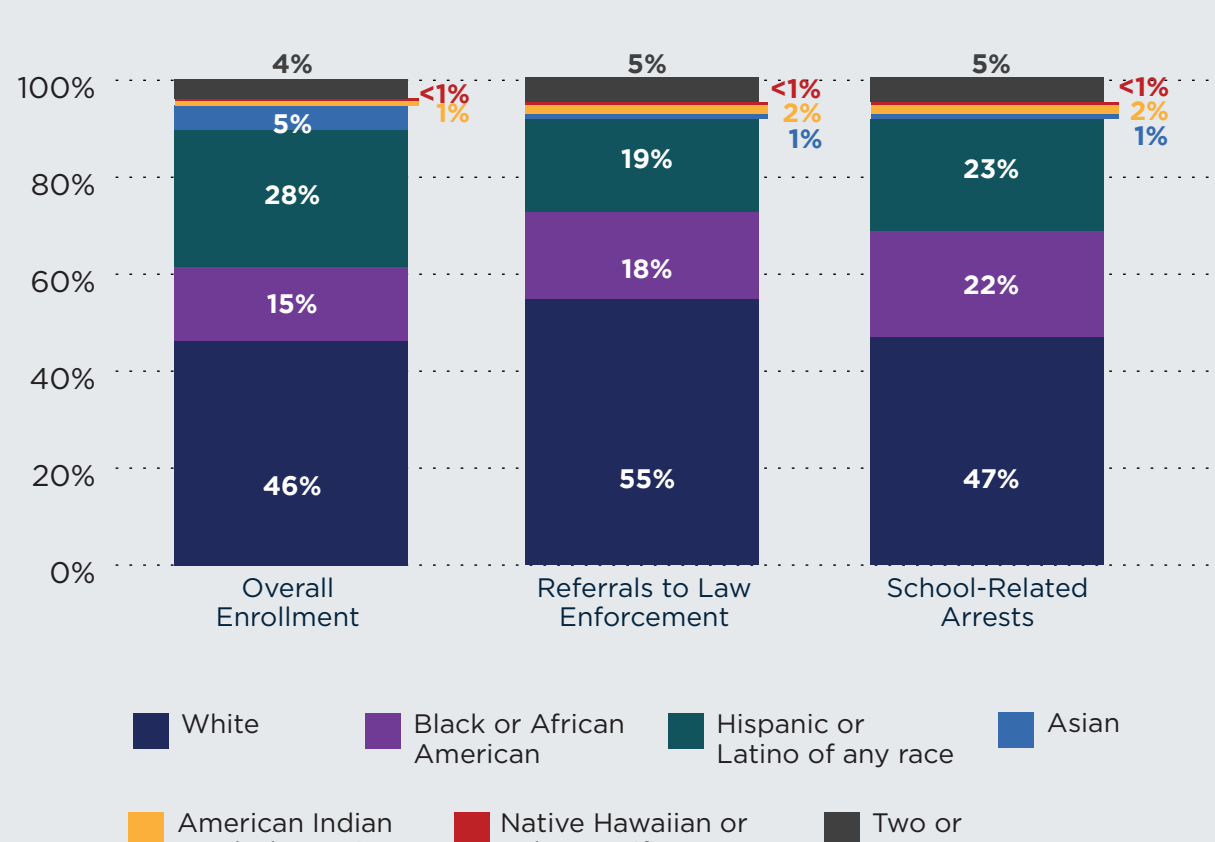
NOTE: Percent distributions may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

**Boys** represented 51% of total K-12 student enrollment, and accounted for 68% referrals to law enforcement and 68% of school-related arrests. **Girls** represented 49% of total K-12 student enrollment, and accounted for 32% of referrals to law enforcement and 32% of school-related arrests.

FIGURE 2

### Referrals to Law Enforcement and School-Related Arrests by Race/Ethnicity<sup>2</sup>

American Indian or Alaska Native students, Black students, White students, and students of two or more races were overrepresented in referrals to law enforcement and school-related arrests in public schools.



NOTE: Percent distributions may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup> Under Section 504, a person has a disability if they: (1) have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity; (2) have a record of such an impairment; or (3) are regarded as having such an impairment. 29 U.S.C. § 705(9)(B), (20)(B); 34 C.F.R. § 104.3(j). Students with disabilities who are eligible for special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. § 1401(3)(A) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.8, are covered by both Section 504 and IDEA. Students with disabilities who are not IDEA-eligible but who are covered by Section 504 are sometimes referred to as "504-only" students.

<sup>2</sup> Referrals to law enforcement and school-related arrests data by race/ethnicity include only students served under IDEA and not those served only under Section 504.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2020-21 Civil Rights Data Collection, released November 2023, available at <https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov>.



The data presented in this report is from the 2020-21 CRDC privacy-protected, public-use data file, released November 2023.



The calculated counts and percentages in this report may differ from those by other offices within the U.S. Department of Education (ED) due to differences in methodology, data sources, and survey population (or universe of schools and school districts that submit data). For additional information about the differences between the CRDC and other ED data, please see, *Building Bridges: Increasing the Power of the CRDC Through Data Linking With an ID Crosswalk*.



The percentages listed are rounded to the nearest whole number. Counts of 1,000,000 or greater are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand. Counts of 1,000 or greater are rounded to the nearest hundred. Counts of less than 1,000 are rounded to the nearest ten.



This analysis excludes schools for which OCR determined potentially erroneous data had been reported. For more information on the 2020-21 CRDC data quality efforts, review the User's Manual available at <https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov>.



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