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EDITORIAL

## Over-Punishment in Schools

New York City joined a national trend in 1998 when it put the police in charge of school security. The consensus is that public schools are now safe. But juvenile justice advocates across the country are rightly worried about policies under which children are sometimes arrested and criminalized for behavior that once was dealt with by principals or guidance counselors working with a student's parents.

Children who are singled out for arrest and suspension are at greater risk of dropping out and becoming permanently entangled with the criminal justice system. It is especially troubling that these children tend to be disproportionately black and Hispanic, and often have emotional problems or learning disabilities.

School officials in several cities have identified overpolicing as a problem in itself. The New York City Council has taken a first cut at the problem by drafting a bill, the Student Safety Act, that would bring badly needed accountability and transparency to the issue.

The draft bill would require police and education officials to file regular reports that would show how suspensions and other sanctions affect minority children, children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Detailed reports from the Police Department would show which students were arrested or issued summonses and why, so that lawmakers could get a sense of where overpolicing might be a problem.

Most important, the bill would create an easily navigable system under which parents, students and teachers could file complaints against school security officers. This provision comes in response to a 2007 report by the New York Civil Liberties Union, which said students were being roughed up for minor infractions like talking back or walking the halls without a pass.

The Police Department and the Department of Education are sometimes stingy with data. But the City Council is on the right track when it says that the disciplinary system could benefit from greater transparency. Lawmakers who are negotiating with the city over the language of the bill should keep this basic point in mind.

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