

## Study: Larger school districts more strict

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A study of Florida public school districts suggests the size of a district often determines whether students are punished under zero-tolerance policies.

A University of Florida researcher found larger school districts are more likely than smaller ones to have mandatory expulsion policies for students who take guns to schools and to impose mandatory suspensions for the possession of knives and drugs, as well as bullying.

"Children are increasingly being sent to judges and jails for offenses that traditionally were dealt with in the principal's office and after-school detentions," said lead investigator Brian Schoonover, who conducted the study for his doctoral dissertation. "Thirty years ago it would have been unusual to see a child handcuffed by a police officer. Today it is part of a growing trend that is commonly referred to as the 'schoolhouse-to-jailhouse track' or the 'school-to-prison pipeline.' "

Schoonover also found more than half of Florida's small districts -- 53 percent -- have no alternative educational setting for students who are expelled, compared with 3 percent of large districts.

Schoonover presented his findings in Washington during last month's National Conference for Safe Schools and Communities.

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