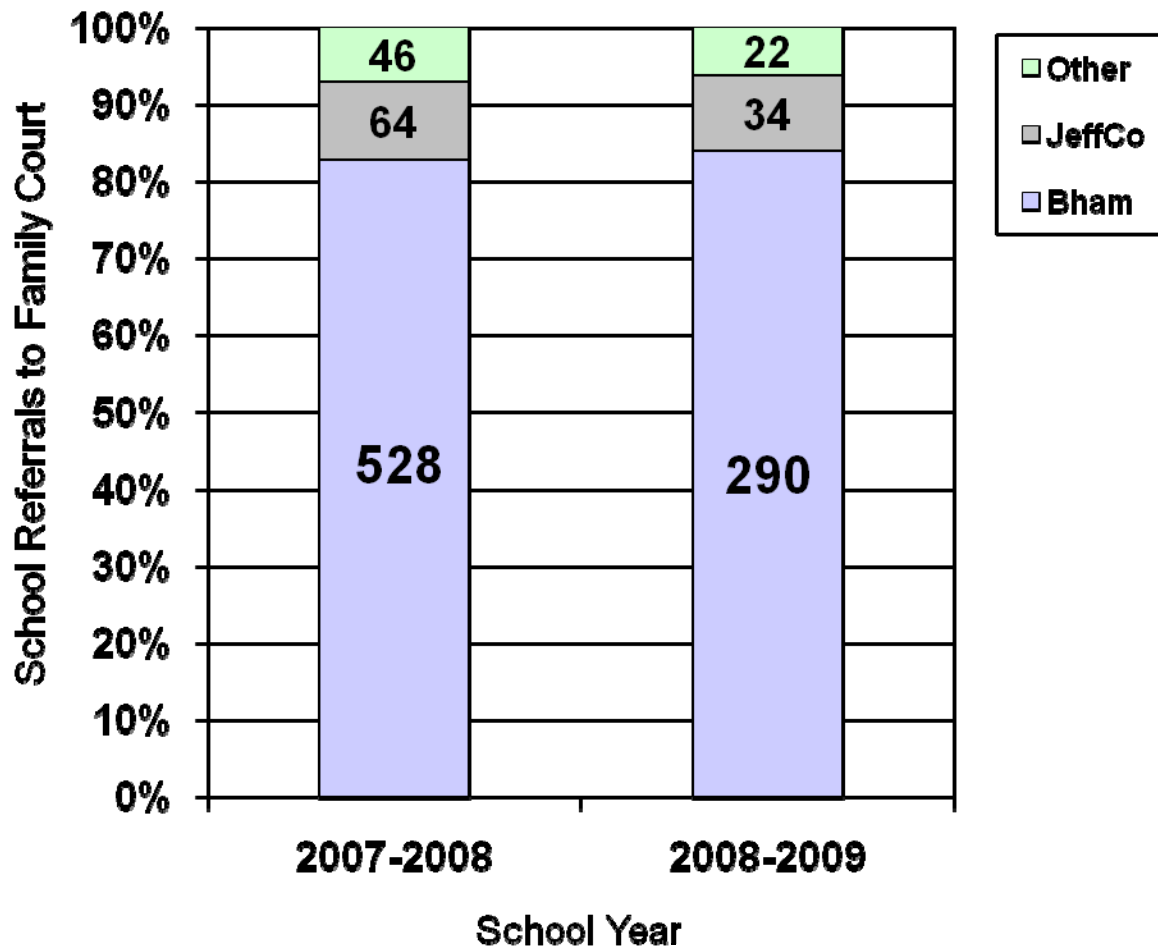

Jefferson County Family Court's School Offense Protocol

Coalition for Juvenile Justice
Southern Region Conference

January 29, 2010

More than 80% of school referrals to the Jefferson County Family Court come from the Birmingham City Schools.



Why is it a problem?

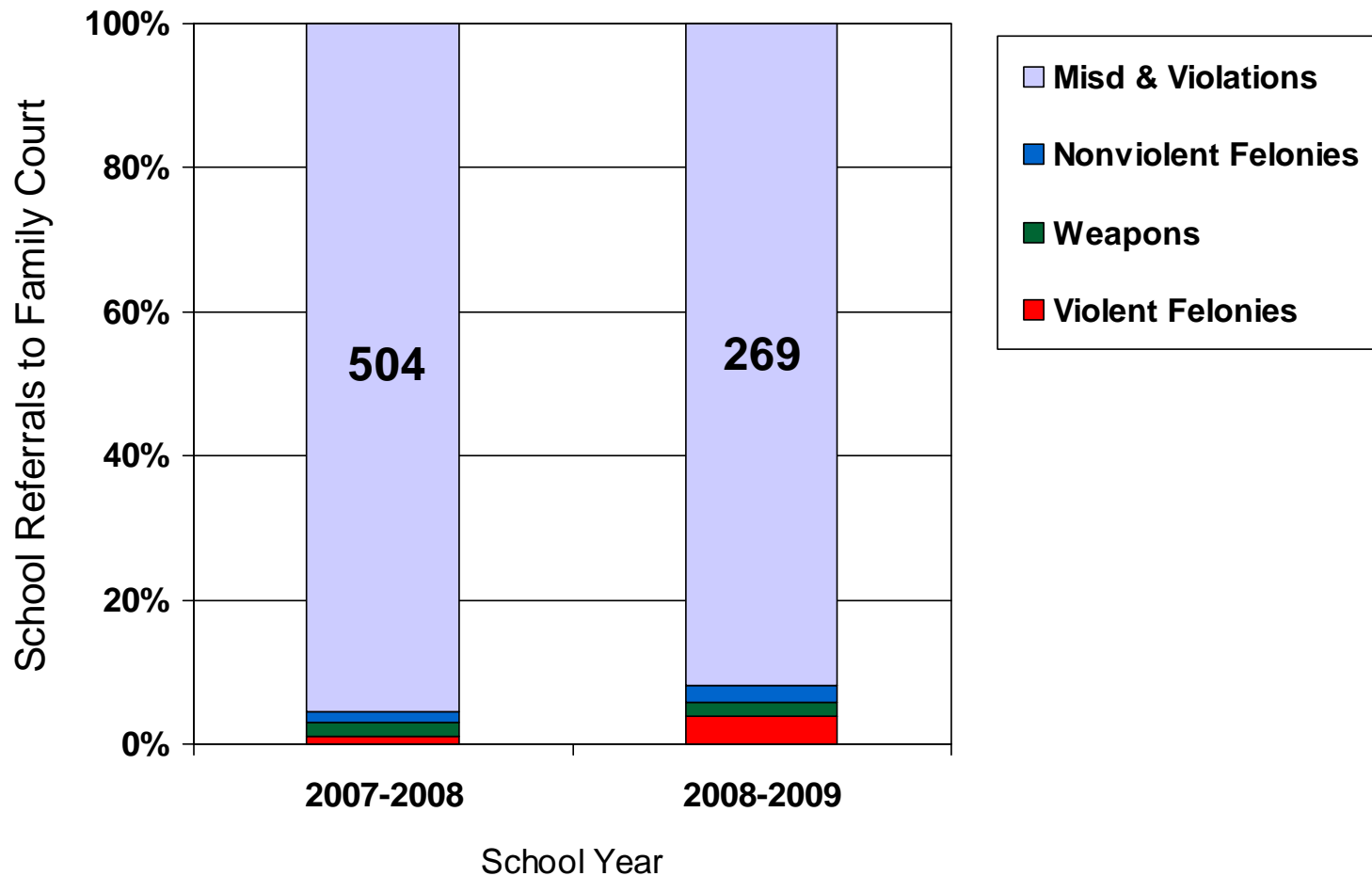
Research shows a strong link between court referrals and dropout rates

- A student arrested in high school is twice as likely to drop out
- A student who appears in court during high school is four times as likely to drop out

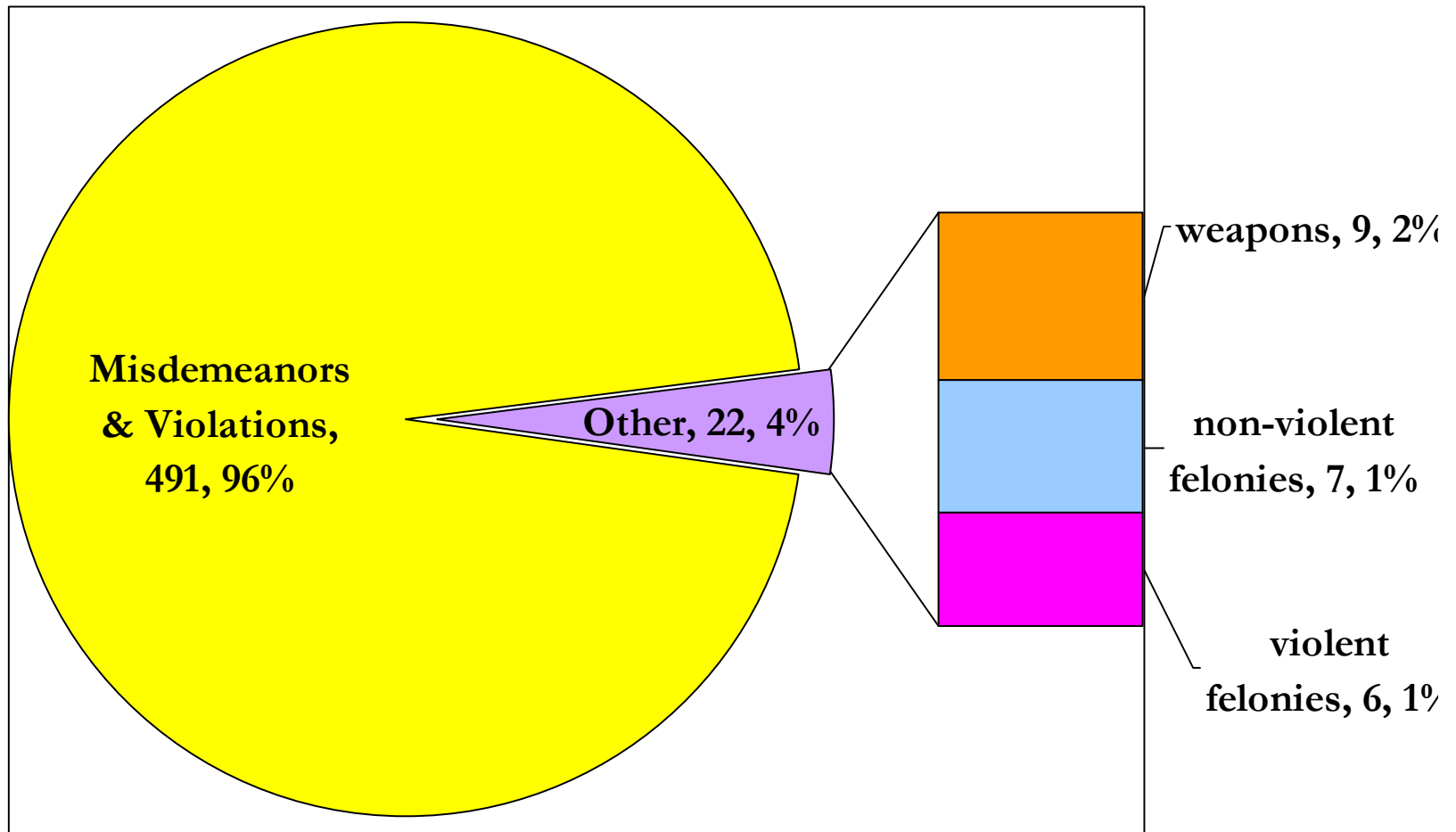
Sweeten, Gary, Who Will Graduate? Disruption of High School Education by Arrest and Court Involvement. 24.4, Justice Quarterly, 462-480 (December 2006).

The great majority of children were brought in on minor offenses and violations.

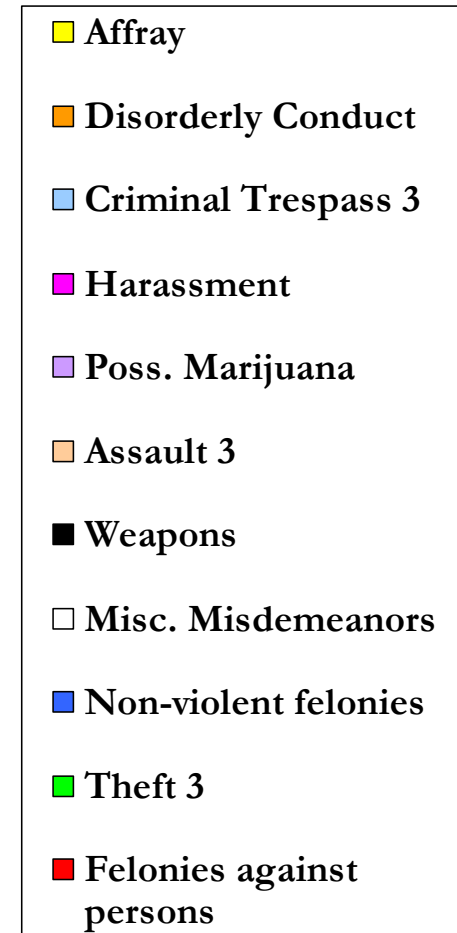
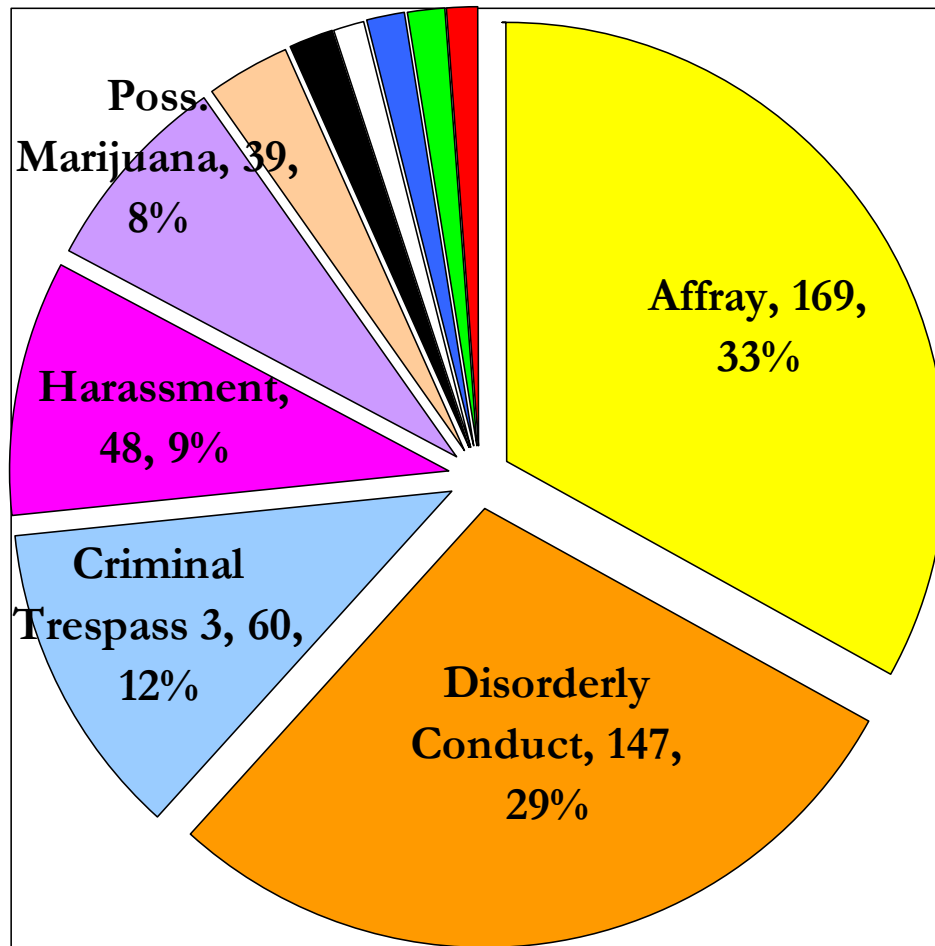
Misdemeanors and violations accounted for more than 90% of arrests involving Birmingham students.



Birmingham students referred to family court in 2007/08 – by offense

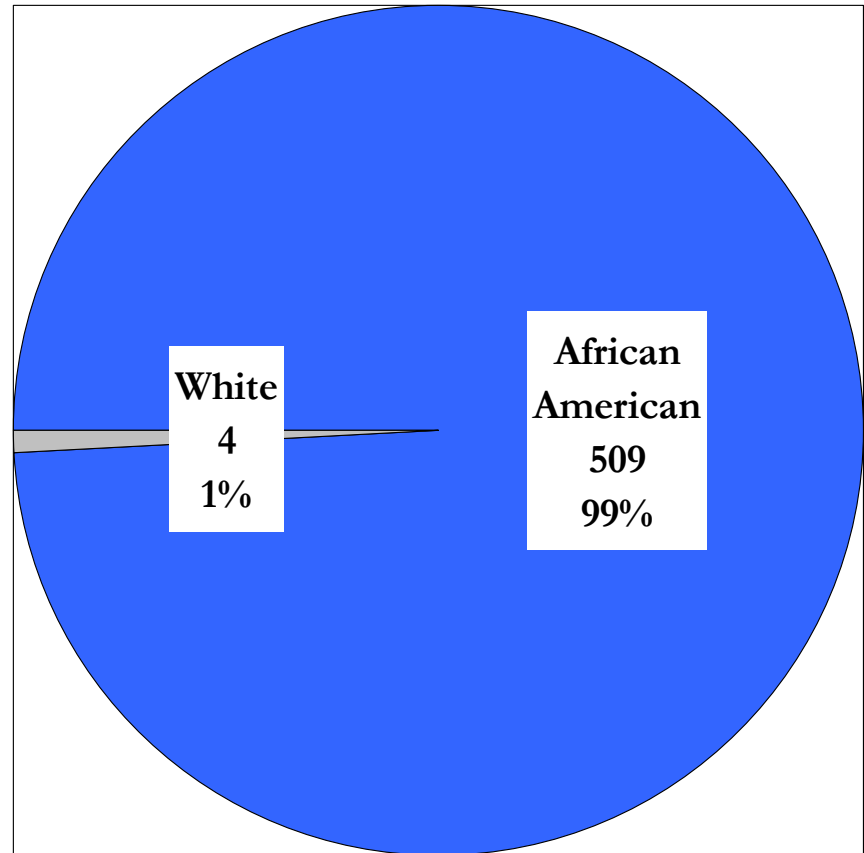


Birmingham students referred to family court in 2007/08 – by offense



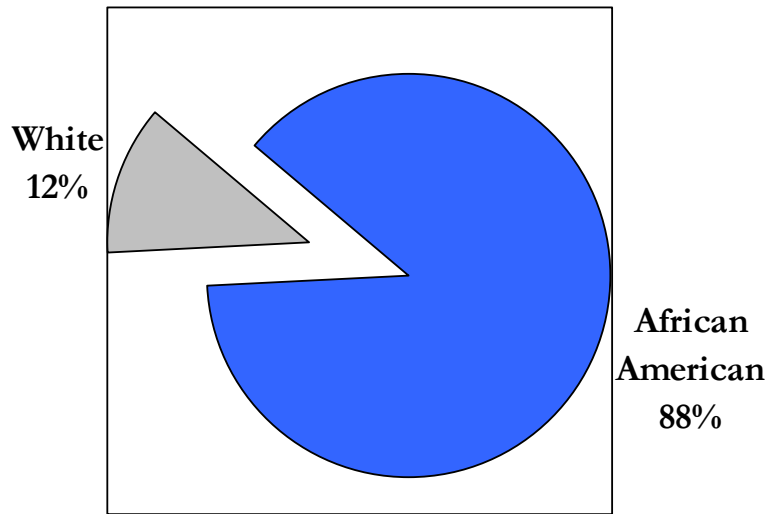
Added to the disproportionate
minority contact with the juvenile
justice system.....

- In the 2007/2008 school year, the Birmingham City Schools made more than 500 referrals to the Jefferson County Family Court
- 99% of the complaints were filed against African American students

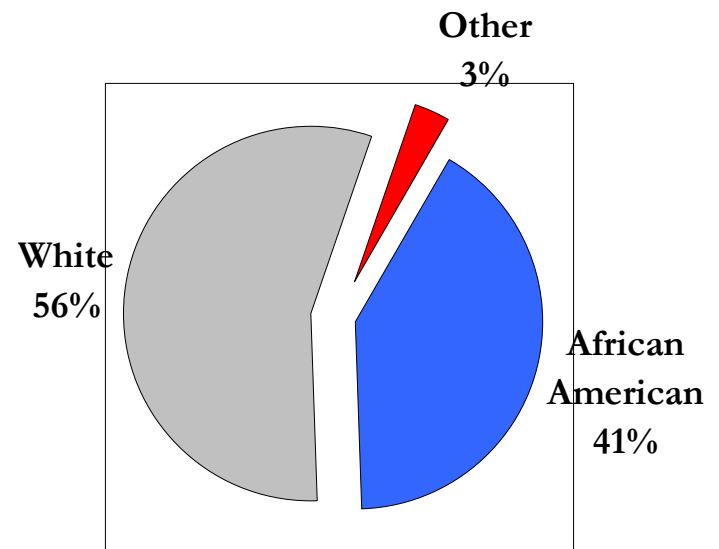


Racial Disparities in Detention

G. Ross Bell Detention Center



Jefferson County



Realization...

Normal Adolescence

- Puberty
- Dating
- Member of family to member of peer group
- Identity
- Some adult responsibilities
- Independence/Dependence

Normal Adolescents

- Moody
- Withdrawn
- “New” emotions
- Frequently change image
- Trying to fit in
- Short attentions spans

“Our” Kids

- Broken families
- Dysfunctional families
- Drug/alcohol abuse in families
- Criminal behavior “normal” in their families
- Learning disabilities
- Mental health issues
- Abuse victims

Action...

A leader to spearhead the effort

- Judge
 - School official
 - District Attorney
 - Police Chief
 - County official
-

Solicit media support

- Meet with the media at regular intervals.
 - Foster good relations.
 - Provide reliable data.
 - Work with the media on continued messaging.
-

Form Your Team

- Jefferson County Family Court
 - Birmingham City Schools
 - Jefferson County District Attorney
 - Birmingham Police Department
 - NAACP
 - Southern Poverty Law Center
 - Department of Human Resources
-

Decide upon a better way of discipline.

- First “offense” – warning/written citation
 - Second “offense” – Attend “School Offense Workshop
 - Referral to court
-

Decide which “offenses” to include.

- Affray (fighting)
 - Disorderly conduct
 - Harassment
 - Assault 3
 - Criminal Trespass 3
-

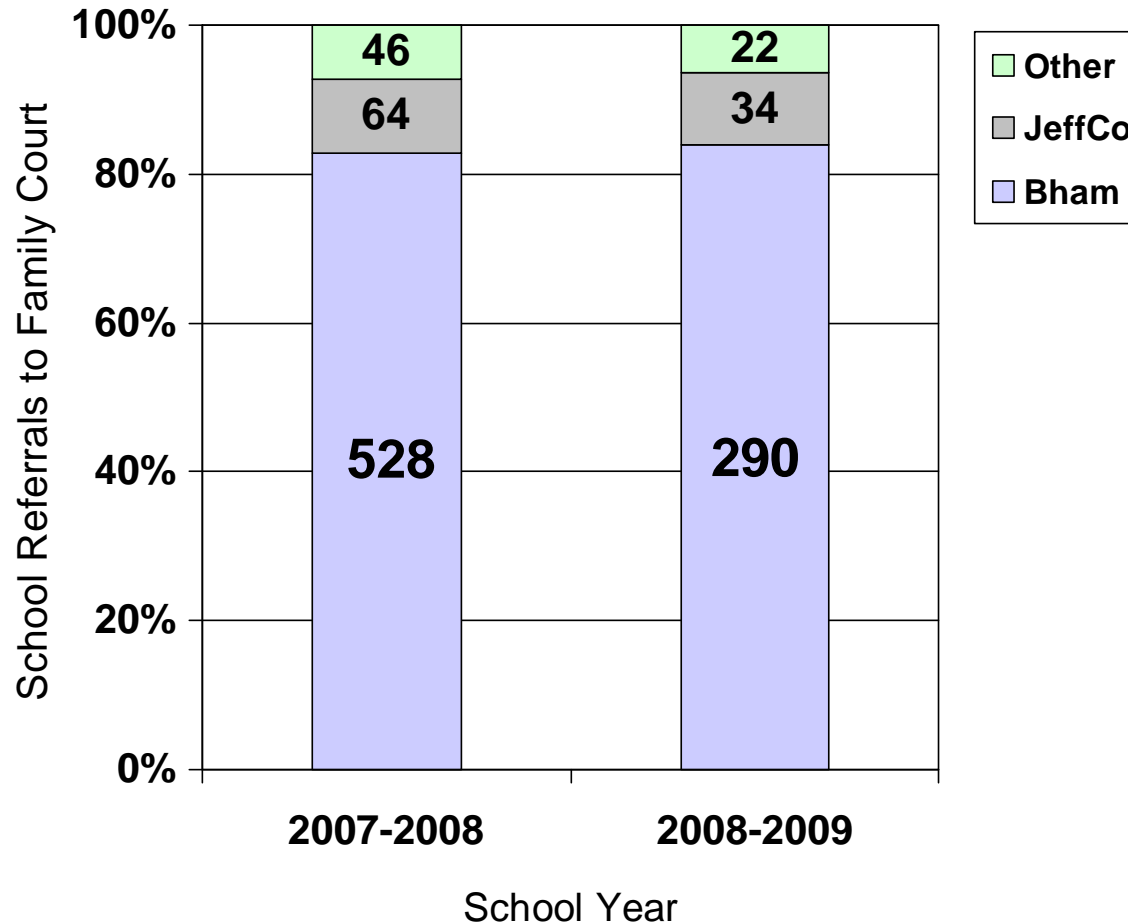
Consensus

- If “Columbine” happens in my jurisdiction, I want the police at the school protecting the children and not at the family court over a school yard fight.
-

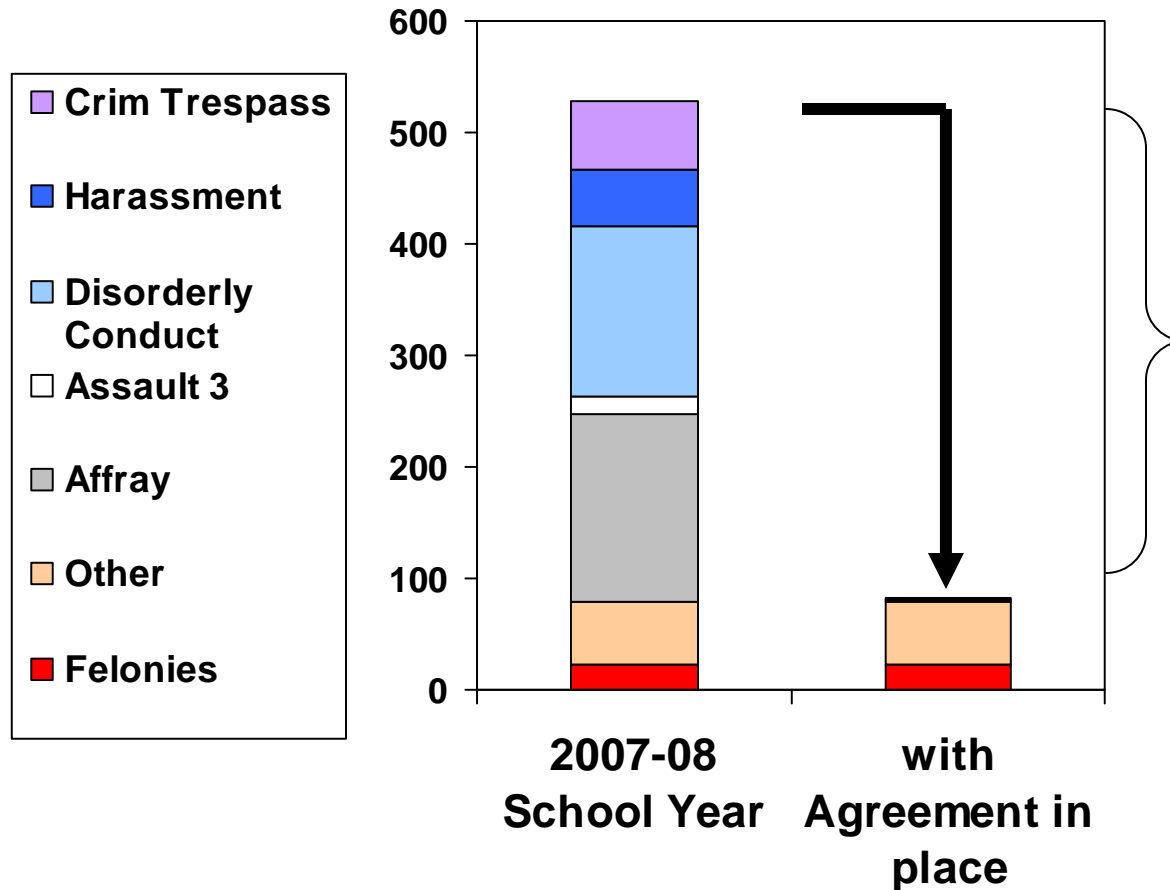
Get it in writing!

Results.....

More than 80% of school referrals to the Jefferson County Family Court come from the Birmingham City Schools.



The collaborative agreement will reduce court referrals from Birmingham schools by 84%.



**84%
reduction**

-
- 21% reduction in school drop outs in Clayton County, Georgia.
 - School Resource Officers have time to “police” and protect.
 - Administrators and teachers gain respect of students and control of schools.
-

For more information:

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Presiding Judge

Jefferson County Family Court

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