

Is the zero tolerance policy in school too harsh?

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UPDATE (CNN) -- Nationwide, school kids are more likely to be arrested at school than ever before. Many believe the "zero tolerance" policies adopted by many school systems disproportionately affect minorities.

Tenth grader Messiah, who asked that his last name not be used, was in science class at the high school of art and design in New York City when he says boredom led him to draw on his desk with a marker last month. He says, "I said I did it, I knew it was wrong."

His mom says her 15-year-old son is not a trouble maker. He was suspended. Three school days later while Messiah was taking a test he was called to the principal's office. He says, "They arrested me, and then searched through my pockets and stuff again, made me take my book bag off and then handcuffed me when I got to the precinct they handcuffed me to the bench for a couple of hours."

Non-criminal offenses like this, being handed over to the police, is the basis for a class action lawsuit filed last year. Dennis Park with ACLU says, "We want something saying that the policy of using too much force is unconstitutional."

It's not just New York, across the nation police presence in school is on the rise and students are more likely to be arrested at school Parker says, "Today this idea of cradle to prison is apart of the American Lexicon and we are seeing that play out in our schools."

And disproportionately affects minorities which can have consequences. Parker says, "Particularly for African American boys if they drop out of school that there is a close to 66% likelihood that they will be in jail or prison by the time they're 35."

Schools say they are just trying to keep students safe. When asked what's wrong with the zero tolerance policy, a student Meredith says, "It imposes penalties in an unthinking way in which there's no discretion."

In a joint statement, New York City's police department, Board of Education, and law department said it's impossible to ignore the important balance -- protecting children while keeping order...they, school safety officers, have helped to reduce the number of weapons brought into schools, reduce crime in schools, and, by extension, improve the learning environment. Messiah's principal dropped the charges. But he still had to go to family court and complete community service

Messiah's mother says, "I felt like this is detrimental to my son's future. He hasn't started a future yet."

(Source: CNN)