

Education and Youth Justice System Involvement

PROMOTING HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION IN YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEMS

According to data from the *Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement* (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2010) of adjudicated students in the United States:

- 30% have been diagnosed with a learning disability,
- 48% are below grade level,
- 25% have repeated a grade,
- 13% have been expelled or suspended, and
- 13% have dropped out of school.¹

A study by Thomas Blomberg concluded that “youth released from youth justice institutions who had above average academic achievement while incarcerated were significantly more likely to return to school, as compared to youths with below average academic achievement.” This “forced attendance” while incarcerated, followed by successful educational achievement, likely contributed to a positive attachment to school, increasing the likelihood that the youth would return to school in the community. Blomberg’s study also concluded that “regardless of their age/grade level, prior arrest history, demographic characteristics, and if they had a disability were significantly less likely to be rearrested within 12- and 24-months following release of incarceration if they returned to school and had higher levels of attendance.”²

This and other research show that the Youth Justice System **needs robust, engaging, and effective education systems** that allow youth who are adjudicated to be and feel successful in their educational pursuits. There is growing evidence that experiencing significant educational progress within youth justice settings serves as a “turning point” for youth and leads toward their ability to earn a livable income and become economically self-supporting, productive adults.¹ Obviously, the best-case scenario is for youth to never come into contact with the youth justice system. As this is not the reality of our current society, justice organizations must make considerable efforts to ensure youth in their care are receiving a high-quality, effective education.

Domains for a High-Quality Youth Justice Education System

In response to this dilemma, the National Partnership of Juvenile Services has published *Domains for a High-Quality Juvenile Justice Education System*. It is a living and evolving document that details the specific eight areas and 20 domains of high-quality educational programs for justice-involved youth (see box on page 2). This document speaks directly to educators, facility managers, community programs, administrators, elected officials, and others explicitly serving justice-involved youth, as this is a unique and vulnerable population whose challenges are often neglected by traditional education documents. Authored by over 75 contributing practitioners, researchers, educators, and more, the document aims to guide in three areas: new program startups; current practitioners wanting to evaluate, support, and improve their work; and supervisors reviewing educational programs.

¹ Just Learning: The Imperative to Transform Juvenile Justice Systems Into Effective Educational Systems: A Study of Juvenile Justice Schools in the South and the Nation (2014) just-learning-final.pdf (southerneducation.org)

² Thomas Blomberg, William D. Bales, Karen Mann, Alex R. Piquero, and Richard A. Berk, “Incarceration, Education, and Transition from Delinquency,” *Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 39, 351-365, 2011

Domains for a High-Quality Youth Justice Education System

Area 1

- Domain 1: Qualified Teachers
- Domain 2: Advocates for Students
- Domain 3: Hiring the Right Person

Area 2

- Domain 4: Staff/Student Ratio
- Domain 5: Physical Infrastructure
- Domain 6: Data Collection

Area 3

- Domain 7: Student Information Sharing
- Domain 8: Behavior Management Plan
- Domain 9: Adolescent Brain Development/Brain Injury

Area 4

- Domain 10: Appropriate Curriculum & Resources
- Domain 11: Technology

Area 5

- Domain 12: Special Education

Area 6

- Domain 13: Quality of Education
- Domain 14: Training
- Domain 15: Safety & Security

Area 7

- Domain 16: Program Funding
- Domain 17: Engagement with Community & Local Education Agencies

- Domain 18: Statements About the Program

Area 8

- Domain 19: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Domain 20: After Care

The document is updated as necessary to include the most recent research and best practice information. Viewers are encouraged to reach out or comment on the Google doc for continued expansion and improvement. Find the complete document at [Domains for a High Quality Juvenile Justice Education System](#).

Program Spotlights

Maya Angelou Schools

A youth justice learning organization that embodies the spirit and thoroughness of the *Domains for a High-Quality Juvenile Justice Education System* is the Maya Angelou Schools, a group of five different learning facilities operated by the See Forever Foundation, that have been educating youth in Washington DC for over 25 years. Their aim is to engage and educate students from low-income, urban communities toward reaching their full potential. This includes educational services for youth and young adults in both public and youth justice settings that focus on social and academic growth for students who have not been successful in traditional school environments.

Because students in facility-based or alternative youth justice schools are often behind academically, the Maya Angelou Schools have created policies and curricula designed to assist this population toward academic success. The school acknowledges and addresses past trauma along with academics in a holistic approach. They also focus on college prep and career assistance through business mentorships, trade apprenticeships, and job placement.

Founding members of the Maya Angelou Schools David Dominici and James Forman, Jr. stated “a good school inside a juvenile facility shares many characteristics with good schools on the outside.” Strategies include:

- hiring talented teachers with high energy and expectations;
- building a school culture of trust;
- developing a structured curriculum that is delivered through differing, individualized instruction;
- weaving special education services into all parts of the school; and
- spending time and effort on preparing students to transition into self-sustaining learners.¹

To learn more about the Maya Angelou Schools, visit <https://www.seeforever.org/>

Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families

Washington State has a robust reentry planning process that includes education and job training in addition to treatment and case management. Education includes completing high school or obtaining GEDs, postsecondary education, and vocational certificates. Job readiness and work-based learning opportunities are also available. To find more information, visit [Transition and Reentry | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#).

Pennsylvania Academic, Career and Technical Training Alliance

The Pennsylvania Academic, Career and Technical Training Alliance (PACTT) is a unique public/private partnership consisting of community-based agencies, residential facilities, and probation programs that aims to improve education for youth in residential placement in Pennsylvania, and upon their return to the community. PACTT goals include academic instruction, job skills training, and work-related services. Find more information at [PACTT ALLIANCE - Official Website \(pactt-alliance.org\)](#).

Resources

Each resource listed below exemplifies the spirit of a high-quality, effective education for youth in justice settings.

1. [The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) provides resources to make social and emotional learning (SEL) part of a high-quality and equitable education for all.
2. The [Center on Positive and Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#) was founded to assist educational agencies and schools to improve outcomes for students with or at risk for disabilities, enhance school climate and school safety, and improve conditions for learning to promote the well-being of all students.
3. [The IRIS Center](#) develops and disseminates free, engaging online resources about evidence-based instructional and behavioral practices to support the education of all students, particularly struggling learners and those with disabilities.
4. [Break Free Education](#) partners with youth justice agencies to create exciting, engaging, and relevant educational programs for youth in confinement. They offer many free resources.
5. The [Office of Special Education Programs](#) offers toolkits and resources for youth justice to include education in justice settings.
6. The [OJJDP Model Programs Guide](#) contains information about evidence-based youth justice and youth prevention, intervention, and reentry programs.
7. The [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#), funded by the U.S. Department of Education, offers information and technical assistance to states, districts, schools, institutions of higher education, and communities focused on improving school climate and conditions for learning.



This document was prepared under Cooperative Agreement Number 2019-MU-MU-K039 from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. This document was created in partnership with the National Partnership for Juvenile Services, via a sub-recipient agreement under the above noted cooperative agreement.

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