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Education and Interagency Collaboration: A Lifeline for Justice-Involved Youth



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Introduction

On a given day, over 54,000 juvenile offenders are held in residential placement facilities (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2015), and about one-third of these incarcerated youth are identified as needing special education support (Council of State Governments [CSG] Justice Center, 2015, p. 1). It is particularly important that these at-risk youth receive high-quality education services in order to make successful transitions from adolescence to adulthood (Leone & Weinberg, 2012). Education not only plays a significant role in facilitating moral, social, and psychological development, but also has important implications for a youth's long-term life experiences and well-being, including employment, income, and health. Unfortunately, youth involved in the juvenile justice system experience a plethora of challenges to receiving a quality education. While many studies have indicated that schooling provides a reliable pathway for delinquent youth to become healthy, productive members of their communities (Lee & Villagrana, 2015), system-involved youth often do not have access to the same high-quality educational opportunities as their non-delinquent counterparts and tend to struggle in academic settings.

Research has overwhelmingly demonstrated the correlation between youth's justice system involvement and educational outcomes; poor school performance is a significant indicator of delinquency, and delinquency is a strong predictor of poor school performance (Ramirez & Harris, 2010). Pettit and Western (2004) found that high school dropouts are about three to four times more likely to be imprisoned than high school graduates; approximately ten percent of white males and 60 percent of black males who drop out of school in the United States are expected to face incarceration at some point in their lives. In terms of recidivism, Beck and Shipley (1989) studied more than 16,000 prisoners from 11 states and found that the rate of re-offense decreased as offenders' education level increased. The study showed that the recidivism rate was approximately 62 percent for individuals with an eighth grade education or less, 57 percent for individuals with high school diplomas, and 52 percent for individuals with some college education.

Although studies have shown that youth who succeed in school while incarcerated are less likely to recidivate, most youth do not earn a GED or graduate from high school while in custody. A 2005 Juvenile Justice Education Enhancement Program study that analyzed cases of over 10,000 delinquent youth released from facilities in Florida found that only 7% of the youth had earned a high school diploma or GED before re-entering the community (as cited in Blomberg, Bales, Mann, Piquero, & Berk, 2011). These findings align with the results of a 2015 CSG Justice Center survey of state juvenile correctional agencies in all 50 states. The survey asked these state agencies to report on the educational and vocational services provided to incarcerated youth; the collection, analysis and reporting of student outcome data; and what they did to ensure that youth



received services after release from incarceration. Key findings from the survey indicated that a majority of incarcerated youth had reading and math skills significantly below their grade level, and were suspended, expelled, or had dropped out before their confinement (CSG Justice Center, 2015). Moreover, only 18% of states provided vocational services similar to those available in the community, such as work-based learning opportunities, vocational certification programs, and career and technical education courses (CSG Justice Center, 2015, p.3).

As demonstrated in these studies, the correlation between delinquency and education is predictable. Entry into the juvenile justice system is often associated with factors that inhibit educational achievement, such as poverty, lack of adult supervision, truancy, exposure to trauma and criminal behavior, behavioral and mental health issues, and many others. Juvenile justice involvement, such as attending court hearings during school hours, can disrupt students' school experience. Deeper penetration into the justice system can exacerbate this disruption, as incarcerated youth often do not have access to high-quality education programming within facilities. Furthermore, during the re-entry process, youth often encounter many barriers to reintegrating into school and obtaining academic credits or vocational skills. It is therefore imperative that policymakers, educators, and child-serving agencies work collaboratively to address the unique educational needs of youth at risk of entering, or involved in, the juvenile justice system.

This issue brief reviews the research on education for system-involved youth, details recent efforts to improve education outcomes for the population, and highlights the Washington Education Advocate (EA) Program, a school-based transition program that focuses on bridging the education achievement gap for youth involved in the juvenile justice system in the state of Washington.

The Effect of Education on Delinquency and Recidivism

Many components impact a youth's risk of delinquency and recidivism, including individual, family, school, peer, and community elements. These elements can serve as both risk and protective factors. Risk factors, such as family violence and association with deviant peers, increase a youth's likelihood of entering the juvenile justice system, whereas protective factors, such as having a supportive adult mentor and being attached to school, discourage a youth's delinquent behaviors. Education, in particular, is a critical factor in determining the risk of youth delinquency and recidivism (Lee & Villagrana, 2015).

With sufficient support, most youth are able to overcome academic and social obstacles without entering the delinquency system. However, youth who lack the necessary resources to surmount the challenges are at a heightened risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system. These at-risk students tend to respond to academic failure with behavioral misconduct (Blomberg et al., 2011, p. 357), which is often met with exclusionary discipline practices that interfere with students' learning and perpetuate a cycle of failure (Ramirez & Harris, 2010, p. 158). Students who have "failed" at education are in turn more likely to misbehave, feel detached from school, be truant, use drugs and alcohol (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012, p. 158), and ultimately drop out, increasing the likelihood of contact with the justice system (Ramirez & Harris, 2010).



A 2005 study on the so-called “school to prison pipeline” examined the relationship between school characteristics and youth delinquency. The authors found that zero tolerance policies, staff’s negative perceptions of student success, infrequent adult-student interaction, and undesirable physical condition of the schools are all associated with a high rate of student delinquency (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). This study showed that negative school experiences and lack of support from school staff could foster behavior problems that lead to juvenile justice involvement.

While schools can present significant delinquency risk factors, they can also introduce powerful protective factors. Schools are in the position to offer youth positive and safe environments to learn academic, social, and decision-making skills, as well as to facilitate development and growth through supportive adult guidance. System-involved youth who experience some form of academic success, feel bonded to school, and have positive relationships with teachers and peer social groups tend to have a smoother transition into the community post-release and are less likely to be involved in future criminal behavior (Blomberg et al., 2011; Sharkey, Shekhtmeyster, Chavez-Lopez, Norris, & Sass, 2011, p. 50). Furthermore, youth who achieve academic success during incarceration are more likely to return to and remain in school after release (Lambie & Randell, 2013), less likely to recidivate (Blomberg et al., 2011), and more likely to find employment as adults (Leone & Weinberg, 2012).

Some literature also suggests that education has a mitigating role on the delinquency of youth involved in the child welfare system (Lee & Villagrana, 2015, p. 20). For example, in an analysis of over 1,800 students in Ontario, Canada, researchers found that school participation and school safety (as perceived by youth) can decrease the risk of child welfare-involved youth engaging in violent crime (Crooks, Scott, Wolfe, Chiodo, & Killip, 2007). A more recent study looked at a cohort of 1,500 economically disadvantaged youth of color and found that high school graduation correlates with a maltreated youth’s future involvement in crime (Topitzes, Mersky, & Reynolds, 2011). Education is effective in reducing youth’s involvement in crime because it provides not only academic remediation, but also social services, recreational programs, and mentoring opportunities. When youth are equipped with the necessary supports, resources, and skills to become productive members of the society, the risk of delinquency and recidivism decreases.

To assess the impact of education on juvenile justice involvement, Blomberg et al. (2011) conducted an observation study of 4,147 incarcerated youth from 115 Florida juvenile institutions, looking at each youth’s educational achievement during incarceration, post-release schooling, and subsequent re-arrest. The research showed that youth who fell behind in school when they were placed in confinement were much less likely to return to school after release. Nonetheless, youth who performed above average in facility-based education programs were 69% more likely to return to community school, compared to youth who performed below average during incarceration. This study suggests that facility-based education programs can have a significant impact on youth’s school engagement post-release.

The same study also found that school attendance plays an important role in reducing recidivism. Youth who returned to school and maintained an adequate level of attendance were 26% less



likely to recidivate within 12 months, and 15.3% less likely at 24 months. Youth who spent more time in school were also less likely to be rearrested than youth who spent less time in school. Additionally, youth who stayed in school were less likely to be rearrested for serious offenses compared to youth who did not return to school.

Schools have the opportunity to identify early indicators of youth's involvement in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems as youth are generally involved in the education system before they enter other systems of care (Abbott & Barnett, 2016). It is therefore imperative that professionals working in the education system recognize risk and protective factors, connect at-risk youth to preventive services, quickly re-engage delinquent youth in educational or vocational programs after their release, and provide supports and referrals as needed. Unfortunately, youth face many unique system and individual barriers in obtaining services and achieving academic success once they become involved in the juvenile justice system. These barriers persist and often worsen once youth re-enter the community.

Barriers to Successful Education Attainment

The majority of youth in custody do not have access to the same type of educational services as non-delinquent youth in the community. The 2010 OJJDP Survey of Youth in Residential Placement indicated that less than half of detained youth spent at least six hours in school (the typical school day), and only half of all youth surveyed reported that their facility had a good education program (Sedlak & McPherson, 2010). Furthermore, staff at facilities often do not receive adequate training to understand the distinct developmental needs of high-risk youth and the interruption to a youth's education and service continuum caused by frequent transitions between facilities (Geib, Chapman, d'Amaddio, & Grigorenko, 2011). Juvenile Law Center's Juveniles for Justice, a program that offers youth the opportunity to develop and implement advocacy projects to improve the juvenile justice system, has recently developed a focus on the educational needs of youth in custody. From their own accounts, youth often experience barriers such as the lack of: appropriate schoolwork for age, grade, or developmental ability; educational resources such as libraries, textbooks, or technology; and high quality teachers and staff while they are incarcerated (Juvenile Law Center, Juveniles for Justice, 2015).

Similarly, only 26 percent of states reportedly provide committed youth with educational services comparable to those in the community, and many states do not have structures in place to ensure that juvenile correctional facilities are meeting the state education accountability system (CSG Justice Center, 2015). In fact, almost 40 percent of facility schools do not meet national education accreditation standards. This lack of resources, oversight, structure, and evaluation for educational programs within correctional facilities makes educational achievement especially difficult for youth in custody.

Another prominent system barrier for youth involved in the juvenile justice system is the lack of coordination across child-serving agencies and their partners. It is estimated that two-thirds of youth do not return to school after their release from secure custody (Sweeten, Bushway, & Paternoster, 2009). Failure to re-enroll can be caused by delays in transfer of education records, perceived or actual confidentiality barriers to data- and record-sharing, and incompatible record



or credit transfer policies across juvenile justice agencies and school districts (Federal Interagency Reentry Council, 2012). The inadequacy in information sharing can also lead to youth's prolonged confinement, inappropriate class placement, and delayed access to services. It is critical that schools, corrections, probation, child welfare, and behavioral health agencies work collaboratively with youth and families to create seamless transition plans for youth re-entering the community. An actionable re-entry plan that promotes success and prevents future involvement with the justice system can help youth establish constructive, achievable life goals (U.S. Departments of Education [DOE] and Justice [DOJ], 2014, p. 3).

The lack of evidence-based, comprehensive educational re-entry programs is an additional system barrier that detained youth face. Research has shown that less than 20 percent of formerly incarcerated youth have diplomas or GEDs, and only about 30 percent of these youth continue to stay engaged in school or work a year after their release (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Youth often struggle to effectively transition to community-based educational settings due in part to the lack of effective re-entry services. Half of the states reportedly provide no guidance or supervision to ensure that incarcerated youth transition to an educational or vocational setting upon release, and approximately one-third of the states automatically enroll youth into alternative educational programs, which usually do not meet the quality or performance standards of traditional public schools (CSG Justice Center, 2015).

The transition from incarceration back to the community is often stressful for youth. This stress is compounded by other individual barriers, such as returning to the same high-risk environment that contributed to the youth's initial delinquency, struggling to catch up academically, being stigmatized and marginalized due to system involvement, lacking social support and financial resources, and having difficulty navigating the complex re-entry system. While many current re-entry programs emphasize strategies to reduce recidivism, literature indicates that the most effective interventions are those that help build youth's academic, behavioral, social, and vocational skills (Geib et al., 2011, p. 5). To help youth successfully reintegrate into the community, it is paramount to have developmentally appropriate, individualized re-entry services that address these unique challenges.

Recent Federal Guidance and Other Efforts to Improve Education Outcomes for Justice-Involved Youth

Over the past 30 years, there have been numerous class-action cases and complaints filed challenging the adequacy of education services and supports for incarcerated youth (Leone & Weinberg, 2012, p. 7). The U.S. Departments of Education (DOE) and Justice (DOJ) have recognized that more than 2,500 juvenile justice residential facilities across the country need support to provide developmentally appropriate services focused on the educational, social-emotional, behavioral, and career planning needs of youth in their care so that these youth can continue on a productive path in life. As a result, in December 2014, the DOE and DOJ (2014) issued a School Discipline Guidance Package, which included a joint report and accompanying Dear Colleague Letter to state school officers and attorneys general. The report sets out five guiding principles for providing high-quality education in juvenile justice secure care settings. It also highlights the program and policy supports that juvenile justice agencies overseeing

facilities should provide to facility administrators and staff seeking to improve existing education-related practices or implement new practices.

The first principle states that environments in which students are educated must be conducive to learning (DOE & DOJ, 2014, p. iv). Creating a facility climate that promotes learning and positive outcomes for youth can be challenging in secure facilities due to their size and physical condition, the education and skill level of staff, gaps in appropriate programming for youth, and lack of commitment from leadership to changing facility culture. This is a long-term process that requires a shared vision and support from staff at all levels. The second principle highlights that funding to support education for youth in long-term care facilities is critical, and that it is important for these facilities to leverage federal, state, and local funds to supplement core education programs. The third and fourth principles underscore the need to recruit, employ, and retain qualified education staff with skills relevant to the youth in their care, and to ensure that curricula aligns with state academic, career, and technical education standards. Finally, the fifth principle states that, in order to reduce recidivism, youth should have access to re-entry planning and the tools and skills needed to reintegrate into the community (DOE & DOJ, 2014, p. iv). While many facilities have re-entry staff, they often work in isolation and without necessary supports and collaboration. Instead, agency leaders must recognize the importance of building community partnerships and collaborative alliances in order to better foster successful re-entry.

Through these principles, the DOE and DOJ make clear that education is essential to ensuring long-term re-entry success for youth in the juvenile justice system. The joint report states that “[R]e-entry planning should begin immediately upon a student’s arrival, outline how the student will continue with his or her academic career, and, as needed, address the student’s transitions to career and postsecondary education” (DOE & DOJ, 2014, 3).

The recent federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) also contains several provisions aimed at improving access to quality education for youth involved in, and returning from, the juvenile justice system (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Under the ESSA, which reauthorized the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act and the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, there is an increased emphasis on smooth transitions from community school districts to educational programs in justice system placements, and from justice placements back to an appropriate educational setting upon re-entry. The ESSA requires that state and local agencies and correctional facilities (or state institutions) collaborate when a youth either enters or exits a facility. Title 1, Part D of the ESSA provides state education agencies federal funds to create or improve educational programs for neglected, delinquent, or at-risk youth. These funds can be distributed to state education agencies by formula, which can be sub-granted to state agencies serving neglected or delinquent youth. Alternately, state education agencies can award funds directly to local educational agencies with high numbers of children and youth in locally operated juvenile correctional facilities.

Under the ESSA, amendments to Title 1, Part D require that state agencies establish procedures for educational assessment of each youth. They also require that state and local agencies work together to share relevant academic records and educational service plans and ensure document transfer when a youth enters a juvenile justice facility. These amendments strengthen access to

education upon re-entry. Correctional facilities receiving Title 1, Part D funding must coordinate educational services with local education agencies in order to minimize disruption to a youth's education upon re-entry. The ESSA requires timely and appropriate re-enrollment in a secondary school or a re-entry program that best meets a student's needs. Additionally, the Act requires credit transfer and opportunities for re-entering students to participate in credit-bearing coursework in secondary school, post-secondary education, or career and technical education. State agencies as well as correctional facilities must assist youth in attaining traditional high school diplomas, and state and local jurisdictions must collect program evaluation data on the number of youth served who graduated on time. Finally, the ESSA increases protections for justice-involved youth by expanding the purpose of Title 1, Part D to include family and community engagement, dual-status youth, students in tribal institutions, youth who are at risk of being adjudicated dependent or delinquent or who have had any contact with the child welfare system, and English learners.

The field has also begun to recognize the importance of ensuring that justice-involved youth stay in school and receive high-quality educational services. Across the U.S., there has been a surge of school-based initiatives to address the school-to-prison pipeline, increased efforts to improve facility-based education programming, and the development of education-focused re-entry programs to help youth transition back to schools in the community post-release.

Many jurisdictions have implemented efforts to reduce school-based referrals to the justice system. For example, as part of its Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) work, system officials in Travis County, Texas redefined the roles and responsibilities of School Resource Officers (SROs) and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to improve system collaboration and to address the educational needs of at-risk youth (Abbott & Barnett, 2016). The SROs from all school districts in the county were trained in trauma-informed interventions, which led to less frequent use of exclusionary discipline practices as a response to youth's behavioral incidents. In addition, CASAs were formally assigned as education liaisons to ensure youth's education needs were met. CASAs are now responsible for monitoring educational progress, including tracking school placement, attendance, record transfers, special needs, and behavior issues. The CYPM initiative in Travis County has demonstrated promising results, with a 28-percentage point increase in school attendance and 15-percentage point decrease in academic and/or behavioral problems for youth involved in the program (Abbott & Barnett, 2016).

Systems have also strived to enhance educational services for youth in residential facilities. One notable example is the education program at the New Beginnings Youth Development Center, the long-term residential facility housing youth committed to the District of Columbia's Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS). Since 2007, the Maya Angelou Academy (MAA) has contracted with DYRS to operate the education program at the facility. MAA's goal is to provide a safe, nurturing, and mutually respectful environment that motivates and prepares its students (called "scholars") to fulfill their academic or career potential ("Maya Angelou Academy at New Beginnings Campus Profile," n.d.). The school curriculum includes English, math, social studies, and science, and also offers GED and SAT preparation classes as well as

courses in computer skills, law, and yoga (“Maya Angelou Academy at New Beginnings,” n.d.)”. Students at MAA were reported to earn credits at a much higher rate and have improved math and reading skills compared to before attending the Academy (“Maya Angelou Schools: Our Results,” n.d.). Currently, twice as many students who have completed the MAA Model Program are attending school or working when they leave New Beginnings, as compared to data collected in 2007. In addition, a number of scholars go on to college soon after their release. (“Maya Angelou Academy at New Beginnings Campus Profile,” n.d.).

Various national initiatives have also focused on improving services at the facility level. The Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings (CEEAS), for instance, works with facility-based schools to support teachers and students in several states across the country. In addition to providing targeted training and technical assistance to sites, CEEAS recognizes the efforts of facility principals, teachers and students by issuing awards and hosting annual poetry competitions for residents (“Get Involved,” 2016).

The Youth in Custody Practice Model (YICPM) Initiative is another national effort designed to support juvenile correctional facilities to improve services, including school-based programming and approaches, for youth in custody (Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators and the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, 2016). Administered by the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) and the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, the YICPM provides juvenile correctional agencies with guidance to strengthen their practices in case planning, facility-based services, re-entry, and post-release community-based services. As part of the initiative, participating agencies enhance facility-based educational practices across several domains, such as establishing an environment conducive to learning, ensuring high-quality programming and special education services, increasing opportunities for college and career/technical education, and providing for a seamless transition to school and employment upon release.

After youth are released from juvenile correctional facilities, there are now many community-based educational services to support their re-entry. Project IMPACT is a statewide initiative in Maine designed to support youth in their post-release academic and correctional transition (“Project IMPACT,” 2015). The Map Program in Ramsey County, Minnesota provides supports for justice-involved youth with disabilities as they transition out of facilities and into education or employment (“Making a Map: Finding My Way Back,” 2013). In Washington State, the U.S. Department of Labor provided grant funding between 2010 and 2012 for the Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR) Office under the state’s Department of Social and Health Services to start a project called Learning, Employment, Achieving, Potential (LEAP), which aimed to support youths’ education and employment post-release in King County (“The LEAP Project: A Juvenile Reentry Initiative in Washington State,” n.d.).

The Education Advocate (EA) Program, discussed in the following sections, is another similar initiative established to address the educational and vocational needs of justice-involved youth, particularly after they return to the community. Different from LEAP, however, the EA Program is an ongoing statewide project financed through the U.S. DOE Title 1, Part D funds. Compared to LEAP, the EA Program has a broader focus in that it not only supports youth during the re-



entry process, but also prevents at-risk youth from entering the juvenile justice system across Washington State.

The Washington State Education Advocate Program

As a response to the increased number of juvenile offenders and the heightened rate of recidivism in Washington State, in 2006 the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) launched a pilot transition services program, assisting youth releasing from the three largest long-term juvenile facilities. OSPI began to strategically review the program for expansion based on both the number of youth in detention and the high school dropout rate (National Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Neglected or Delinquent Children and Youth [NDTAC], 2013). In 2008, Washington State received an increased allocation of federal Title 1, Part D Neglected-Delinquent funds. While this funding previously supported transition coordinators working inside detention facility schools, youth were still not receiving sufficient services to return and remain in their community schools after leaving facilities. Recognizing this need, Kathleen Sande, the Washington State Title 1, Part D Coordinator, participated in the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform's Multi-System Integration Certificate Program¹ and developed a Capstone Project² that further enhanced and expanded the program through Title 1, Part D funding.

To broaden services for youth released from detention centers and long-term facilities across Washington State, Sande approached the nine Educational Service Districts (ESDs) with the idea of hiring current school-based prevention/intervention specialists (PIs) as EAs (Kathleen Sande, personal communication, October 26, 2011). These specialists were funded by a DOE Safe and Drug-Free Schools Grant to provide drug and alcohol services to youth in schools. As the DOE funding decreased, the Title 1, Part D funds provided an opportunity for the PIs to continue their work in substance use prevention and intervention while also working part-time as EAs. With additional juvenile justice training, these staff were a natural fit to provide education advocacy services as they had already developed rapport with school staff and were familiar with resources that could help youth reintegrate into the community. This type of braided funding mechanism is currently used to support some high school-based EA Programs, which help keep high-risk youth in school while providing them with substance use treatment, a highly needed service for adolescents in Washington State. In addition to the DOE Safe and Drug-Free School funds, the program also utilizes other financing resources, such as county funds from taxes and detention center operations to provide transportation, local school district funds to increase capacity, and state-level truancy funds to assist in school dropout programs (Kathleen Sande, personal communication, June 1, 2016).

¹ The Multi-System Integration Certificate Program is a weeklong program designed to train leaders on how to improve outcomes for youth known to the child welfare, juvenile justice, and related systems through a multi-disciplinary approach that highlights integration and collaboration. The purpose of the program is to bring together current and future leaders and increase their knowledge on multi-system reform, cultivate their leadership skills, improve the operation of their organizations, and create a network of individuals across the country committed to systems improvement and reform. Upon completion of the Certificate Program, participants become CJJR Fellows by designing and implementing a Capstone Project focused on multi-system reform in their jurisdiction. CJJR currently has over 700 Fellows that benefit from ongoing technical assistance from CJJR and participation in a growing network of mutually supportive leaders across the country.

² Kathleen Sande's EA Program Capstone has resulted in significant improvement in youth's education and justice-related outcomes. She was selected as the CJJR 2015 Capstone of the Year Awardee due to her exemplary leadership and effort.



In collaboration with the school districts, Sande developed partnerships with the probation and correctional agencies in Washington, trained the ESD Directors on the goals and role of EAs, and developed an Education Advocate Program Manual. In addition, she worked with the ESDs to complete grant applications, which outlined their local needs, defined the population in need of services, and targeted federal outcomes. The grants have since become more locally driven, whereby the grantees are now able to choose their population and area of focus. Originally designed to assist incarcerated youth to return to and remain in their community school during the re-entry process, the EA Program has evolved into a sophisticated three-tiered dropout prevention, intervention, and re-engagement program that provides needs assessment, case management, counseling support, academic and career coaching, as well as community resources and referrals to students at risk of entering or already involved in the juvenile justice system.

To prioritize youth with the most intensive needs, the EA Program established eligibility criteria in collaboration with local detention and JR facilities. As a result, the eligibility varies between local facilities based on their unique target population's needs, resource availability, and geographic limitations. Allowing local jurisdictions to tailor their eligibility criteria also limits duplication of effort.

In general, the eligibility is determined with a referral form that includes information such as a youth's risk to re-offend; school, community, and work function; social skills; behavioral health risk; safety risk to others; and strengths. Youth are eligible for EA services if they are:

- between 5 and 21 years old;
- involved in the justice system and are at moderate- to high-risk of recidivating;
- at risk of dropping out of school; and/or
- served by community-based programs and at risk of disengaging from the programs, or require additional support to complete a high school diploma or GED (Schutte & Maike, 2009, p.3).

EA services include, but are not limited to:

- assessing youth's risk, needs, and strengths through referral and intake data;
- providing case management, counseling, coaching, and group support to help youth develop coping skills, build relationships, and succeed in school;
- engaging youth and families in services and addressing any barriers;
- assisting youth with credit and transcript transfer;
- ensuring that youth are placed in appropriate classes;
- providing homework assistance;
- providing post-secondary and employment navigation;
- developing and monitoring individualized "Student Success Plans";
- linking youth and their families to community resources; and
- tracking youth behaviors, school performance, probation/parole compliance, and participation in community programs (Schutte & Maike, 2009).



To coordinate a seamless, multifaceted intervention strategy, EAs identify the level and intensity of services youth need based on the intake results, referral information, and a Risk and Protective Factor Framework.³ Using a three-tiered case management approach, EAs can provide more intensive services to youth with higher levels of risk and need. Focusing on prevention, intervention, and transition, EAs also work closely with youth's circle of supportive adults (e.g., teachers, school counselors, family members, probation/parole officers) to help them overcome challenges in school and to adjust youth's service level based on their progress.

Youth at low risk of re-offending or those who have made significant progress are placed in Tier 1. They receive minimal services and monitoring and have contact with EAs quarterly with the purpose of maintaining a supportive and ongoing relationship. At Tier 2, youth receive a moderate amount of case management. Youth are placed in this level when they are at low- to moderate-risk of re-offending, are able to make positive decisions, have engaged family members, and have shown some positive progress in meeting the re-entry plan goals. EAs maintain contact with Tier 2 youth and adults in their lives at least once a month. At Tier 3, high-risk, high-need youth require intensive case management services and typically remain in this level of care between 30 to 90 days. EAs make contact with Tier 3 youth at least once a week and have frequent communication with adults in these youth's lives. EAs are expected to follow up with youth unless they relocate, choose to cut off contact, are unavailable for services, or have turned 21 years of age (Schutte & Maike, 2009).

Currently, there are 28 EAs (most work part-time) and 12 EA Directors working in JR facilities, JR offices, and local communities across the state (Kathleen Sande, personal communication, September 2015). Most JR facilities in Washington are run by the state and house post-adjudicated youth with a longer length of stay compared to youth in detention centers.⁴ EAs in JR facilities work closely with facility transition coordinators and parole officers to support youth's educational, vocational, and re-entry needs from inside the facilities, whereas EAs in JR offices assist youth's transitions from outside the facilities.

In the local community, EAs may work in detention centers, community agencies, high schools, or middle schools. With the exception of middle school-based EAs that focus mostly on prevention rather than reintegration, community-based EAs work closely with probation officers and school staff to support youth with more intensive services and keep youth in school. While the structure of JR facility, JR Office, and community-based EAs differs slightly due to students' unique needs in different situations, the underlying functions and effective aspects of the position are similar.

EAs ensure that youth's educational and career goals are included in the re-entry plan and provide youth with necessary resources to succeed in school while filling the role of the supportive adult in their lives. The program's three-tiered case management approach allows

³ The framework is based upon the *Social Development Strategy* (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996) from *WA EA Manual* (2009) p. C-3.

⁴ Youth in JR facilities have an average length of stay of 143 days (Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, 2016), while youth in county-run detention centers have an average length of stay of approximately nine days (Probation Officer, personal communication, April 18, 2016)



staff to tailor services to meet individual students' needs. For example, Caroline,⁵ a student enrolled in the EA Program, benefited from her EA's rapport with school staff, support with schoolwork, and advocacy. Caroline shared that it was very difficult to keep up with school while in detention, but her EA went to the teachers and got all the homework assignments to help her continue learning and not fall behind. In her alternative school, Caroline found the work unstimulating and was disengaged: "I have way too much time on my hands. I was bored and wasn't learning anything... The structure of a regular school is better for me." Caroline wanted to return to her home school and credited the EA for making it happen. She was the first person in her family to graduate from high school and will start community college in 2016 ("Caroline," personal communication, April 18, 2016). Another youth, Nathan⁶, struggled with substance use, which led to his juvenile justice system involvement. His EA supported him through the drug court and outpatient process, enrolled him in a substance use intervention group, and got him a bus card so he could commute to and from school. He graduated in June 2016 and plans to join the Army National Guard ("Nathan," personal communication, April 18, 2016). While the two youth in the above examples had very different experiences with the justice system and faced unique challenges in school, they were each empowered by their EA to turn their lives around.

Another main function of the EA Program is to work with other child-serving agencies to improve the long-term well-being of justice-involved youth. The EAs' focus on education and employment allows facility transition coordinators, probation and parole officers, and school staff to target other aspects of the youth's needs. One school counselor highlighted how the EA Program continuously improves collaboration between school and probation officers, explaining that "[The EA's] knowledge and position as a liaison from the court back to the school and awareness of when a youth is getting off probation allows for much better coordination planning and targeted follow-up for these youth" (Kitsap High School Counselor, personal communication, April 18, 2016). Such coordination allows a more seamless transition for youth re-entering the community and provides youth and families a sense of continuity. A parole officer also discussed the value of EAs in his own terms: "If it hadn't been for the advocacy, navigation of the minefields, and expertise of the EA, families wouldn't get the results that they want and would have to settle for a less than optimal school placement for their child" (Parole Officer, personal communication, April 18, 2016).

Washington EA Program Outcomes and Impact

Youth, probation and parole officers, facility transition coordinators, and school staff indicate that the EA Program fulfills a unique demand in Washington State. Not only does the program keep at-risk youth in school, it also addresses the needs of these youth across multiple areas, including education, employment, substance use, and mental health during the challenging reintegration period.

In addition to improving outcomes for youth who are at risk of entering or involved in the juvenile justice system, the EA Program has also facilitated changes in how child-serving

⁵ The name has been changed to protect the identity of the youth.

⁶ The name has been changed to protect the identity of the youth.



agencies work with each other and with delinquent youth (Kathleen Sande, personal communication, April 18, 2016). The program follows a teaming model, which promotes communication between the EA, family, facility transition coordinator, probation or parole officer, and school staff from the very beginning of the re-entry process through the end of the EA service. As liaisons between the education and juvenile justice system, EAs enable school staff to learn about the juvenile justice system and help correctional officers to become familiar with the education system. The program provides an opportunity for the various systems to work together and create a continuous wraparound service for youth without duplicating efforts and resources.

Furthermore, the implementation of the EA Program has encouraged a shift in correctional culture. System partners report that correctional officers have moved from the traditionally punitive approach to a more supportive one, vastly improving their relationships with youth and families. A parole administrator talked about the culture change and family-centered approach within his region: “The culture has changed with EAs’ support. They follow up and get the ball rolling. It was a bigger battle without the EA... They put the family in the driver seat” (Parole Administrator, personal communication, April 18, 2016). Another parole officer echoed these thoughts, stating that “It’s not just holding [youth] accountable but teaching them to be more skillful” (Parole Officer, personal communication, April 18, 2016).

In academic year 2014-2015, the EA Program served over 670 students across Washington State. Although there has not been a quantitative study on the statewide impact of the EA Program, ESD 112 released a 2014-2015 EA evaluation report (Maike & Nixon, 2015) summarizing the process and outcome of the program in Vancouver, Washington. This jurisdiction’s EA Program focused on youth between ages 15 and 17 with high needs in the reintegration process post-release and served 78 youth during the reporting period. The average length of involvement in the program was nine months. The report findings indicated that enrollment in the program is associated with improved academic outcomes and a low rate of recidivism. Prior to receiving EA services, 53 percent of youth participants (i.e., those with available academic data) failed to pass any classes; at follow-up, 73 percent of these students had passed at least one class during the most recent grading period. In terms of school engagement, of the 40 youth who transitioned into secondary education, 73 percent continued to remain engaged 90 days post re-entry. Among the 78 youth receiving EA services, 91 percent did not re-offend during their enrollment in the program.

The ESD 112 EA evaluation report also presented findings from a stakeholder survey, which showed several positive system-level impacts as a result of the EA Program. All stakeholders who responded to the survey agreed that the program has reduced barriers and helped youth successfully reintegrate into the school system and community. Over 90% of the stakeholders believed that the program improves communication and collaboration between the child-serving agencies and creates opportunities for joint re-entry planning among partners.

While the EA program has produced promising results for youth at risk of entering or involved in the juvenile justice system, a more extensive evaluation would further help demonstrate related outcomes. Sande and her team are currently looking to develop partnerships with a local



university to analyze all data collected since the inception of the program. There may also be opportunities to evaluate the program with a more rigorous research design, such as using a comparison group to determine its overall effectiveness and impact.

The EA Program has thrived in the face of funding challenges. System partners in Washington State have worked diligently to keep low-risk, low-need youth out of secure facilities through various reform efforts, such as the national Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) and CYPM. As a result, the number of incarcerated youth has reduced significantly over the past years, which in turn has led to the decrease in federal Title 1, Part D funding, the main funding source for the EA Program. Sande and her team indicated that the number of youth incarcerated does not necessarily reflect the resources needed to make rehabilitation successful. Even though fewer youth are detained in secure facilities as lower risk youth are diverted, youth remaining in facilities tend to be a higher-risk, higher-need population who requires more intensive services. While the decreased funding threatens to limit the EA Program staffing capabilities and subsequently reduce its effectiveness, some school districts in Washington State have begun to fund the program as they see the positive results of this initiative.

Over the past seven years, Sande and her partners have put in significant effort to support the implementation of the EA positions, which in turn has facilitated interagency collaboration, reduced system barriers for youth returning to schools, and improved education outcomes for high-risk youth. Youth who participated in the EA Program were also shown to have low rates of recidivism, thereby contributing to public safety. Sande's Capstone Project has bolstered Washington State's ability to meet the individual needs of school-aged youth and resulted in significant improvement in youth's education and justice-related outcomes. Moving forward, there is a need to conduct more rigorous research on the statewide impact of the program, expand the middle school-based preventive EA positions, and have at least one EA in each high school across Washington State to elevate the effectiveness of the program.



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