



OJJDP FACT SHEET

J. Robert Flores, Administrator

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Overcoming Barriers to School Reentry

by Cora Roy-Stevens

For youth leaving custody, a return to school is integral to successful reentry into the community. By building partnerships between the justice and education systems, the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES) has developed a model for overcoming barriers to school reentry.

Data from the New York City Department of Education indicate that more than two-thirds of high school-age offenders do not return to school on release.¹ Indeed, the criminal justice and education systems often seem to work at cross-purposes. Judges mandate school attendance, but the community lacks an effective system for reenrolling students. The justice system releases young offenders from custody during midsemesters and summers, when schools are least equipped to admit new students.

Many court-involved students perform below grade level and have histories of truancy and suspension. Few, if any, have high school credits. They require a disproportionate rate of special education services and often feel alienated from school. If the special needs of these youth are not met, they are at risk of dropping out of school and returning to the justice system, at considerable social and financial cost.²

Through CASES, the Committee on Court-Involved Students, the School Connection Center, and the Community Prep High School are helping court-involved youth continue their education and reenter their communities.

Committee on Court-Involved Students

In 2001, education and criminal justice officials formed the Committee on Court-Involved Students. The committee includes

the city's juvenile justice, corrections, and probation departments; city and state child welfare agencies; and staff from the education department's Chancellor's Office and special education, custodial schools, and admissions offices. Committee members work collaboratively to identify barriers to education for students leaving custody and to remove those barriers.

School Connection Center

The School Connection Center is a high school admissions office whose staff of criminal justice and education professionals collaborate to ensure that education reentry goals are met for students discharged from custodial schools to residences in Manhattan. The Center is funded by a Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant. Its services include educational assessments, transfer of academic records, and expedited enrollment in community schools.

Of the 507 court-involved students served at the School Connection Center, 394 (78 percent) have been placed in 79 community schools and education programs. Students are tracked for 4 months after school placement, and the attendance rate for these students is 70 percent. Retention of students during the entire school year is 66 percent.

Community Prep High School

Community Prep High School is a transitional school that addresses the academic and social needs of students who are not ready to attend community schools on release from custody. It receives funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Community Prep services include—

- ◆ Dual curriculums to build students' academic and social skills.
- ◆ Rolling admissions for students released by the justice system throughout the school year.

¹ The New York City Department of Education provided unpublished data to CASES for this analysis.

² The cost of detaining a juvenile offender in New York City is \$358 a day or \$130,670 a year. One study estimates that the lifetime cost to society of a high school dropout is \$243,000 to \$388,000 and that the typical career criminal costs society \$1.3 to \$1.5 million. The study calculated the monetary value of saving a high risk youth at \$1.7 to \$2.3 million. (Cohen, M.A. 1998. The monetary value of saving a high risk youth. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 14[1].)

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- ◆ Student government and other leadership opportunities.
- ◆ Family involvement.
- ◆ Collaboration between school staff and agencies that monitor criminal justice.
- ◆ Restorative justice practices, such as problem-solving circles, to address disciplinary issues.
- ◆ Literacy activities included in academic and afterschool curriculums.
- ◆ Girls-only advisory and extracurricular activities.
- ◆ Saturday classes.
- ◆ Individual counseling and case management services.
- ◆ Afterschool tutoring, recreation, employment skills training, and internships.
- ◆ Enrollment lasting 10–15 months before students are transitioned to traditional community schools, GED or vocational programs, or employment.

Preliminary data indicate that Community Prep students engaged in learning and participated in the school community. Some students with high rates of truancy at their previous community school (before time in custody) demonstrated strong gains, including an average attendance increase of more than 15 percent

among students who were at Community Prep for at least 45 days in the fall 2003 semester and who had attendance rates of 55 percent or lower at their prior community school.

Conclusion

Partnerships between the justice and education systems are essential for juvenile reentry. Such partnerships must remedy two critical gaps: delayed access to community schools and a shortage of appropriate schools for young people leaving custody. The School Connection Center and Community Prep High School are models for expediting admissions and improving academic and social skills among court-involved youth. Community agencies such as CASES can play an important role in brokering partnerships between the education and justice systems and in promoting positive outcomes for court-involved youth.

For Further Information

For additional information about CASES, contact Joel Copperman, Executive Director, CASES, 212-553-6301; Betsy Witten, Director of Education Initiatives, CASES, 212-553-6355; or Tim Lisante, Local Instructional Superintendent, New York City Department of Education, 718-557-2801.

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