



ADDRESSING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF JUVENILE JUSTICE INVOLVED YOUTH: IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

School plays a central role in a youth’s day-to-day life; most teenagers spend more time in school than they do with their families. Recognizing the important role of school in the lives of youth, Juvenile courts have strived to make education a priority. But in practice, many juvenile courts have found it challenging to engage the participation of time-stretched school personnel who often view “problem” youth as lower priority. To overcome these barriers, you will need to reach out and open lines of communication with principals, counselors and teachers. This will make it more likely for you to access the up-to-date information about student performance and behavior that you’ll need for good case planning and supervision, and enable you to draw on district and school resources — such as testing and tutoring — to benefit youth in your juvenile court.

The key to success in building these relationships is flexibility. Because school personnel may not be able or willing to attend regular team meetings, consider including them by phone conference, or hold occasional meetings at the school site.

In selecting an area of focus, it will be helpful for you to create a stakeholder group that comes together for the express purpose of improving juvenile court operation. Your stakeholders should be made up of judges, representatives from the district attorney’s office, representatives from the defense bar, chief probation, juvenile court management, court administrators, representatives from community service providers, representatives from youth oriented-prosocial activities (like youth sports leagues), youth and their families, and of course the community.

[Recommended Resources](#)

Throughout the 1990s, the rise of zero-tolerance school discipline policies resulted in the widespread adoption of strict and mandatory responses for a large range of misbehavior in school. An unintended consequence of these policies and practices were youth with behavioral health needs put at an increased risk for exclusionary discipline and school-based arrests. Disabled students and those with behavioral health needs have been disproportionately impacted by this shift in policy and practice. Communities and states have recognized the need to address those with behavioral health needs, and have implemented a School Responder Model (SRM), which originally emerged from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network. SRMs are a multidisciplinary approach to responding to youth with behavioral health needs and have been shown to effectively divert those youth away from the juvenile justice system. This Technical Assistance Bulletin provides the steps necessary to implement a SRM and keep kids in school and out of court. Ethical Challenges for the Juvenile Court written by Judge Leonard Edwards explores the ethical challenges and leadership role of the juvenile court judge. You can download a copy here --
<https://www.ncjfcj.org/publications/disrupting-school-justice-pathways-for-youth-with-behavioral-health-needs/>

The Juvenile Law Center has extensive resources for youth in both the juvenile justice system and the education system. You can visit their website here --
<https://jlc.org/issues/education>

Questions for Discussion

What do you know/want to know about the school performance of juvenile justice-involved youth? (e.g., grades, attendance)

What kinds of school related services do you juvenile court youth need? (e.g., IEPs, tutoring)

What special services does the district provide that might benefit juvenile court youth? (e.g., tutoring, counseling, assistance with IEPs, after-school programs)

What district-wide reporting systems (for attendance, grades, behavior) can you access to stay up-to-date on academic progress and behavior of juvenile justice youth?

What lines of communication currently exist with your school systems? What would you like to change about these lines of communication?



What district-wide policies exist that affect how youth come to the juvenile justice system?

What policies might need to be revised? How will you go about negotiating these changes with districts?

How will you educate parents about ways to support their child academically?

In general, how do you make education a priority within your juvenile court?