

EDJJ NOTES

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In the News

Kentucky Center For School Safety Report

The *Kentucky 2001: Safe Schools Data Project*¹ was recently released by the Kentucky Center for School Safety. The report is a comprehensive look at disciplinary infractions (school board policy violations) and violations of the law by students in the state. Most information in the report is broken down by school district and region, gender, and race. No information is provided about students with disabling conditions and their involvement in disciplinary infractions and law violations. The report also describes prevention services and activities implemented by school districts.

The report is encouraging in that rates of Part 1 infractions, or most serious law violations, are down more than 7% from the 1999-2000 school year. Consistent with data from other states, most serious law violations involved theft and not violent crimes. While there was more than a 15% reduction in school board policy violations, most incidents involved a broad category of infractions classified as “defiance of authority.” Approximately 10% of students engaged in behavior that resulted in expulsion, suspension, alternative placement, or corporal punishment. More than 80% of school districts in the state

reported having implemented prevention activities including after-school programs, conflict resolution or peer mediation programs, and family services. No detail about the breadth and adequacy of these prevention initiatives is provided.

A disturbing aspect of the report is racial disparities in student disciplinary infractions
(Article continues)

IN THIS ISSUE

- **In the News: Kentucky Center for Safe Schools Report**
- **Spotlight: Dorm Libraries, Bridge City Correctional Center, New Orleans, LA**
- **Parents and Advocates: *Play by the Rules: Alabama Laws for Youth***
- **Research to Practice: Promoting Conceptual Knowledge in Math**
- **Transition: Best and Promising Practices For Youth in Long-Term Correctional Facilities**
- **Your Letters**

About EDJJ

EDJJ is a technical assistance, training, research, and dissemination center designed to develop more effective responses to the needs of youth with disabilities in the juvenile justice system and those at-risk for involvement with the juvenile justice system.

The center is a collaborative project of the University of Maryland, University of Kentucky, Arizona State University, American Institutes for Research, and The Pacer Center.

and law violations. For example, African American students represent approximately 10% of the school population in Kentucky. Yet, they account for 20.5% of all school board violations. With regard to law violations, African American students are almost three times more likely to be identified by their schools as law violators than their Caucasian classmates. Regional variability in rates of infractions indicates that disparities between African American and Caucasian students are greatest in areas with the largest percentage of African American students in the population.

Higher rates of disciplinary infractions and law violations may be attributed to higher levels of misconduct by African American than Caucasian students. However, other factors such as differential responses to infractions may affect rates of reporting misconduct for certain groups of students. Additional research is necessary to identify factors associated with the disproportionality of disciplinary reports for African American students. Researchers should also address contextual issues that may affect student behavior and subsequent reports of law violations.

The Kentucky report provides useful information on school disciplinary practices that schools, parents, and communities can use to examine school safety, quality of student life, and racial differences. Creating schools that are responsive to the needs of all children and that adequately prepare youth for postsecondary education, training, or employment is crucial to the well being of our communities.

¹McCoy-Simandle, L. & May, D. C. (2002). *The Kentucky 2001: Safe Schools Data Project* report is available at: <http://www.kysafeschools.org/>

Spotlight

I have learned responsibility. I have learned that helping other people is fun. I have learned that it is not as hard as it seems to help people. – A 15 year-old student librarian

A unique and positive approach to promoting student responsibility and reading is being implemented at The Bridge City Juvenile Detention Facility in New Orleans, Louisiana. In addition to a school library, each dorm unit has a separate library managed primarily by students.

Implementing the dorm library program was difficult at first. Students destroyed books or didn't return them. However, problems were quickly overcome through collaboration between Ms. Gaynell Adams, the librarian and the corrections officers (COs) under the direction of supervisor, Mr. Ned Tolliver. Working together, educators and COs set rules. In addition, regular book checks by correctional officers assure that books are not defaced or destroyed. As a result, students began to develop ownership of the library and books. A policy of opening the library every day and refusing to close it due to behavioral issues reinforces that staff are equally committed to the program's success.

An innovative component of the dorm library program is the use of student librarians. Students are chosen based on consistently exhibiting positive behavior. Ms. Adams relies on the experience and recommendations of teachers and COs to identify students for the dorm librarian positions. Students receive training and assistance with necessary documentation for book check out. A 15 year-old student summarizes his responsibilities as a dorm librarian, "I work Monday through Friday

6:00-9:00 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. I make sure the books are in the proper place and not damaged. I make sure that books are checked out to all who are interested and I try to make sure specific [book] requests are granted. I help other readers when needed. Time flies by really fast. It's never boring."

"Dorm librarians are very proud – it's an esteemed position," Ms. Adams observes. Students and COs join Ms. Adams in asserting the advantages of the student librarian program. One 16 year-old student librarian says proudly, "At first I liked it because the officers gave me snacks. Then I came to like it because it gave me more responsibility. It gave me self-esteem."

Ms. Adams points out several other benefits to the dorm library program, "What gives me great joy is when the boys make special book requests. Everyone wanted the Harry Potter books. The boys are reading more and not just because they have to." Similarly, Mr. Tolliver notes, "It is a plus to the facility. It helps students bond and develop friendships. I would definitely recommend it for any institution."

Ms. Adams and Mr. Tolliver mention recommendations for developing a successful library program. Ms. Adams suggests, "Communicate with security, that's a major part of it. Start small. Tap community resources for book donations. Use public library book sales and donations from the community and schools." Mr. Tolliver advises, "First, find a location on the dorm where it's still secure. Inspect books when they are checked-out and again at check-in." Mr. Tolliver also highlights important interactions with students, "I let the kids know when they are doing a good job."

The dorm library program and use of student librarians are innovative approaches to promoting literacy and supporting positive student behavior. Certainly, this

program will benefit students long after they leave Bridge City Juvenile Detention Facility. Ms. Adams reflects, "We want to provide leisure reading for the boys and homework assistance. We are also trying to provide students with learning time and resources after school, like they would have at home. We hope they will become lifelong learners and lifelong leisure readers."

Parents and Advocates

What if I'm not drinking, but I'm holding someone else's drink?

What if I throw my soda can out of the car window?¹

These and many other questions are addressed in Alabama's Center for Law and Civic Education publication, *Play by the Rules: Alabama Laws for Youth* (2002). The book is designed for use with seventh grade students and those in alternative schools within Alabama. Eleven law-related topics are covered: (a) rule of law; (b) juvenile justice system; (c) criminal offenses; (d) weapons, guns, and fireworks; (e) alcohol and other drugs; (f) parent-child relationships; (g) recreation; (h) school; (i) transportation; (j) work; and (k) civil responsibility.

One of the positive aspects of the book is its user-friendly format. The answer to each question includes a summarization of the law. The answers are legally accurate without including so many details that youth get "bogged down." Parents and parent advocates should know that the topics included in the book are based on Alabama statutes. While this resource may provide some guidance, laws vary both across and within states.

The publication also provides valuable information for discussion about behavior that may be considered a crime and possible

consequences for that behavior. This is particularly important for youth with disabilities and their families. Providing accurate and easily understood law-related information is one method of preventing law violations by youth.

Further, addressing questions commonly asked by youth presents a potential forum for promoting positive behavior. For example, youth should know the consequences of carrying a weapon, even if it is intended solely to scare someone. Once a youth understands the critical nature of such an action, parents can discuss more appropriate options for dealing with conflicts and where to get assistance if a problem exists.

Parents, advocates, state, and local leaders could also benefit from using *Play by the Rules: Alabama Laws for Youth* (2002) as a resource for developing a local publication that accurately addresses local and state laws. Such a project has great potential for assisting youth at risk for law violations.

Play by the rules: Alabama laws for youth (2002) is available from:

Alabama Center for Law & Civic Education
Cumberland School of Law
Samford University
800 Lakeshore Drive
Birmingham, AL 35229
(800) 888-7301
www.aclce.org

Research to Practice

Algebra Instruction

Teaching algebra to youth in juvenile corrections can be difficult. Youth with disabilities in these settings may lack the necessary computational skills and have difficulty with, “higher level mathematics that require reasoning and problem-solving” (p. 8).¹ However, to obtain a diploma, many schools require students to pass an algebra course and require assessments that include

algebra. Thus, algebra instruction is a critical part of the curriculum for youth. Clearly, there is a great need and challenge for educators to provide meaningful algebra instruction in juvenile correctional educational programs.

One instructional approach that supports student achievement in algebra is the concrete-semiconcrete-abstract (C-S-A) sequence of instruction. Students are provided with opportunities to work through word problems based on a common concept. Before asking students to apply a rule for solving problems, the teacher allows students to represent and work through problems using manipulatives. This is called the concrete stage. Once they master problems in this way, students move to the semi-concrete stage. At this time, they are encouraged to represent a problem using drawings. Finally, in the abstract phase, students use numeric representations of a problem.

The C-S-A sequence works very well in concert with strategy steps for solving problems. For example, students can complete problems with manipulatives while using a strategy such as S-T-A-R.² This is a mnemonic strategy in which students follow a specific four-step process: (1) S - Search the word problem for facts; (2) T - Translate the equation into picture form; (3) A - Answer the problem; and (4) R - Review the solution and check for reasonableness of the answer. For maximum benefit, direct instruction of a strategy and methods for identifying when it is applicable should be used.

Teaching algebra to students in juvenile corrections may be challenging. However, consistent use of a C-S-A sequence and strategy instruction are two effective methods for assisting students in this worthy endeavor.

For Examples of C-S-A and Strategies for Algebra Instruction:

- ¹Gagnon, J. C. & Maccini, P. (2001). Preparing students with disabilities for algebra. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 34(1), 8-15.
- ²Maccini, P. & Ruhl, K. L. (2000). Effects of a graduated instructional sequence on the algebraic subtraction of integers by secondary students with learning disabilities. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 23, 465-489.

Transition

Best and Promising Practices for Youth in Long-Term Correctional Facilities

In the last edition of EDJJ Notes we published a list of best and promising practices for short-term jails and detention centers. It is our hope that short-term correctional facilities will use these promising practices to create and implement transition programs for juvenile offenders within their facilities.

EDJJ has also developed best and promising practices for long-term correctional facilities based on the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) publication, *Documented Effective Practices in the Education of At-Risk and Delinquent Youth*.¹

Limited research and questionable methodology in several studies suggests that the findings be interpreted cautiously. However, EDJJ agrees with Coffey and Gemignani (1994) that many effective practices have been identified. We have updated these promising transition practices for long-term correctional facilities:

- Assure staff awareness of and familiarity with all county, state, local, and private programs that receive and/or send youth to/from long-term correctional facilities.
- To the extent possible, individualized pre-placement planning should exist prior to the transfer of youth from jails, detention centers, or other programs to long-term correctional facilities.
- A process exists for the immediate transfer of youth's educational records from jails, detention centers, or other programs to long-term correctional facilities.
- A variety of specific educational programs are provided including academics, vocational and job-related skills, social skills, independent living skills, and law-related education.
- A variety of support services are provided including work experience and placement, alcohol and drug abuse counseling, anger management, vocational counseling, health education, and training for parenthood.
- External resources such as speakers, tutors, mentors, vocational trainers, substance abuse counselors, employers, volunteers, and job counselors are used.
- Students in long-term correctional facilities should have access to a resource center, which contains a variety of materials related to transition and support.
- Special funds are earmarked for transition and support services.
- Interagency meetings, cooperative in-service training activities, and crossover correctional and community school visits are held regularly to ensure awareness of youth and agency transition needs.
- A process exists for the immediate identification, evaluation, and placement of youth with disabilities.
- An individualized education plan is developed for each student with disabilities and includes a transition plan.

- An individual transition plan is developed with all students and includes the student's educational and vocational interests, abilities, and preferences.
- A transition planning team is formed immediately upon student entry into a long-term correctional facility to design and implement the individual transition plan.
- A process exists for the immediate transfer of youth's educational records from long-term correctional facilities to community schools or other programs.
- Coordination with parole to ensure a continuum of services and care is provided in the community.
- Coordination exists with public and private school educational program personnel to ensure that they advocate for these youth, cultivate family involvement, maintain communications with other agencies, and place students in classes with supportive teachers.
- A community based transition system exists for maintaining student placement and communication after release from a long-term correctional facilities.
- The existence of a system for periodic evaluations of the transition program and all of its components.

As noted in the recommendations for short-term juvenile jails and detention centers, additional research is needed to establish the positive benefits of these recommendations over time. However, students would be well served by implementing best and promising practices based on the research that is available.

¹See Coffey, O. D., & Gemignani, M. G. (1994). *Effective practices in juvenile correctional education: A study of the literature and research, 1980-1992*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. This publication is available from:

The Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse
 Publication Reprint/Feedback
 P.O. Box 6000
 Rockville, MD 20849-6000
 Phone: 800-638-8736
 Fax: 301-519-5212
 Email: puborder@ncjrs.org

Vocational Programs in Corrections

Success in the community following detainment or commitment is affected by the education and training provided to youth while in a facility. Recently, a survey was conducted of career and technical education programs in adult and juvenile correctional settings.¹ State-level correctional education officials were asked to provide information in four areas: (a) vocational programs offered; (b) description of innovative programs; (c) accrediting agencies and frequency of accreditation reviews; and (d) frequency of formal internal reviews.

Data on vocational programs offered in juvenile facilities were obtained for nine states. Preliminary analysis indicate four common offerings: (a) auto technology (n = 8); (b) horticulture (n = 7); (c) auto body (n = 6); and (d) printing/graphic arts (n = 6).

The data provide an initial picture of vocational programs in juvenile corrections. Additional research is needed to obtain data from more states. National, state, and local career trends should be considered during future analyses. Also, careers that welcome formerly incarcerated youth should be considered.

¹The data from Bennett, D. W. (2002). *National survey of career & technical (vocational) education programs* is available by emailing Mr. Bennet at dwbennett@dce.state.va.us

Your Letters

Dear EDJJ,

My son is 16 years old and does not come home at times. He recently started ditching school. He does not have any criminal record except for a ticket he received for an incident of graffiti. We have already involved the police, but all they can do is issue a citation. This did not affect my son's behavior. We would like to send him to a facility where he can receive education and psychological support. However, we are a middle-income family and have limitations with what we can pay. We appreciate any assistance you can provide.

Sincerely,

Worried Parents in California

Dear Worried Parents in California,

There are several resources that may be helpful in assisting your son. You did not mention if your son is served in special education. If not, you may want to ask the school to evaluate him. If he is classified, you can request a meeting with the IEP team. They may have knowledge of therapeutic school programs within the public school system and identify if he would be more appropriately served in another setting.

Also, The National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors maintains a Children, Youth and Families Division. State and territory representatives may be contacted for further information. The number in California is (916) 654-3479 (other state contact numbers are on the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (CECP) homepage at (<http://cecp.air.org/resources/statemh.htm>)).

Additionally, most state education departments have consultants in emotional and behavioral disorders. The number for California is (916) 327-3535 (also found on the CECP website).

You may also want to look at the resources on the PACER website (www.pacer.org). Two sections may be particularly helpful: Emotional/Behavioral Disorders Resources (<http://www.pacer.org/publications/ebd.htm>) and Mental Health Resources (<http://www.pacer.org/national/wwwlinks.htm#mental>).

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