Simon Gonsoulin:
Good day and welcome to our first in a series of NDTAC webinars for the 2013 school years. I am Simon Gonsoulin from the National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At Risk, better known as NDTAC. We are housed in Washington DC and we are pleased you decided to join us today.

The series is Tailoring Academic and Behavioral Support Services for Youth. This series is based on the most recent NDTAC practice guide entitled *Providing Individually Tailored Academic and Behavioral Support Services for Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems.*

You can access it at [www.neglected-delinquent.org](http://www.neglected-delinquent.org). If you are registered for the webinar, you received a copy of the guide a few hours ago. We will go over practices found in the guide. We will have a school program join us with how they present one or more strategies and how they exemplify the spirit and intent of Title I, Part D, programming. We hope that you enjoy the webinars throughout the year.

Before I turn the webinars over to the presenters, I would like to share a little information about our Center and the webinar participants.

NDTAC, through the American Institute for Research exists with a contract with US Department of Education. John McLaughlin is our federal program manager. John has joined the webinar today. Also, to let you know, John has been federal manager for the program for four years. He was also a Part D State coordinator.

Finally, the NDTAC mission centers around three themes. Developing a uniform evaluation model which involves national data collection and the dissemination of an annual report that focuses on the success of the program at the state level. Ultimately we roll this up into the national report that can also be accessed on the website. We also provide technical assistance that ranges from the dissemination of products, reports and tools that we hope will be beneficial to the field. We respond to individual TA requests by the individual state coordinators. And we have webinars during the year as well as community calls for the Part D coordinators. This year we added a new task which addresses the collaboration between the courts, schools and the pipeline through the Supportive School Discipline Community of Practice. Our first community of practice call will take place tomorrow.

We also serve as the facilitator between different organizations, agencies and interest groups to ensure the educational needs of the youth that we all serve in Title I, Part D, programs are considered in decisions that affect policy as well as practice.

What I want to do is introduce the two presenters today. I will give you a little bit of background information about them. First of all, we have Nick Read who is a member of the NDTAC staff and has been a member for several years. Nick has been involved in many aspects of the center's work. Most recently, he has accepted responsibility of being the technical assistance lead and helping to drive and improve our technical assistance efforts for the Part D coordinators, as well as the logical stakeholders in the area of technical assistance. We appreciate his involvement in
the Center. He is also the co-author of the guide being shared with you today. Also speaking is Paul Schandevel who is the director of family services at Children's Homes Inc. in the state of Arkansas. He is a licensed clinical social worker. He has experience in welfare agencies here in the US and internationally. He has been working with Children's Homes Incorporated. He has been involved in restructuring and reopening of children's homes in the state of Arkansas, with foster care and children services as well. He is a leader in implementing alternative learning environments and programs in the state of Arkansas. Without further delay, I will turn this over to a member of NDTAC staff Nick Read.

**Nick Read:**
We want to introduce everyone to the guy that would be the basis for the webinars this year. Today's webinar is an important because the guide that will be the basis of the webinars for this year. Today's webinar is an important one so you can get familiar with the guide. I want to give a little bit of brief background. This began about two years ago at Georgetown University. In recognition of this need to improve education and educational attainment for this population, the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) at Georgetown University produced in 2010, *Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems*. In the monograph, authors Peter Leone of the Department of Special Education at the University of Maryland, College Park and Lois Weinberg, professor at the Charter College of Education at California State University, Los Angeles, assert that this population of children and youth far too often fail to receive a quality education that allows them to develop the skills and competencies necessary for them to become productive adults.

The monograph first presents the educational barriers and poor outcomes the children and youth face and then describes recent legal and policy reforms that have shaped education policy for this population, as well as litigation that has been brought against jurisdictions not providing adequate education services to youth in their care. Additionally, the monograph discusses several promising practices are discussed, such as the use of educational liaisons and evidence-based educational interventions, such as preschool and literacy programs.

The CJJR Monograph concludes with a discussion of six main principles to guide system reform and service delivery. The underlying principles that drive services should include:

1. Early education is essential.
2. Quality education services are critical for successful development of all youth.
3. If outcomes matter, they must be measured.
4. Support services are needed to help some youth succeed.
5. Interagency collaboration and communication is vital.
6. Change requires within-agency and cross-agency leadership.

Shortly after the release of the monograph, CJJR Director, Shay Bilchik, approached NDTAC about the possibility of creating a series of practical guides to complement the monograph’s research and help administrators and practitioners conceptualize and implement the principles. Our Center started with the principle of “interagency communication and collaboration is vital” and created the *NDTAC Practice Guide: Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems Through Interagency Communication and Collaboration* in 2011. This guide highlights three key practices that juvenile justice, child
welfare, education, and other child-serving agencies can employ to achieve collaboration and provides concrete strategies for adopting the practices and overcoming common challenges.

We talked about creating a series of practical guidance to complement the monographs research and conceptualize and implement the principles listed here. So, NDTAC started with the principle that interagency communication and collaboration is vital. We wrote our first practice guide about a year and half ago on that topic. It is available on our website. It highlights three key practices, the juvenile justice, child welfare and other child serving agencies can and used to achieve collaboration. It is to help overcome overcoming -- to overcome challenges.

In 2012, NDTAC completed the second guide in the series, this time examine the CJJR monograph principle, “individually-tailored support services for youth are provided. The resulting Practice Guide is Providing Individually Tailored Academic and Behavioral Support Services for Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems. We’d like to take a little time to walk through the specifics of this Guide and then share with you some ways you can incorporate the Guide’s content into your current practices.

This Guide uses as it’s foundation the idea that, to address the academic hardships faced by youth involved with these systems—changes in placement, family mobility, disabling conditions, economic disadvantage, and others—education providers need to provide supports that address students’ unique needs, both academic and behavioral. It seeks to help facilities and community schools ensure that the evidence-based academic and social skill interventions described in the CJJR monograph become standard practice for these youth across educational settings. The Guide asserts that, although high-quality curriculum and instruction are important for all students, those students most at risk for not achieving to their potential should be afforded the supplemental support and encouragement needed to overcome barriers and meet high expectations.

That said, let’s take a closer look at the Guide itself.

First off, it is important to consider the types of settings in which the students discussed in the Guide are receiving educational and supplemental services. NDTAC, in collaboration with the CJJR monograph authors Leone and Weinberg and CJJR director Shay Bilchik, focused on a wide range of settings from non- to highly-restrictively. As you see here, in the Guide we’re looking at public and private traditional and alternative schools within the community where system-involved youth may find themselves before and/or after residential placement, day treatment centers, again where youth involved with juvenile justice and child welfare may be educated while still living “at home,” group homes for youth in need of non-secure placement outside of a family home, residential treatment centers, and detention and correctional facilities. For the purposes of this guide, we focused only on juvenile correctional facilities, though we know there are youth under the age of 21 residing and receiving education in adult facilities.

Each of these settings presents its own unique challenges to providing high quality academic and behavioral support services, with some settings arguably presenting more challenges than others. The Guide provides practices and strategies that are suitable for implementation across all five categories of educational settings, but it is important to remember that practice and strategies will need to be tailored to the environment in which they’re offered.

Now that we’ve covered where these students involved with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems are receiving their educational and supplemental services, let’s take a look at the
specific practices NDTAC recommends to implement such services. For this Guide, NDTAC developed five overarching Practices focused on individually-tailored academic and behavioral support services, each with its own accompanying implementation strategies. The five Practices are:

1. Collect and use data to identify needs and develop learning plans
2. Implement procedures that ensure smooth transitions
3. Address gaps in academic skills and accelerate learning
4. Instruct students in ways that engage them in learning, and
5. Address behavioral and social needs to promote educational success

We’ll now explore each of these Practices and their strategies in more depth.

Practice 1 looks at the importance of collecting data and using that data to develop individualized plans for each student’s success. With advances in technology, the use of data to make educational decisions is or is becoming an expectation in all educational settings. For at-risk students, like those involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, in any school setting, examining student performance data and other relevant information needs to be the foundational practice that undergirds all programming decisions. Schools can examine both academic and nonacademic information and tailor practice and programming to student needs identified in these data.

This Guide proposes that systems should use progress monitoring to evaluate students’ academic and behavioral progress and determine if the system’s methods are working or if change is needed. The implementation of the remaining four overarching Practices in the Guide is predicated on the thoughtful use of data to make educational decisions. All educational settings should establish a systematic process for using data, develop personalized learning plans, focus on specific and measurable outcomes, and actively share data across settings.

The three general strategies the Guide proposes for implementing this practice are to:

1. Provide a systematic process for using data to identify, screen, monitor, and make educational decisions; or in other words, make data collection and use a formal and consistent process;
2. Develop and maintain personal learning plans, which should address both academics and behavior and which will guide everyone who interacts with a youth and the youth themselves through the practices and services that are most likely to help the student succeed; and
3. Share information to facilitate students’ success and well being, which we all know can be difficult but is critical to ensure everyone is on the same page in terms of helping a youth succeed and that the process of doing so is coordinated and efficient, rather than fragmented and frustrating.

Within the Practice Guide we have included a range of resources and program examples for each Practice. We’ll share a sampling of some of these as we continue to go through the Practices. Here you’ll see a few example resources from the State of Louisiana related to collecting and using data to identify student needs and develop plans.

First we have a series of legislative measures aimed at improving the flow of student information from one placement to another in the State. The 2001 Louisiana legislative session passed Senate Bill No. 118 that forbids local school districts from “holding” juvenile justice-involved youth’s educational records for such reasons as owing the school lunch money, not returning library books, or not paying extracurricular activity fees. It also specifies a time period by which all
records are to be sent to the State agency. Similarly, Act 1225 of the 2003 Louisiana Legislative Regular Session—Interagency Agreements for Information Sharing Concerning Juveniles and Article 543 of Louisiana’s Children’s Cabinet, Interagency information sharing; interagency agreements lay the policy foundation for facilities’ practice of transferring student records in a timely manner.

With this statutory support, facilities are able to submit to a youth’s previous placement a Student Records Request Letter. A letter like the one linked here is automatically generated within 24 hours of a youth being admitted to the reception unit at all State-operated secure care facilities. The information requested includes the student’s cumulative records, individual evaluations, Individualized Education Program, birth certificate, Social Security card/number, immunization records, units of credits earned, and any other pertinent information. This letter also notifies the local school system that the youth is engaged in educational services.

Finally, once a placement has a student’s records and other relevant information in hand, they can develop or modify the student’s individualized or personalized learning plan. This example was developed prior to 2003 and is automated and user-friendly. A task force of facility school administrators and teachers helped develop the plan to be comprehensive yet not overly burdensome on teachers and school staff to initiate and update. The automated system also generates facility and systemwide educational reports to support data-driven decisionmaking in the schools.

These are just a few of the Resources for Practice 1 available in the Guide. Now let’s move on to Practice 2.

The second Practice is all about making sure that transitions for youth, once involved with the juvenile justice and/or child welfare system, between educational settings—and we know these youth typically have many placements over the course of their educational careers—are smooth, if not seamless, so that progress made at each stop isn’t lost or undone at each subsequent stop and that each placement is building upon past successes. Transitions for this highly mobile population may be the most critical element to address in insuring the long-term educational success.

The Guide suggests four strategies for successfully transitioning system-involved students from one placement to the next. They are to:

1. Include transition activities in student PLPs, again, to make transition planning formal, set clear expectations, and hold each party accountable for doing what’s necessary to succeed at each step along a youth’s path through the system;
2. Establish formal mechanisms for the exchange of educational data and records—if data and records exchange isn’t made into policy and consistently carried out as practice, it will not happen and the youth will suffer;
3. Prioritize and allocate funds for transition supports and programs—similarly, if there is no money (or time) for transition planning and activities, it won’t happen. If a facility or school doesn’t make transition a priority, it won’t be funded adequately. It’s as simple as that.
4. Conduct ongoing monitoring and continuous quality improvement of transition efforts—because you’ll never know if you’re being successful unless you track your efforts and evaluate whether their having the intended impact. If you’re on the right track, what can you do to kick it up a notch? If you’re not seeing the success you envisioned, maybe you
need to change what you’re doing. You’ll never know unless you take the time to continuously monitor.

In addition to sample documents and other resources, the Resources and Examples section of the Guide provides information and links to facilities and programs around the country that exemplify the Guide’s Practices and Strategies. Some of the program examples for Practice 2 and its Strategies include:
Balcom Learning Center in Paragould, Arkansas, which is a residential facility program focused on providing the skills youth need to transition back to high school and/or to go on to college or vocational training;
The Education Transition Center housed within the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department in Houston, Texas, which offers supplemental education services and facilitates a youth’s successful transition back to the community; and
The Los Angeles Crossover Youth Practice Model Site in California. This site has established a specific unit within its participating detention center for youth that have crossed over from child welfare to juvenile justice. These youth are paired with an education mentor/tutor that works with them throughout their time in both systems. The goal is to have someone that bonds with the youth, is going to be stable in their lives, and is able to work with them on their education challenges. This level of consistency enables the mentor/tutor to build relationships with educators and serve as advocate

Practice 3 looks at understanding and addressing any academic weakness and skill gaps that system-involved youth may have and going beyond simple remediation by providing instruction that catches these students up with their non-system-involved peers and sets them on a path to greater academic success.
Three strategies NDTAC believes will help administrators and practitioners successfully address system-involved students’ gaps in academic skills and accelerate their learning are to:
  1. Base instruction on functional and curriculum-based evaluation of student needs – again, going back to the data available on the youth, whether formal academic assessments, behavioral screenings, or what have you, and using that information to instruct students in ways and in content that is most likely to build on strengths, overcome known challenges, and foster the highest levels of success.
  2. Provide tiered academic intervention programs, because we know each student is different and learning interventions and strategies for one student, or group of students may not work or be appropriate for another. By establishing set tiers of programs – with differentiation along a continuum of need – you can provide the most good for the most students, so to speak, in ways that make sense for efficiency and effectiveness
  3. Use explicit scaffolded instruction – explicit instruction is an approach that can be used in varied educational settings and with varied instructional materials tailored to students’ needs. It includes a series of supports or scaffolds that guide students through the learning process. When instruction is scaffolded, teachers strategically select the content and then they break it down into manageable instructional units based on students’ ability to make sense of the content. This helps address the varying learning abilities and education levels of students across settings.
In turning to the Resources and Examples for Practice 3, we see that many residential and community-based programs for youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems around the country are making great strides in addressing students’ gaps in academic skills and accelerating their learning. A few examples of such programs include:

The Transition LEARN, or Literacy Education And Resource Network, Center in Cochise, Arizona, which opened in 1993 and consists of 14 computerized student workstations, individual learning plans based on a battery of assessments, and one-on-one tutoring. Specific education programs include Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and General Education Development (GED) preparation;

Hastings Youth Academy, or HYA, in Hastings, Florida, which is a school operated on the grounds of a moderate-risk, secure juvenile justice facility – the Hastings Comprehensive Mental Health Treatment Facility. Education at HYA includes three major programs to address the mental health needs of youth involved with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. Also, the local County School Board provides onsite educational services, including high school and GED courses. Explicit instruction is being implemented at HYA to address the reading and literacy needs of youth who are confined. HYA is also participating in a national study called “Literacy Instruction Based on Evidence through Research for Adjudicated Teens to Excel,” or “Project Liberate,” which is examining implementation of explicit instruction in correctional education settings. The results of the study are expected to be released in summer 2013; and finally Success Academy at the Ghazvini Learning Center in Tallahassee, Florida. Success Academy serves students transitioning from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice who are behind in earning credits. The academy also serves grade-level students who are looking to accelerate their studies. The goal for students is to get 1½ year’s worth of credit (9 credits) in a 1-year period.

The fourth practice continues the look at instruction and promotes approaches that engage students in what they are learning about. All students need to be engaged in interesting and challenging learning experiences that go beyond basic academic skill development. For students who have experienced repeated academic failure, like many involved with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, a variety of services and supports are critically important to engage them in learning rather than have them participate in a watered-down curriculum and rote learning of basic skills.

Several ways in which teachers and other education professionals can better engage at-risk students are to:

1. Personalize the learning environment and instructional content – again, in order to better meet the unique needs of each youth, especially as many of not thrived in traditional learning environments. This is an opportunity for teachers, administrators, and others to find ways of accentuating students’ strengths and building on interests.

2. Build conditions and opportunities that demonstrate to students their success – these students, perhaps more than any others, need to feel that they are achieving, no matter how incremental it may be. The classroom should be a place where they feel successful and supported in trying to achieve at high levels by their teachers, peers, and others.

3. Provide engaging, interactive, and hands-on learning opportunities – because many students learn best by interacting with content and/or tasks in some way rather than passively receiving information. In this way, learning is more meaningful. For at-risk students across educational settings, teachers and education support staff need to use a
variety of interactive approaches, such as project-based (thematic) units, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and reciprocal teaching.

4. Engage youth in educational decisionmaking – this begins by formally and informally soliciting students’ feedback on their educational experiences and goals, which helps to inform action steps toward promoting overall school success. Feedback should be supplemented by school records, including assessments and evaluations, and past learning plans.

The Guide features several examples of documents highlight ways jurisdictions focus on instructing students in ways that engage them in learning and commit them to success. Lets take a look at a couple examples from Louisiana and one from Maryland.

There is a section within Louisiana’s ILP that suggests that youth engaged in educational services in juvenile justice facilities may need accommodations and or modifications to maximize educational outcomes. This section helps ensure that students are provided educational opportunities that build on their interests and strengths while taking into consideration any unique learning needs they may have.

Also included in the Louisiana ILP is a section for the student to initial and approve the plan’s provisions. During the ILP meeting, teachers ask for the student’s commitment to address the educational benchmarks in the ILP while in placement. The ILP/PLP is finalized only after the youth has participated in development and approval of the plan.

Finally, students in Maryland’s Juvenile Services Education Centers are co-authors of their ILPs. As part of plan development, students are asked to express their personal interests, educational goals, and desired social and emotional adjustment. Once the student finishes creating the ILP, he or she must sign and date it, stating that he or she understands the content and commits to working on the prescribed goals.

The final practice turns attention to addressing the behavioral and social needs many youth involved with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems (and those that aren’t) that impact their academic achievement. Behavior plays such an important role in a student’s educational success and failure to acknowledge this relationship and to address needs is a big disservice to these youth. It is important to remember that many if not most system-involved youth have numerous risk factors, such as adverse childhood experiences and trauma, and a higher prevalence of emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities than their non-system-involved peers.

NDTAC offers four strategies for implementing supports that adequately address students’ behavioral and social needs in order to promote their educational success, including:

1. Manage student behavior with positive rather than punitive approaches – we’re learning more and more from the literature that simply punishing unwanted student behavior does little to address the underlying causes nor to prevent future occurrences. More positive approaches that give students purpose and responsibility for behaviors and maintain a clear structure for expectations and feedback have shown to produce better results

2. Engage the family to gain greater insight into youth’s behavioral needs – students’ family members and/or other responsible, concerned adults are the best source of information for what behavior issues a youth might face and what does and doesn’t work in addressing them. Brining family members and other caring adults into the behavioral management
process makes the school’s job that much easier and gains family members’ trust that the
school is really trying to do what is best for their child.

3. Create a structured learning environment – highly structured learning environments may be the best setting for at-risk students to achieve academically and behaviorally. Such environments help set clear expectations for students and teachers, which eliminates many of the unknowns that can trigger disruptive behavioral responses and limit instructional time.

4. Align behavior management approaches across settings and domains – Addressing the behavioral needs of youth within systems must be thoughtfully considered and consistently dealt with across all educational settings, from public high schools to correctional facilities, and locations, from classrooms to living units. Approaches should be flexible so as to be applicable to all students in all situations. Greater consistency in expectations fosters a greater likelihood that students will behave they way they should and in ways conducive to their and their peers’ educational success.

Some of the Resources and Examples for Practice 5 include:
Positive Education Program’s Day Treatment Centers in Cleveland, Ohio serve school-age children and youth who have been diagnosed with an emotional disturbance in an integrated educational and mental health environment. These centers serve as both the school and the therapeutic treatment center for these children and youth. The centers employ the Re-Education (“Re-ED”) philosophy, which provides the framework that creates a therapeutic environment in which (a) there are expectancies for normal healthy behavior, (b) competence is stressed, and (c) energy is focused on identifying and building strengths to promote positive growth.

The Center employs behavioral strategies and positive interventions and supports that provide predictability, structure, and consistency for students. Individual and group meetings, lessons, and activities are used to teach new ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and behaving. Individualized programming builds functional skills and academic competence that promote cognitive and social-emotional growth and development.
The Behavior Management Program employed in Louisiana’s secure care facilities is based on the foundation that youth who enter the system must advance through stages of development if their behaviors are going to change. Each stage requires a different level of support from staff members and peers. The management program acknowledges four stages of development many youth must navigate to benefit from programming and addresses the clear relationships among expectations, incentives, staff interaction, responsibility, and stage progression.

Finally, NDTAC’s brief, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in Juvenile Justice Settings describes PBIS programs implemented in two juvenile justice settings, highlighting how the program was implemented, how it works, and what the results have been at each of the facilities. NDTAC will be working closely with the National Center on PBIS and their partners in the future to further explore the impact of PBIS on behavior and academic achievement within secure and alternative education settings.

And so this provides just a glimpse at the five Practices their respective strategies, and some of the resources and program examples within the NDTAC Practice Guide. We hope you’ll download the Guide from our Website and explore it in more depth. At this point, we’d like to walk through in a bit more detail how you might incorporate these practices and strategies into your own systems.
NDTAC develops practice guides like this one to help state and local administrators and service providers ensure that youth who are neglected or delinquent have the opportunity to meet the same challenging State academic standards that all children are expected to meet as well as to help practitioners improve educational services for children and youth who are neglected, delinquent, or at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system.

We hope you can incorporate the practices and strategies shared in this guide into your daily work. Some ways to do this include using it to support strategic planning, to design professional development opportunities, as well as to develop program evaluation criteria and/or self-assessment tools for facilities serving neglected and delinquent children and youth.

That was a quick overview of the guide itself. There is much more in each webinar will build. There is much more about practices and strategies. You cannot just read the guide, but incorporated into your daily practice. I will now turn things over to Simon to guide us into the next part. Hopefully this gave you a good glimpse of what is in the guide. The next part of the presentation will exemplify what is already in the guide.

Simon Gonsoulin: Thank you Nick, he managed to get through the 30 page guide in about 20 min. You packed a lot of content into the presentation. Take time to go to the guide and not only look at the content around practices and strategies and also the resources which can be helpful. They help the strategies come to life by giving real-life examples of programs that states and communities are employing.

So, our next presenter is Paul Schandevel who is the director of family services at Balcom Learning Center in Arkansas. As Paul shares about the program, you will hear about how they address many of the strategies that we are suggesting in the guide. He will kind of walk through his program. You will quickly see how many elements in the program do align with the strategies. Paul, I will turn it over to you.

Paul Schandevel: This is Paul Schandevel from Paragould, Arkansas. I am humbled to be able to present to you a program that has become the centerpiece to our work with kids who are delinquent or neglected.

On the next slide, you will see that the purpose of the Balcom Learning Center is to provide an alternative learning environment where children can work on emotional, behavioral, social and family problems, as well as get caught up academically in school. The second focus is that we also want to provide our students with skills and opportunities that promote positive outcomes upon his or her return to the community school.

This gives you a little bit of history. I came to the center in 1993. It became obvious to us that we needed an on-campus school type situation. We partnered with the Greene County Tech school district which is across the street from us. We started with six kids upstairs in our gym called Little Red Schoolhouse. Now we are currently serving 24 students in grades five through 12 in a new building.
I am kind of showing you the context of the Learning Center. It is on a 30 acre campus surrounded by family homes. These are houses with 10 to 12 family members led by married couples. Their kids and the kids from the children's home that are placed within them. The Balcom Learning Center is supported by these homes and the counseling, and therapeutic case work services. We are also supported by the community partners.

Back in 1995, when it was decided we would have a school on campus we looked at many possibilities – private school, home school. We came across a study – a Pygmalion's study that was commissioned by the Arkansas Department of Education that was put together to take a look at nontraditional education and develop guidelines to assist school districts and the educational cooperatives in the creation and management of alternative learning environments. We got a hold of the guidelines and they are built into the foundation of Balcom Learning Center and that began in 1996. These guidelines certainly outlined here address alternative learning environments with nontraditional/flexible instruction methods. This is a brief list of some of the kids that we serve, including students who are neglected and abused.

This next slide continues the guidelines which includes appropriate staffing, training for staff, student admission, resources designed to meet individual needs, recordkeeping and information sharing, collaboration with other agencies and exit criteria. These guidelines are at the foundation of the Balcom Learning Center.

The next slide gives you an idea of our curriculum. Balcom gets its curriculum from four primary sources and I will briefly go through each. Of course, there is the Greene County Tech school district is one our main resources. They are lined up with the Arkansas frameworks. We collect work from the school district and we bring it to Balcom Learning Center. We do have teachers that have developed their own curriculums and we have those approved by Greene County Tech. The second is the PACE learning system which helps students learn through success. There are prescriptive, interactive and highly successful programs that meet individual needs and encourage steady progress. PACEware, which is on our computers is a powerful program that helps Balcom, prescribe, evaluate and diagnose to help the struggling students. It contains reading, language, spelling, mathematics, social studies and science.

The third is Apex Learning which is a virtual high school curriculum that Greene County Tech allows us to access that we access for credit recovery. Apex learning provides over 100 online high school courses from core and recovery to world languages and AP. Our students often recover credits during summer school.

The last curriculum we draw from is called The Keystone School. Since 1974, It provides accredited home education programs to more than 200,000 students from all 50 states and more than 80 countries around the world. Keystone is a home school curriculum, fully accredited, for grades six through 12. Two of our students attending at our school are enrolled in the following Apex courses: art, music appreciation, Spanish, life science, precalculus, health and psychology.

You will see on this slide that two thirds of the school day at Balcom Learning Center that is attended by 24 kids are focused on academics and remediation. From about one o'clock to three
fifteen are focused on afternoon activities. This slide gives a brief description of each activity. I will go into further detail on subsequent slides.

We have a program that has been with us for several years. We have a herd of 14 horses at a 4-H center and an equine therapeutic center which is about 1 mile from the campus where the Balcom Learning Center is located. The Balcom Learning Center collaborates with the Spirit Rich Riding Center equine assisted learning. We have three groups of 6 to 10 youth that meet in the afternoons for a two-hour route. Equine assisted learning is a practical learning methodology that takes them out of their normal routine in a safe and stimulating environment through facilitated horseback activities completed on the ground. They learn more about themselves and others.

We have a Pathfinders program. The kids in this slide are 500 feet up on a goat’s trail at the Buffalo National River in northwest Arkansas at the foothills of the Ozark Mountains. These kids prepare all semester for this final trip. These kids learn such things as responsibility, social responsibility, problem-solving and so forth. What is on their backs is what they live with on these trips.

And you will see vocational training. The vocational training and 4-H program provide opportunities like this one. These kids are building an insulated shed. We did this last year. It had electricity and the trusses that you see in this picture were homemade. They were made by hand by the kids. The shed was sold for $1500 to one of our staff members. It is activities like this that the kids are involved with to help them transition issues that we talked about earlier.

Here you see the family homes. Each home is led by a married couple. The kids are there 24 hours a day. The youth are taught how to live in and trust in a family setting. Many of the kids have been hurt in family settings. Six youth, ages 5 to 11 and 10 or older, depending on the home, are placed in each of these houses.

Children's Home Inc. itself has 50 or 55 children's homes. We have 10 family homes and several foster and adoptive homes to complete the list.

Residential education - in 2008, the Congress in DC wrote into the child welfare legislation that a residential education program, like ours, that has been BLC as its centerpiece is one of the five healthy options for children needing out of home placement. Of course, we know the other options are family wraparound services, foster care and adoption. What distinguishes residential education is on the slide. You will see that there is flexibility, freedom of choice, stability, prevention, graduate support, post permanency services and we are cost-effective. It is free to the kids to come to our agency. We have a $2.8 million budget and we serve about 100 kids at a time. You can see that residential education has been a fine fit for Children's Homes Incorporated.

Here are some of the kids learning how to can food. We teach the kids to cook, sew and care for the garden. There are a lot of things they learn and they are proud of what they have accomplished.
This slide is the front page of a tool that we use that we find helpful. This is called DISC which stands for dominance, influence, steadiness and compliance. The kids get online and completed 24 questionnaire and they learn their behavioral style. They get a 13 page print out talking about how they can better study. The final couple of pages of the print out tie their behavioral style to possible career choices. Each choice has a number. Those numbers are tied to the federal government database for all of the careers and occupations in the country. There are roughly 8000. They get about 20 to 30 career possibilities. They go online and they can read about the career or occupation they may like to be a part of in the future. This is an excellent tool.

It is important that the family's work with us. Our success at Balcom Learning Center is much higher if we have the families involved. The families come to the campus one Saturday a month, August through April. We have family education and parent education. The parents are taught six understandings and 16 skills. Let me give you an example of some of the understandings. They are taught about family systems, parenting styles, support, how to set up rules and consequences. Some of that skills they learn is active listening, straight talk, say no and meaning it, conflict management and resolution. We have served roughly 8 to 15 families each Saturday for the past 16 years. This program has proved successful for the kids. The parents learned skills in the morning and then in the afternoon they have activities like the one you see in this picture which give parents a chance to practice the new skills on their kids.

The Character Climb is another important part of the program that supports BLC. This is called a behavior management system. Each family home enforces the system. When the kids come into the program, they are brought into receiving and then they are moved to the intermediate phase. The primary phases for kids five through eight. Then, once they are off the intermediate phase, they moved to transitional living phase. Along this road, kids learn more responsibilities and they are given more freedom based on the progress they make and the choices they make. The character climb is like the frame of the house. It provides structure and encourages the house parents to provide consistent and impartial training. They enforce positive and negative consequences of the character climb. They are graded daily on a sheet.

I want to give you a idea of some of the categories they are graded in. They are graded in respect, disrespect, caring, thankfulness or indifference, chores, care for their stuff and others, healthy communication, there are target issues that are graded. They are also graded on social skills. We used the research from Boys Town and Girls Town and we teach these kids the social skills and more complex skills that every human needs to learn and a healthy relationship. The character climb is also a key aspect of the program. It is enforced across all of our domains from the Balcom Learning Center to the groups we do in the afternoon to life in the family home.

Every child in the Balcom Learning Center has a goal. They write that goal on this goal attainment scale. You will notice from the left to the right that the kids improve as they make change and make better choices. The kids will write in the most negative behaviors and they will list them up to the most positive behaviors that accomplishes their goal. Each Thursday afternoon, the kids in Balcom Learning Center get an opportunity to present their goals and also the evidence they have gathered from the staff to appeal to the groups. Maybe they marked at the beginning at box 2 and now they have made progress and they are the middle of box 3. Some
kids will get to box 5. Then they get feedback. They will date it and then it shows them the progress that they are making.

This is a measure of our success from the last school year. You will notice that we moved kids one half to 4 1/2 grade levels. We had 30 kids altogether last year, 24 at a time. You will notice and spelling how much they improved. In language expression which includes grammar and written expression, they really excelled. They moved 1/2 to 5 grade levels in language expression. Of course, there are positive gains in the others as well.

The Balcom Learning Center is a faith-based agency that relies on donors, volunteers, professional staff, the community of North East Arkansas, Special Programs at Greene County Tech, Crowley's, Ridge Academy, and the State and Federal Department Of Education. We Are we are thankful for all of the support we get. The last slide is a picture of myself and you are verywelcome to contact me at any time.

**Simon Gonsoulin:**
Paul, thank you very much. We appreciate you sharing those nuggets that you have learned from the Balcom program. Hopefully those on the call managed to get the connection between the content that Nick shared and the practices and strategies. Many of the strategies that are already operational at Balcom, we drew from them to help write the guide. Paul, thank you for sharing your program today. Also for helping us with the program, and the practice guide as well.

**Question:** What is the reaction of the students once they participate in the Pathfinders program? Does it change from the first day to the final day? That is the first question. Do you see change in the reaction from the kids. And the second question is, is this a national program, or something you have only created there at Balcom.

**Paul:** In answer to the first question, we do see change. When you take kids out to an environment like the wilderness, all of their defenses seem to drop. It is an environment where they have no control over and they have to respect. For better or worse, we see the kids, often as they truly are, now, that is not to say that we don't have kids who are well defended and no matter where you put them, they will do the same thing. But, we do see significant change from the beginning to end. Often when we have the banquet, the kids will state things like, if I could climb that mountain, or if I could rappel down that cliff, then I can certainly get past what I am facing in my situation. So, it is a very experiential-oriented. Islands of Healing is the classic book. I think they still go by Project Adventure – that’s huge. It is a conglomerate of resources. We were fortunate in 1991 to have an individual who was heavily involved in experiential learning in an academic setting. So, we have taken different resources - Islands of Healing, we sent staff to Project Adventure training in Georgia, two or three of our staff our first responders. We have sent staff to other conferences across the country to help prepare them for this type of intervention.

**Question:** I see that you use a combination of virtual instruction and computer-assisted instruction as well as published programs. You noted that the curriculum is along the Arkansas core curriculum. Was there a process that your school or company went through in order to align
the curriculum to the Arkansas core? Can you describe it, and, if so, how difficult was it to achieve?

**Paul:** It was not difficult to achieve. Once we decided to be an alternative learning environment, we partnered with the public school system. [Indiscernible] Birmingham who is in charge of the special programs at Greene County Tech has been instrumental in helping us to align what we do here to align with the frameworks of the Arkansas. I have a good relationship with the counseling staff at the high school, and to me it is all about relationships and lining things up with the framework is not as hard as it sounds. There are a lot of pages in the framework and it kind of scares you half to death, that when you align yourself with good people, our supervisor and director of Balcom Learning Center is certified and licensed K-12 special education teacher. She has been around the block and knows the different tracks to take. Having a good staff will help as well. But it is not as hard as it seems. So, just build relationships and it will get you there.

**Question:** What are some measures, other than grade level tests, that you actually have in place to gauge academic progress for youth?

**Paul:** What we have done since the beginning is that when new students come into the Balcom Learning Center, we use the TABE assessment, which is the basic education that all people need. This is part of the PACE learning system. It measures where the child is in core areas and what grade level they are functioning at in math, language expression, spelling. So, at the end of each semester, we have the child retake the TABE and find out if they have made progress or not. The TABE is a vital tool. Another tool we have -- that we use is from PACEware system. We are becoming more computer literate here in Northeast Arkansas. The PACEware software that we have put onto our computers is something that we are just learning to use now. Right now we are mostly still using a traditional style, with some kids online with Keystone. Some kids use the computer for research and that type of thing. But, our goal is to turn the corner when it comes to online type resources. We are just turning the corner. PACEware will help us diagnose and describe on the computer, rather than on paper which is laborious. We can figure out a child’s certain weak areas and objectives and the child will be able to work on lessons on the PACEware while doing their regular curriculum, and hopefully get them caught up even quicker. The TABE is our main measure, along with the usual test that the school systems provide like the Iowa. But, adding this PACEware, there are also some pre-and posttest capabilities just using that software. We are learning that, so we're just going to keep going.

**Question:** First of all, somebody asked if you could provide the website for DISC so individuals can look at it in more detail. They also want to know if youth rethink their career choices? How do teachers use this information to maybe inform or impact their instruction with each youth?

**Paul:** Okay, the teachers -- just to be frank about this. The teachers are overbooked just to make sure that the students have the curriculum in the schoolhouse. The integration of the DISC occurs more in the afternoon programs, than in the morning. Just because there is so much to do - we have a math teacher and a science teacher that have five or six subjects. Especially for seniors who are trying to figure out college plans. Like, we have a young man who is 18 who had graduated with his GED, which is what he wanted. He found that he was a people person. He is currently training to become a welder. We integrate it into our growth plan. Each child has a growth plan for each child and in that growth plan, there is a section for targets. We don't care if the child is sixth grade or 10th grade. We even have some fifth-graders at the Balcom Learning Center. We begin to figure out what they are going to do beyond high school as early as fifth
grade at the Balcom Learning Center because it is on the growth plan. The information that we get from the DISC is integrated to the growth plan. We have the kids research the different career possibilities based on their behavioral style. It is not a formal process, but it leads into our overall program. The teachers are so busy teaching the academics, their calling is to make sure the kids learn what they need to learn. We try to stay out of their way. Here is a website. We get our DISC tools from what is called Leadership Resources and Consulting. They are out of Palestine Texas -- Palestine, Texas. It is PO Box 2025 and zip code is 75802. 657 The phone number is 800-657-2235. The web address is www.lrandc.com. Andy or Stacy will be able to help you out there.

**Question:** For the home parents, can you describe the certification process?

**Paul:** Certainly. When new house parents come in, they are trained in the character climb. We take them through the program manual and hit the highlights, especially how to respond to crises. Our house parents (staff) couples are also trained in managing aggressive behavior or MAB. This is a model for preventing crises and handling crises out of the University of Oklahoma. It is centered there. It is a 13 hour training. We are part of the Arkansas Association Homes for Children. Three times a year we will have training for all of our residential homes across the state. Our family homes -- we have kids who build relationships with the house parents. But, we know that a lot of our kids have family at home and are trying to get home. Our goal is to teach them how to live in a family. We do all that we can to train the house parents staff on how to build appropriate relationships with the kids and help them make change, to help them trust in a family. We have trainings three or four Mondays a week throughout the school year. That is a thumbnail sketch for the couple.

**Simon Gonsoulin:** Paul, that is perfect. Thank you very much. It is 3:01. We want to thank Nick and Paul and the participants for being part of the webinar today. We hope you shown is for the next webinar and look forward for the upcoming save the date. Have a great holiday.