Successfully Transitioning Youth Who Are Delinquent Between Institutions and Alternative and Community Schools

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Introduction

Education is key to life success and to the reduction of juvenile recidivism. Although many youth who have been adjudicated as delinquents earn GEDs, passing the GED is not a sufficient outcome and should not be conflated with earning a high school diploma in measurement of graduation rates. Research by Nobel Prize–winning economist James Heckman shows that, in comparison to a regular high school diploma, the GED limits opportunities and income. This disparity appears to be due to the fact that earning a regular high school diploma reflects the development of, in addition to cognitive skills, “non-cognitive skills” that are also important to the labor market and post-secondary success.\(^1,2\)

Returning to school and succeeding once there is not easy, particularly for youth transitioning from the justice system. There are a variety of individual, school, and systemic factors that must be addressed if young people are to successfully return to schools. Individual factors include poor academic and social–emotional skills, credit deficits, special education needs, and the failure to develop an identity as a learner.\(^3,4,5\) School factors include poor conditions for learning in the schools to which transitioning youth return which likely contributed to the educational deficits that these students exhibited prior to adjudication; limited opportunities for students to learn when schools are focused almost exclusively on test taking and the need to maintain order; a lack of appropriate supplemental educational and social services; a failure to explicitly teach non-cognitive skills (e.g., persistence, self-discipline, dependability); and educator attitudes and biases, which often push students out.\(^6,7,8\) Systemic factors include the failure of agencies and institutions to share records quickly, the absence of alignment and articulation between sending and receiving schools at both ends of the transition process, the dearth of accountability for mobile student outcomes, and inadequate systemic capacity to collaborate with families.\(^9\)

While systemic reforms are necessary, judges, court staff, agency staff, and educators can already act to improve school integration and academic success. They can accomplish this by seeing transition as a process and not an event, and that it starts when a student is removed from his or her community school. Viewed this way, “transition” refers to a youth’s movement within and between one of four stages: (1) entry into the juvenile justice system (or alternative school placement), (2) residence or incarceration (or enrollment in an alternative school setting), (3) reentry or exit from a residential
facility (or alternative setting), and (4) aftercare (or progress monitoring of a youth upon enrollment in his or her home-base school).

A successful transition from each stage to the next requires “a coordinated set of activities for the youth, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes successful movement from the community to and from a correctional program or alternative school setting to post-incarceration activities.” As Table 1 details, successful transitions require all stakeholders to communicate openly and coordinate activities. This requires a detailed focus on improving individual youth outcomes, and demands that providers adequately prepare youth for their return to their home communities prior to release and transfer between community schools.

Table 1

| Characteristic Of A Successful Transition: The NDTAC Transition Framework |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **Coordinated:** | **Outcome oriented:** | **Promotes successful movement between facility or alternative setting and the community:** |
| Stakeholders communicate with one another to ensure that youth are receiving appropriate services and participating in appropriate activities. | Youth attend school and/or are working. Youth are positively engaging with family and community. Youth are not returning to the system (no new charges, reincarceration, or placement in alternative school setting). | Prepares youth to resume educational services or vocations in their home communities. Enhances skills and attitudes for success in society. Reduces recidivism. |

Characteristics of successful transitions also include the provision of services postplacement and after release. A study conducted by the University of Oregon collected data on the facility-to-community transition experiences of 531 formerly incarcerated youth in 6-month intervals to assess their work, education, and living experiences. The data indicated that, if students were engaged within 6 months after release, they were far more likely to remain lawfully in the community, working, or going to school, 1 year after release. In fact, the study demonstrated that students who received appropriate aftercare services—mental health, substance abuse treatment, educational supports, and others—within that 6-month critical window of engagement were more than three times as likely to be engaged in society after 12 months.

The aim of this paper is to help judges, court officials, educators, service providers, legislators, agency heads and other jurisdiction decision makers understand the rationale and mechanisms that undergird effective transition practices so that these stakeholders can be better equipped to address the unique needs of youth, particularly as they enter the critical window of engagement. Services provided during this timeframe are essential for keeping youth engaged in their home communities, ensuring
their development as productive citizens, and preventing them from returning to the juvenile justice system and/or alternative school placements. The paper focuses primarily on the reentry and aftercare stage of transition, outlining the key youth and adult competencies and conditions that facilitate successful reentry, identifying critical elements of successful transition practices to be in place prior to and during reentry and aftercare, presenting model reentry programs to exemplify each element, and offering implications for the courts and school justice partners.

What Affects Transition Outcomes?

A successful transition requires addressing a youth’s entire ecology. A youth’s ecology includes the community, school, classroom, peer group, and family contexts from which he or she came prior to residential and/or alternate school placement and to which the youth will return on release and/or transfer (Figure 1). A youth’s ecology also refers to a youth’s relationships (e.g., with parents, teachers, school administrators, probation officers, gang members) embedded in each of these contexts. Supporting youth as they reenter their home communities is neither an easy nor a straightforward task because it involves helping youth, and frequently their parents, negotiate and manage each of these contexts and relationships in a healthy and constructive manner throughout the reentry process.

There are a host of personal, school, community (e.g., neighborhood violence, police profiling) and system-level factors that influence this process. For instance, at the system level, youth often require multiple services and supports from multiple agencies, systems, and individuals that do not traditionally coordinate. In addition, there is rarely one individual responsible for tracking and supporting a youth’s transition. The result is often a lack of individual and collective empowerment and accountability among service providers. The challenges faced by youth transitioning from alternative and suspension schools back into community schools (e.g., acceptance by school staff, reengagement in school activities) provide another good example of the various factors that influence the process. At the system level, a youth’s successful transition is complicated by his or her high level of mobility. Given
current policy and practice, this mobility makes it difficult to hold one jurisdiction or agency solely responsible for the youth’s welfare. At the school level, there are often insufficient data available on alternative school outcomes with which to assess the effectiveness of their educational services, and neighborhood schools often lack staff with the training and capacity to support the transition process.

The lack of formal policies and practices in alternative settings and receiving schools regarding data use for monitoring, accountability, and alignment can adversely affect the sharing of information between these settings and comprehensive high schools about students’ reentry. This gap may also impede the timely transfer of student transcripts between alternative and comprehensive schools. Inattention to these factors by both the alternative schools and the receiving schools can compromise the likelihood of a successful transition. Effective alternative settings address this disconnect by reaching out to the receiving schools. The alternative settings are successful when the receiving schools are receptive to the lessons learned about how to create conditions for success for returning students.\textsuperscript{16,17}

\textbf{Competencies for Youth, Families, and Service Providers}

Ultimately, to foster a youth’s effective reintegration, there must be appropriate conditions. Additionally, all stakeholders—the youth, his or her family unit, and service providers—must develop particular competencies. The stronger the competencies, the less dependent individuals are on supportive conditions. Conversely, supportive conditions (e.g. mentors and coaches) can sometimes make up for the lack of individual competencies. However, the best outcomes will be realized when people have strong competencies and are supported by nurturing conditions as illustrated in Figure 2.

\textbf{Support social–emotional learning.} Heckman’s research suggests that non-cognitive factors may be more important than cognitive factors in life success.\textsuperscript{18,19} The research literature on disadvantaged youth is ripe with evidence that social and emotional factors, which include non-cognitive factors, have a powerful affect on learning\textsuperscript{20} and in the prevention or moderation of delinquency.\textsuperscript{21,22} Social and
emotional learning (SEL) is a process through which children and adults learn to understand and manage their emotions and relationships. This includes developing (or enhancing) the ability to demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, value and address diversity, and handle challenging situations effectively. SEL creates a foundation for academic achievement, maintenance of good physical and mental health, parenting, citizenship, and productive employment. A meta-analysis of 207 SEL programs demonstrates the importance of SEL in improving social competence, promoting academic achievement, reducing antisocial behavior, and improving pro-social behavior.23

It is equally important to develop the social–emotional skills of service providers, so that they can address implicit biases about youth, be less reactive when confronted by troubling behavior, and handle the stresses of teaching and providing services. For example, research regarding disparities in children’s services and the restrictiveness of placement for children of color suggests the impact of what social psychologists call aversive racism, which is an unconscious negative bias which individuals would reject if they were aware of the bias.24,25 Similarly, research on classroom management suggests the importance of teachers remaining cool under pressure and being able to address disciplinary issues in a matter-of-fact way, without showing anger or taking behaviors personally.26,27,28,29 Finally, other research shows that high levels of teacher stress and burnout are linked to perceived high demands and low control in the job.30,31

The development of student and reciprocal adult social and emotional competencies is particularly important in addressing the punitive disciplinary environments of many schools—which lead to a loss of academic engagement, diminished instructional time, and opportunities to learn—and school suspension and expulsion.32 Social–emotional skills can support, as well as be supported by, restorative and relational approaches to discipline,33 particularly as there continues to be an emotional call for retributive justice, which is reinforced by a belief in the efficacy of punishment.34,35

**Develop cultural and linguistic competence.** Cultural disconnects between teachers and students and their families affect transition outcomes. These disconnects include a lack of understanding of culturally grounded behaviors and preferences, and may contribute to lower expectations, as well as to disproportionate rates of disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions for minority students.36,37,38 Attribution bias—the tendency to rely on cultural, dispositional or personality-based explanations when attributing responsibility for events or observed behaviors—and aversive racism
exacerbate these problems.\textsuperscript{39,40} Research on positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) suggests that even good interventions that do not focus on racial disparities fail to reduce disparities.\textsuperscript{41}

Cultural competence, which involves the capacity to reflectively look beyond one’s own framework\textsuperscript{42} and to treat individuals individually, while respecting and acknowledging their cultural beliefs and values, can help address this disconnect.\textsuperscript{43} Cultural competence is both individual and organizational. Cultural competence has been defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, in a school, in an agency, or among professionals, and enables that system, school, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in bicultural and multicultural contexts.\textsuperscript{44}

Cultural and linguistic competence can help educators differentiate instruction in a manner that will better engage linguistically and culturally diverse student populations.\textsuperscript{45,46} Such competence can also play a key role in helping educators develop and implement alternative approaches to discipline and student engagement.\textsuperscript{47,48} Finally, cultural competence can help educators and providers implement family-driven approaches to engaging parents in improving outcomes.\textsuperscript{49}

**Address risk and protective factors and develop assets and resiliency.** While assets are important, so are the persistent risk factors that often affect transitioning youth. The process of moving from a very structured environment to a less structured one can heighten a youth’s sensitivity to the negative social influences that led to his or her institutionalization or placement in the first place. These influences include, but are not limited to, delinquent peer groups, poor academic performance, high-crime neighborhoods, weak family attachments, lack of consistent discipline, and abuse.\textsuperscript{50} While the presence of factors do not guarantee bad outcomes, the more risk factors a youth has or experiences in their environment, the more likely the young person will realize bad outcomes.

Like other youth, transitioning youth have strengths and needs. Effective approaches develop, as well as build on, assets.\textsuperscript{51,52,53} These assets include individual strengths and interests. Research from “Overcoming the Odds,” a longitudinal study, shows that even gang-involved youth have individual and environmental assets that can be harnessed to promote positive youth development and reduce delinquent behavior.\textsuperscript{54} Consequently, while families and service providers should address these risk factors, these stakeholders should also address youth strengths and assets. In addition, youth have personal assets that they can mobilize and leverage to support and protect themselves with the assistance of a caring adult, family member, mentor or advocate as they reintegrate into their home
communities. Before and during reintegration, youth need opportunities to develop the social and emotional competence to respond maturely to potential risk factors and utilize protective factors in seven domains: family and living arrangements (e.g., safe homes, caring adults); peer groups and friends; good mental, behavioral, and physical health (e.g., avoidance of drugs and alcohol; healthy family, peer, and romantic relationships); education and schooling (e.g., regular attendance, enrollment in core courses); vocational training and employment (e.g., a mentor relationship with an employer); and leisure time, recreation, and vocational interests (e.g., participation on an athletic team).  

**Conditions That Support Youth, Families, and Service Provider Success**

Create the conditions in which young people are on track to thrive—not just on track.

Youth involved in the juvenile justice system typically perform at a level 2 or more years behind their peers in basic academic skills, experience learning disabilities, present with mental and behavioral problems at disproportionately higher rates than their peers, and often lack the social–emotional skills necessary to deal with the challenges that they face. To facilitate the transition process for such youth and to enable improved academic achievement after reentry, it is important to address their academic needs (including credit accumulation) while also addressing the social and emotional conditions for learning, which include safety; support, care, and connectedness; peer and adult social and emotional competence; and engagement and challenge. The conditions for learning are also important for success in the other domains of a youth’s life (see Table 2).

**Safety.** Safety includes freedom from physical harm (e.g., staff or peer violence, substance abuse) and threats of physical harm, as well as freedom from emotional harm (e.g., bullying, sarcasm, ridicule). This encompasses both actual and perceived levels of risk of harm. A safe environment is one in which individuals share a sense of mutual trust and respect, and one that fulfills a youth’s core

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**Table 2**

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<td>✓ Emotional safety</td>
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<td>✓ Low-risk environments</td>
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<td><strong>Engagement and Challenge</strong></td>
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<td>✓ High expectations</td>
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<td>✓ Academic opportunities that are connected to life goals</td>
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<td>✓ Strong personal motivation and engagement</td>
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psychological needs, including the need to belong, be autonomous, and be physically secure. Research shows that, when the environment meets basic psychological needs, students are more willing to align themselves with and commit to the school community’s norms and rules. Similarly, evidence indicates that students in an unsafe school environment are more likely to show higher levels of negative risk-taking behavior and disengagement from school.

**Support, care, and connection.** “Support” includes the availability of social, emotional, behavioral, and academic support mechanisms. “Care” and “connection” refer to a youth’s healthy bonds with the adults in his or her life and the extent to which he or she feels nurtured, encouraged, well treated, and respected by these adult figures. Researchers have found that even one high-quality supportive relationship with an adult early in high school, particularly for students of color, has dramatic effects. Research using the “Adolescent Health Survey” shows that connectedness plays an important role in promoting positive academic outcomes and preventing problematic community outcomes. The importance of connection to school and adults at the school has been found in specific areas. For example, a California study suggests that, for males, perceived school support related to significantly lower odds of substance abuse.

**Social and emotional competence.** Youth reentering homes, communities, and schools need to learn to manage their emotions and relationships positively and surround themselves with peers who also have socially responsible behavior. While this can be difficult for youth returning to challenging environments, SEL programming can be effective. SEL programming can involve service learning, reflection on literature, and the effective use of advisories and school meetings to promote the development of youth competencies. Some youth require more intensive supports to address such challenges as impulsivity and attribution bias, and this can be done in a manner that builds the social and emotional capacity of these youth.

**Engagement and challenge.** In order for youth to develop the skill and desire to set and reach positive life goals, these youth must energize their interest in the educational experience along academic, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological dimensions. This is possible when learning builds on a student’s strengths and addresses his or her interests, and when the student perceives learning as being relevant to his or her future. Culturally competent approaches that address individual learning needs and provide an appropriate balance between challenge and support can enhance engagement. Challenge is more than rhetoric of “high standards”; it refers to setting and promoting high expectations
for all students, providing opportunities for students to apply the curriculum to the real world, and encouraging intellectual curiosity and intrinsic motivation. For students to be engaged and feel challenged in an educational setting, they must “experience a climate of high expectations, opportunities to learn, and supports for achievement (and related school behavior) that is shared and reinforced by other students, their friends, their teachers, and their family.”

**Elements of a Successful Transition**

There are five elements of a successful transition approach that service providers should consider implementing if they are to support successful transition: having (1) an effective transition team, which (2) develops and monitors a transition plan, which includes (3) pre-release programming to prepare youths for transition, (4) mentoring and advocacy, and (5) monitoring and intervening to support success. This section briefly defines each element, provides examples of each element in practice for illustrative purposes, and details the challenges and strategies associated with implementing each.

**Element 1: An Effective Transition team.** A transition team typically includes the youth; his or her parent or guardian; and a caring adult, who may be a teacher within the facility or alternative or community school, a transition specialist, or other education specialist. Ideally, the team starts its work when the youth enters the facility. The team’s role is to collaboratively develop and coordinate transition activities with the youth, both prior to placement and after exit. Memoranda of Agreement/Understanding are one way to formalize agreements between agencies and partners to coordinate services and supports for reentering youth. A wraparound approach that is culturally competent as well as youth guided and family driven can ensure that systems are addressing a reentering youth’s needs in a coordinated and comprehensive way. Wraparound Milwaukee provides a vibrant example of the wraparound approach in reintegration. Kentucky’s Bridge Coordinators, Maine’s Reintegration Teams, and New Hampshire’s Transition Coordinator–Advocate programs are also examples of transition team development. Refer to the Appendix for descriptions of these programs.

**Element 2: Transition plan.** Much like an individualized education program (IEP), developed for students with disabilities, and a wraparound plan in mental health and child welfare, an individualized transition plan (ITP) identifies the youth’s educational and vocational goals and documents agreements reached by the transition team concerning action steps for the youth and other stakeholders. It is important for the ITP to clearly identify student support services that will be provided to the youth throughout the transition process. A transition portfolio is an example of a comprehensive ITP and is
compiled by the transition team as a resource for the youth. The portfolio may contain (1) special education rights, (2) the student’s IEP (if applicable), (3) any psycho-educational evaluations, (4) the transition plan, (5) a transition resource packet, (6) academic assessment results, (7) vocational assessment results, (8) résumé, (9) vital records such as the youth’s social security card and birth certificate, (10) school transcripts, (11) a course credit analysis, (12) any certificates or diplomas earned by the youth, and (13) work samples. A study conducted by Arizona State University found that transitioning students with disabilities who received enhanced transition services that included the use of transition portfolios were 64 percent less likely to recidivate. Transition portfolios like Kentucky’s “educational passports,” California’s Individualized Plan, and the use of electronic records are all examples of essential elements of a transition plan. Refer to the Appendix for descriptions of these programs and practices.

**Element 3: Pre-release exit training and curricula.** This element involves providing services and supports that focus on preparing the youth for his or her time following exit. This includes opportunities for social emotional learning. Successful alternative schools prepare students for their return to mainstream settings. The training should, among other things, focus on ensuring that the youth is socially and emotionally prepared for the transition, understands the academic and/or vocational situation to which he or she will return, is aware of the services and supports available to him or her on exit, and knows how to access them. Day passes or furloughs from the facility to the school to which the youth will transition, credit recovery programs, and dual enrollment are all examples of pre-release exit training and curricula. Refer to the Appendix for descriptions of these practices.

**Element 4: Mentors and advocates.** Early in the transition process, the transition team should identify at least one caring adult, who can be a family member, to mentor the transitioning student and help her or him advocate for the student’s rights. This individual should be a member of the team, and the team should match him or her with the student. The individual should be ready to mentor the youth for a minimum of one year, and should receive the supports necessary for effectively mentoring and advocating for the youth once the youth exits or transfers. More than one person can perform the mentoring/advocating function. It is important that mentor/advocates are appropriately matched with the youth and supported so that they can perform their role(s) successfully. Wraparound Milwaukee and Aftercare for Indiana Through Mentoring (AIM) are two examples of programs that successfully utilize
adult mentors or advocates to assist in a youth’s transition out of a facility. Refer to the Appendix for descriptions of these programs.

**Element 5: Monitoring and tracking.** Supportive monitoring is a key element of many successful dropout prevention programs. While this is the case for all students, monitoring and tracking a youths’ progress through the reentry and aftercare stages of transition are particularly important for those students transitioning back to the community. Providers should use data to identify youth needs and monitor results, to aid in advocacy, and to foster continuous improvement.

There are organizational and systemic conditions for the effective implementation of monitoring. They include a culture of continuous quality improvement (CQI), ensuring that agencies and stakeholders are always finding ways to make their transition services more effective, is critical to ensuring that the stakeholders deliver the right interventions in the right manner and at the right time. The culture needs to be operationalized through a user-friendly data system that can build off as well as contribute to monitoring and tracking. The conditions also include effective coordination and collaboration across agencies, as evidenced by such strategies as common performance measures and dashboards. Table 3 summarizes the challenges associated with implementation, as well as the strategies that work to overcome those challenges, for each of these five elements.

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To operationalize youth- and family-centered competencies and conditions, service providers should implement the five elements in a culturally competent manner that develops and sustains conditions for successful transition by building youth and adult capacity. This includes supporting youth and family voice and engagement, addressing the youth’s entire ecology, nurturing strengths and assets (including social and emotional competencies), and coordinating efforts in an accountable manner. Specifically, forming and using transition teams; developing transition plans; implementing prerelease and exit training and curriculums for youth and family; providing youth access to mentors and advocates; supporting the capacity of mentors and advocates; and creating a culture of ongoing monitoring, tracking, and continuous quality improvement are characteristic components of effective transition programs. Programs like Washington State’s Education Advocates, Rhode Island’s System of Hope, Washington State’s Family Integrated Transitions, and Maine’s Reentry Legislation and Reintegration Teams are exemplars of these practices. Refer to the Appendix for descriptions of these programs.

Conclusion

A youth’s successful transition should begin when a youth enters a restrictive setting or alternative school and success depends upon engagement. This paper shares a number of overarching, salient ideas concerning what is needed to support successful youth transitions out of residential placement facilities and other alternative school settings. Primary among these is the understanding that
successful reentry requires addressing a youth’s entire ecology. Families and culture matter; positive interactions and relationships with caring adults matter; and community-level factors matter. To foster better reentry outcomes, youth, families, and service providers must equip themselves with a set of competencies—developing and enhancing interpersonal tools by addressing the youth’s risk and protective factors, fostering the cultural and linguistic competence of all stakeholders, and supporting the youth’s social–emotional learning. Stakeholders must also address the environmental conditions into which the transitioning youth will return. Service providers must employ youth-guided and family-driven approaches, to create conditions in which young people can be on track to thrive—not just on track. This involves creating social and emotional conditions for learning and transition; these include providing a physically and emotionally safe environment for youth, offering and enabling supportive and caring connections with adults and peers, helping youth develop the capacity to manage their emotions and make good decisions, and presenting engaging and challenging academic opportunities. Bearing in mind the competencies, conditions for transition, and critical program elements that this paper shares, facilities and programs that serve transitioning youth can prepare youth, from entry through discharge, for their return to their community or home-based school and enable them to resume educational services in their home communities; can develop and enhance the skills and competencies while the youth is in an institution or other placement, to help him or her succeed; and can reduce recidivism and/or return to alternative settings.
Appendix

The supplemental information and resources in this appendix help the reader understand and implement the suggestions that the paper discusses.

Wraparound Services

Wraparound services “wraps” a comprehensive array of individualized service and support networks “around” young people and their families, rather than forcing them to enroll in predetermined, inflexible treatment programs (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP] “Model Programs Guide,” http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/). However, to be effective, wraparound services must be youth guided and family driven (Kendziora et al., 2001; Osher & Osher, 2002; Osher, Osher, & Blau, 2006). Effective wraparound initiatives are culturally competent and include a collaborative, community-based interagency team; a formal interagency agreement; care coordinators; child and family teams; a unified plan of care; and systematic outcomes-based services. Examples of effective wraparound can be found in Wraparound: Stories from the Field at http://cecp.air.org/AIR_Monograph.pdf (Kendziora, Bruns, Osher, Pacchiano, & Mejia, 2001).

In defining wraparound service usage in the field of children’s mental health, Burchard, Bruns, and Burchard (2002) state that wraparound services are those that address positive outcomes and realize the following combination of factors and results:

- Services and supports that are individualized, built on strengths, and meet the needs of children and families across a number of life domains
- A team-driven process involving the family, child, natural supports, agencies, and community services
- Cultural competence, building on the unique values, preferences, and strengths of children and families, and their communities
- Wraparound teams with flexible approaches and adequate and flexible funding
- A balance of formal services and informal community and family supports
- Development and implementation based on an interagency, community collaborative process
- Outcomes determined and measured for the system, for the program, and for the individual child and family

Evaluation of Wraparound Services

Jesse Suter and Eric Bruns (2009) recently published a meta-analysis of the effects of the wraparound process. Their review identified several studies conducted between 1986 and 2008 that documented the effects of youth receiving wraparound services compared with a control group. However, like for many individualized interventions, the evidence base for wraparound remains thin.
Still, positive effects in the following “life” areas were noted: youth living situation, mental health outcomes, overall youth functioning, school functioning, and juvenile justice–related outcomes (Suter & Bruns, 2009). http://www.nwi.pdx.edu/NWI-book/Chapters/Bruns-3.5-(evidence-base).pdf

A few examples of wraparound programs with positive outcomes are

- Wraparound Milwaukee
- Juvenile Delinquency Task Force
- Dawn Project
- Connections Project


Examples and Descriptions of Wraparound Models in Systems of Care

Most federally funded systems of care employ individualized and coordinated services in a wraparound model. The following are examples of wraparound efforts in systems of care.

**Project Hope System of Care (SOC), in Rhode Island.** Project Hope is designed for youth returning from secure care. Wraparound services and supports include efforts to improve the families’ relationships with the youth returning home by providing an array of transitional services and supports to the family and youth that support positive youth development outcomes. Services and supports are always initiated in the home, and the initiative has a 24/7/365 approach to serving families and youth. Within their continuum of care are the following services: clinical treatment services, multi-systemic therapy (MST), out-of-school services, educational advocacy, short-term day school placement, and short-term respite care. The Project Hope SOC has established a Youth Transition Center for youth eligible for early release from the Rhode Island Training School. The program is designed to help youth serve out their probation successfully and to reduce the chances of repeat offenses. http://www.ncmhjj.com/Blueprint/programs/ProjectHope.shtml

**Impact SOC, in Ingham County, Michigan.** Impact is a partnership of child- and family-serving agencies working together with youth and families to provide coordinated services and supports for children with serious emotional disturbance. Impact strives to build and enhance home- and community-based services for young people involved with the juvenile justice and/or child welfare systems. The wraparound component provides strength-based, family-centered wraparound facilitation activities (which include coordinating and completing a strength-based assessment of the child and family) and family guidance home-based therapy services (including cognitive behavioral therapy and behavior management consultation), conducts and facilitates child and family team meetings on a regular basis to work through rough times and problems, facilitates the development of a family wraparound plan with youth and family decision making components, coordinates and monitors the implementation of the plan, and facilitates the termination of wrap services via development of a maintenance plan. http://www.impactsystemofcare.org

Appendix 2
Tapestry SOC, in Chautauqua County, New York. Tapestry’s wraparound services and supports are very similar to Impact’s. However, Chautauqua is focusing on youth engagement especially in the school setting, with the desired outcome of preventing youth from penetrating deeper into the juvenile justice system. Tapestry staff, comprising all child-serving agencies and family members, see themselves as resource developers, resource locators, service enhancers, and promoters of self-sufficiency, in partnership with family and youth. A key partner in this effort is the county juvenile and family court judge. The community has embraced a restorative justice approach in addressing needs of youth involved in the juvenile justice system, in an effort to maintain the youth in the community and improve engagement and connection at all times—but especially when the youth returns from placement. A significant focus of the SOC initiative is to assist the youth returning from placement in their efforts to reintegrate into school and the community. Very few youth are placed in the state juvenile justice system as a result of Tapestry’s preventive work with the local school districts, which has included the support and training for the schools’ implementation of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). http://www.chautauquatapestry.org/index.php?page=Home

Maryland Choices SOC, in Montgomery County, Maryland. Choice provides wrap services and supports that focus on providing these services and supports within the mandates of the court (legal requirements imposed on family and youth are always part of the service and support equation, to ensure greater likelihood of successful transition), strength-based assessments and plan development, a strong relationships of caregiver (parent/family) and community connections with services and supports, flexibility in offering resources, and strong accountability system for wrap team members. Choices wrap creates a partnership with the juvenile justice agency and caregiver in what the SOC calls a complimentary asset relationship. The juvenile and family court personnel, including the judges, are significant partners in Choices. http://www.choicesteam.org/marylandproviders

Other Examples of Successful Reentry Programs

There are other promising reentry programs that can be learned from. They include:

Maine’s Reintegration Teams. Legislation formalizing a process of collaboration between education and corrections via the creation of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) is allowing for a smooth transition of youth and their educational and personal relevant information across agencies. Reintegration teams are responsible for creating reenrollment plans for students identifying appropriate education on the basis of interagency collaboration involving family participation and a seamless transfer of records. http://www.justice4all.org/files/Reenrollment%20-%2004%20Best%20Practices%20with%20Preface.pdf

Family Integrated Transitions. Family Integrated Transitions (FIT) is predicated on the idea that treatment is most effective if it addresses in an integrated manner all the factors that sustain a problem behavior. FIT builds on skills that youth develop while incarcerated (treatment framework while placed), focuses on engagement of multiple systems involved in supporting youth’s successful transition, assesses youth and families to determine unique needs, individualizes services, and focuses treatment on family strengths and on goals that the family and youth set. FIT addresses multiple determinants of behavior change—engagement factors, family factors, systemic factors (including school), and individual factors. http://depts.washington.edu/pbhpj/projects/fit.php
Washington State’s Education Advocates Program. The Washington State Advocates Program receives funding from Federal Title 1, Part D. Educational advocates are located in each region of the state to promote successful reentry for youth leaving secure confinement. The program objectives include expanding support for successful reentry inclusive of case management; assisting youth in overcoming barriers, especially barriers to entering school; and improving school coordination. The program implements a three-tiered approach, and serves youth in a particular tier on the basis of an assessment of needs. The education advocate’s work centers around helping youth navigate the educational system; reenrolling these youth; facilitating information exchange; collaborating with others in the system to encourage a smooth and seamless transition; providing transitional support; networking; communicating with child welfare, juvenile justice, and other community agencies; educating youth about their options; and assisting youth to advocate for themselves. http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/events/2009june/presentations/best_practice_jjTransition_sande.pdf

Merging 2 Worlds. Merging Two Worlds (M2W) is a curriculum based on life skills and transition that the Arizona Department of Education’s Secure Care Education Committee developed specifically for secure-care populations. M2W bases its curriculum on the concept that resiliency is critical to an individual’s successful reintegration into the community. http://merging2worlds.education.asu.edu/

Aftercare for Indiana Through Mentoring. Aftercare for Indiana Through Mentoring (AIM) promotes the use of a positive adult role model in the lives of youth returning from a correctional facility and the alignment of appropriate community services. AIM recognizes that many supports and services already exist in the community but that they are not readily accessible to transitioning youth. One component of the service provision that AIM offers is to assess the needs of juvenile offenders who will soon be released from facilities throughout Indiana and to bring these youth together with community agencies that can effectively meet their needs. AIM asks a commitment of at least 1 year from its mentors. Before a youth leaves a facility, AIM assigns a specific mentor to work one-on-one with him or her after release. AIM tries to match youth with mentors from the same home community. Once in the community, AIM staff and mentors serve as brokers for services for transitioning youth by making referrals to appropriate community organizations. http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/resources/spotlight/spotlight200609b.asp

Allegany County, Pennsylvania, School-Based Probation Program: a strong relationship between the school and probation. A number of jurisdictions (specifically in the state of Pennsylvania) have implemented school-based probation programs, and these programs report successes in the areas of improved communication with school and parent; probation officers’ acting as “brokers” of services for family, youth, school, and community agencies; advocating for education needs of youth; and providing alternatives for managing difficult students who are on probation. The goals of school-based probation are (1) improved attendance, (2) direct and immediate interventions, (3) reduced out-of-school time because of school conduct violations, (4) reduced probation revocations, (5) reduced recidivism, (6) improved academic performance, and (7) fuller coordination and collaboration with community agencies. http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/presentations/jjSymposium_carlino.pdf

Bridge Coordinators, Kentucky. Each school district with a large number of youth reentering the system from secure care has a bridge coordinator. The coordinator “conducts transition interviews, collects appropriate data, and obtains parental releases for juvenile record sharing.” The bridge
coordinator’s efforts create an “Educational Passport,” which is “a form of documentation that accompanies the returning juvenile to his or her subsequent educational placements.” The Educational Passport “facilitate[s] information sharing across jurisdictions for returning students, including notification of schools regarding the impending releases of juveniles from treatment facilities or incarceration.” The Kentucky program also includes recruiting mentors for rehabilitated youth and a monitoring process to ensure that barriers to reentry are identified and overcome.


A transition coordinator—advocate, New Hampshire. With federal demonstration project funding, Nashua, New Hampshire, has created a position of “Education and Transition Specialist” to establish and maintain continuous contact with each participant’s family and/or residential providers. Participants are students whose education has been significantly disrupted because of delinquent behavior, including detained and committed youth. The Education and Transition Specialist provides assistance, especially navigating systems, such as accompanying the family to a school meeting or to apply for services, or providing information about resources for the family or their children.


California Comprehensive, Individualized Plan with Broad Participation. California’s Education Code (Cal. Education Code §§ 47755; 47756; 47765; 47766) requires a school district to develop a comprehensive, multiagency plan for pupils’ transition from juvenile facilities. The multiagency plan for improving and gathering available community resources for youth’s reentry may include the role, responsibilities, and agreement for participating agencies, as well as identify specific transition and aftercare services to be provided. The code requires each transition plan to include: (1) “prerelease and preparatory planning activities during the confinement phase of youth corrections,” and (2) “structured transition involving the participation of residential, institutional, and aftercare staffs both before and following community reentry.”


Recommended Reentry Practices

In addition to programs there are a variety of approaches and practices that are promising. They include:

School-based mentoring programs. School-based mentoring programs provide post-release youth with support and encouragement from a caring and responsible adult. The ultimate outcome for this type of program is to provide reentering youth with positive role models so that these youth are more likely to successfully transition back to school and less likely to return to the correctional facility. The goals of such a program center on increasing school attendance and decreasing problem behavior and delinquency.


Reenrollment programs. The Virginia Board of Education (2006) adopted regulations governing the reenrollment of students committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice. The regulations reflect some of the following best practices: (1) mechanisms established for timely transmission of school records between correctional facilities and schools, (2) assignment of clear roles and responsibilities
among agencies, (3) individualized reenrollment plans, (4) youth and family involvement in planning, and

**Parent competencies and skill development.** There is no requirement that every parent be a
“superparent” but the expectation may be a capable, competent, and knowledgeable parent when it
comes to typical childcare and development, as well as parenting skills. These are typical core skill areas
that agencies should assist families with, and these skills may improve the likelihood of positive reentry
outcomes. Some of these areas to consider are housing, nutrition, finances, child development, home
and social life, medical and behavioral health care, navigation of child systems and agencies, and
advocacy for their child, especially educational advocacy.

**National standards established by the National Alternative Education Association exemplary
practices.** Many youth leaving secure care placement must enter alternative schools within their school
districts according to policy—and if not by policy, by practice. The National Alternative Education
Association has adopted 10 exemplary practices that address school climate and culture, transitional
planning, support for parent involvement, and program evaluation. Included within each practice are a
number of indicators (of quality alternative programs) that are suggested in order to (1) guarantee and
promote high-quality educational services for the identified population of students, (2) develop a
common core of principles and technical language under which alternative educators will operate, (3)
promote viable new alternative education programs built on exemplary practices in the field, (4)
evaluate the effectiveness of new and existing programs, and (5) inform policy relative to alternative

**Establishment of quality educational programs in confinement.** One of the best ways to ensure
success in school after reentry to the community school system is to make certain that the educational
programming in confinement is a comprehensive and quality-filled educational experience for the youth
and that this programming offers a continuum of educational curriculums. Credits that students earn in
school during their confinement should transfer to any school in that state, provided that the state-
adopted curriculum is followed and is delivered by not only certified teachers but teachers who are
highly qualified. The juvenile justice schools should maintain a record-keeping system that will quickly
and easily receive and transfer records of youth enrolled in these schools.

**Implementation of passes or furloughs by juvenile justice agencies designated to address
educational issues prior to release.** New York State promotes the expanded use of passes and
furloughs—a practice that juvenile justice agencies and schools districts use to meet with local school
representatives in order to address an educational reentry action planning. Many Jurisdictions support
transportation and advocacy at community schools for youth in custody. Far more schools require a
face-to-face interview for youth returning to the school, as well as those students considering or
applying for a new school placement. For example, juvenile justice agencies could provide
transportation for youth and family member(s) to meet at the receiving community school to discuss
class schedule and expectations for students by the school administration, to determine what types of
school-sponsored supports will be necessary for the youth to be successful when he or she returns to
school, and possibly to hold the youth’s IEP meeting—all prior to release from the secure environment.
A juvenile justice staff member can act as an advocate for the youth and determine how to become a
better “broker” of services and supports in order to ensure the likelihood of better reentry results.

Appendix 6
General school climate or conditions for learning for all youth—and in particular for youth returning from juvenile justice confinement. Learning is not just a cognitive process. Research shows that powerful social and emotional factors affect learning. Some of these factors involve social relationships. These social factors include the teacher’s relationship with the student, the student’s relationship with other students, the teacher’s and student’s relationships with the student’s family and with staff, the overall climate of the student’s learning environment, and the support provided to teachers and other staff so that they can provide a caring and supportive environment. Social and emotional factors are important for all students. However, they are particularly important for students served in delinquent settings—students who often come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; students of color; and students with emotional, behavioral, and learning disabilities. Research suggests that it is hard to improve academic outcomes for these students, both individually and collectively, without addressing the social and emotional barriers to learning that they face (Osher, Sidana, and Kelly, 2008). Eleven states currently have grants to improve conditions for learning under the U.S. Department of Education’s Safe and Supportive Schools Program. Information about these States and the program can be found at http://safesupportiveschools.ed.gov.

Legislation that addresses information sharing and exchange, as well as formal cooperative agreements (memorandums of understanding—MOUs). Louisiana enacted legislation to, among other collaborative efforts, facilitate interagency information sharing:


Several States have adopted MOUs and other agreements to facilitate easier sharing of information between departments and agencies:

- Business Associate/Qualified Service Organization Agreement, South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH). http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/southCarolinaDataSharingAgreement.doc (MS Word)

Suspend, do not terminate, Medicaid eligibility while in confinement. Medicaid does not pay for services for youth who are incarcerated in State-operated (public) correctional facilities. Some States’ Medicaid plans require that these youth’s eligibility be terminated while they are incarcerated and that they must reestablish eligibility after release. This eligibility process may take as long as 60 days, in which time youth may not receive necessary psychotropic medications or participate in behavioral Appendix 7
health treatment or therapy. The step to take to address this problem can be very simple—establish Medicaid policies that suspend youth in secure facilities from the program during their confinement, rather than terminate their benefits, which can result in significant delays for reinstating eligibility after release.

**Dual Enrollment.** New York City school system altered its enrollment policies to make the reenrollment of students easier and more seamless. The principle is simple. Rather than remove a student from the home base school’s roles while he/she is in a residential or detention facility the home school maintains the student on a “parallel list” or rooster. This practice can speed up the youngster’s reenrollment resulting in fewer attendance/truancy problems. Another positive benefit of dual enrollment is the greater likelihood of records transfer.  

**Credit Recovery.** Schools can provide opportunities for youth reentering the community or home base school a variety of credit recovery options that may increase his or her likelihood of remaining and reengaging in school and achieving a high school diploma. These programs might include the delivery of remedial classes during the regular school day or extending learning opportunities before or after-school, summer programs and weekend school. These credit recovery opportunities may allow for flexible pacing of content, course demands and course scheduling. Providing students extra practice time and frequent informal and formal assessment options may be beneficial to students reengaging in school and improving outcomes.  
[http://www.centerii.org/handbook/Resources/4_C_h_Credit_recovery_programs_hs.pdf](http://www.centerii.org/handbook/Resources/4_C_h_Credit_recovery_programs_hs.pdf)
Appendix References


Endnotes


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