



Abandoned in the Back Row: New Lessons in Education and Delinquency Prevention Executive Summary

More than ten years ago, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice found that youth who receive an inadequate education or who are not well-supported in their school achievement are at high risk for justice system involvement, in its report to the President, the Congress and the Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, “Abandoned in the Back Row.”ⁱ Today, despite increased awareness of the school-to-prison pipelineⁱⁱ, far too many of our nation’s schools are under-resourced and lack effective programming to support struggling students and those with special education and mental health needs. As a result, far too many youth with unmet needs and learning gaps needlessly fill our courts, detention centers, and correctional facilities.

The report also highlights programs that successfully deliver sound education and effective interventions to reach at-risk youth, including Beacon Centersⁱⁱⁱ, Families and Schools Together (FAST)^{iv} and Communities in Schools^v, among other exemplary programs.

Prevention saves lives and money—for each child prevented from beginning a life of crime, taxpayers save as much as \$2 million.^{vi} In a study assessing the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Center program, researchers estimate that society saves \$47,759 per participant.^{vii} They conclude that overall, \$7.10 is returned to society at large for every dollar spent on early education.^{viii} Around the country, there are many diverse schools and models from which to learn and draw inspiration. To truly prevent delinquency, violence and crime, we must invest in education, as well as family, youth and community supports.

Key Facts:

- Youth who drop out of school are three and a half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested.^{ix}
- Between 70^x and 87^{xi} percent of incarcerated youth suffer from learning or emotional disabilities that interfere with their education.
- In the adult criminal system, 82 percent of prison inmates have dropped out of high school.^{xii}

- For juveniles involved in quality education programs, re-offense rates can be reduced by 20 percent or more.^{xiii}
- Approximately 35 percent of young adults who dropped out of high school are unemployed.^{xiv}
- Each year the nation is drained of more than \$200 billion in lost earnings and taxes because of the high rate of youth dropping out of school.^{xv}

Recommendations:

- Acknowledge the strong connection between educational failure and other social ills, such as poverty, violence, crumbling schools and substance abuse. Support programs that bolster and empower schools, teachers, communities and families in the monumental task of educating our youth.
- Support policies that provide funding for crucial evidence-based resources as substance abuse treatment, health and mental health services, and services that bolster families. Such resources must be available in all schools and communities. Services must be available across economic, racial, gender and cultural lines.
- Invest federal dollars “upstream” by investing money and human resources in education, rather than “downstream” in incarceration. This investment will have enormous future payoffs in reduced welfare, healthcare and criminal justice costs.

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ⁱ Abandoned in the Back Row: New Lessons in Education and Delinquency Prevention, Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ), 2001.

ⁱⁱ The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to the pervasive use of exclusionary discipline and zero-tolerance policies which have created a pipeline effect, which funnels youth out of the school system and into the juvenile justice system.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.sfbeacon.org/BeaconCenters/>

^{iv} <http://www.familiesandschools.org/>

^v <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/>

^{vi} A.J. Reynolds, Success in Early Intervention: The Chicago Child-Parent Centers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

vii ibid

viii ibid.

ix National Council on Crime and Delinquency, Reducing Crime in America: A Pragmatic Approach (San Francisco, CA: National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1993).

x Sue Burrell and Loren Warboys, "Special Education and the Juvenile Justice System," Juvenile Justice Bulletin July 2000.

xi National Center on Education, Disability and Juvenile Justice, Special Education in Correctional Facilities (College Park, MD: National Center on Education, Disability and Juvenile Justice, 2001) 1.

xii National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, "Quick Facts-Economic Impact," www.dropoutprevention.org 20 April 2001.

xiii Center on Crime, Communities and Culture, Education as Crime Prevention, Providing Education to Prisoners (New York: Center on Crime, Communities and Culture, 1997); National Center on Education, Disability and Juvenile Justice, Juvenile Correctional Education Programs: The Case for Quality Education in Juvenile Correctional Facilities (College Park, MD: National Center on Education, Disability and Juvenile Justice, 2001.); Sue Burrell and Loren Warboys, "Special Education and the Juvenile Justice System," Juvenile Justice Bulletin, July 2000; Ronald D. Stephens and June Lane Arnette, From the Courthouse to the Schoolhouse: Making Successful Transitions (Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2000).

xiv National Center for Education Statistics, Youth Indicators Trends in the Well-Being of American Youth (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

xv J.S. Catterall, On the Social Costs of Dropping Out of School (Stanford, CA: Center for Education Research, 1985).

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