

Engaging Law Enforcement on Youth Justice Reform

POLICY UPDATE

SEPTEMBER 2015

Introduction

As tragedies like the 2014 deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York, Freddie Gray in Baltimore, MD and the dozens of others during the same time period that did not make national press made clear to the nation, we have a long way to go to establish fair, unbiased, and appropriate law enforcement practices. Fortunately, multiple stakeholders have turned their attention to ways in which law enforcement practices can be improved to both increase fairness and promote youth justice reform. A 2014 publication by the [International Association of Chiefs of Police \(IACP\)](#) -- "[Law Enforcement's Leadership Role in Juvenile Justice Reform: Actionable Recommendations for Practice and Policy](#)" provides a set of practices for police training and policies that could lead to fairer police practices.¹ We encourage you to read the entire publication for a fuller understanding of the IACP's recommendations for reform.

¹ The main ideas in this fact sheet are drawn from International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), "Law Enforcement's Leadership Role in Juvenile Justice Reform: Actionable Recommendations for Practice and Policy" (Chicago, IL: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, July 2014), <http://bit.ly/1zD7BY3>. This fact sheet is one of many NJJN documents summarizing key research stemming from Models for Change, with a focus on implications for policy and practice in the juvenile justice field. For more information about Models for Change, visit www.modelsforchange.net.

Ways for Advocates to Support Improved Law Enforcement Practices with Youth

The IACP produced its report after surveying 958 law enforcement leaders between February and April of 2013 and convening a national summit. Participants at the summit came up with 33 recommendations grouped into eight topic areas. Below, we focus on a few of the best starting points for advocate collaboration with law enforcement.

Promote Law Enforcement Training

WHY PROMOTE TRAINING?

Training law enforcement, probation officers, and other juvenile justice stakeholders on youth issues is increasingly recognized as an important factor in improving engagement with youth.² The IACP recognizes that training is important to help officers understand how youth differ from adults; how they differ from one another depending on their background; and to be able to respond appropriately to all youth.

Yet a 2013 report which surveyed police officers found that most state police academies devote less than one percent of total curriculum time to teaching about juvenile justice and most of the limited training that does exist emphasizes legal issues rather than skills for working with youth.³ Skills training in dealing with youth can help to prevent interactions from escalating into tragedies like Ferguson. As stated in the above-referenced report:

“Studies dating back to the 1960s indicate that youth in poverty and youth of color feel especially disadvantaged in their interactions with police, leading to profound distrust. The critical factor in the youth’s response and perception of the legitimacy of police authority is how an officer approaches a youth.”⁴

WHAT THE IACP RECOMMENDATIONS SAY

In the IACP report, the need to train law enforcement in a number of areas that would improve their interactions with youth, such as adolescent development and trauma/behavioral health issues, was emphasized:

² Barry Mahoney and Stephen Phillippi, “Innovation Brief: Professional Development for Key Decision Makers in Juvenile Court” (Chicago, IL: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, December 2013), <http://bit.ly/1J0pORh>; Models for Change, “Workforce Development: Strategic Innovations from the Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network” (Chicago, IL: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, April 2011), <http://bit.ly/1DZK9lz>.

³ Strategies for Youth, “If Not Now, When? A Survey of Juvenile Justice Training in America’s Police Academies” (February 2013), 4, <http://bit.ly/1EA1aZQ>.

⁴ Strategies for Youth, “If Not Now, When?” 8, citing Irving Piliavin and Scott Briar, “Police Encounters with Juveniles,” *Am. J. Soc.*, 70.2 (1964), 206-214, 213.

Recommendation 2B: Expand officers' capacity to effectively respond to youth by offering cohesive training programs that enable officers to understand adolescent development; cultural differences among youth; mental health and trauma issues; and effective strategies for youth engagement, intervention and crisis response.⁵

Recommendation 7A: Law enforcement policies, practices and training should enable officers to respond appropriately to youth with mental health and substance abuse disorders and trauma histories...⁶

The IACP report also discusses trainings in some jurisdictions that have centered on “efforts to reduce the disproportionate arrest of youth of color.”⁷ An example of this type of training is the Pennsylvania Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Youth-Law Enforcement Curriculum, which is a one-day training for all new police cadets that includes bringing police and youth of color into a dialogue to foster mutual understanding.⁸ The curriculum has also been adapted for use in other states.

These recommendations can be used to open a dialogue on training with your local law enforcement agencies.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

- The [Connecticut Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee](#) established a program for law enforcement on youth development and issues related to racial disparities in which 1,400 police officers have been trained since 2007.⁹ The “Effective Police Interactions with Youth” training curriculum provides patrol officers with information to better understand youth behavior and with practical strategies for interacting with young people in positive ways.¹⁰ A 2008 evaluation found that this training had a lasting positive impact on participating officers’ knowledge and attitudes about “youth development and issues related to racial disparities.”¹¹
- [Strategies for Youth](#) is a non-profit organization that provides training programs for police officers that involve community-based youth-serving organizations and local

⁵ IACP, “Law Enforcement’s Leadership Role in Juvenile Justice,” 7.

⁶ IACP, “Law Enforcement’s Leadership Role in Juvenile Justice,” 11.

⁷ IACP, “Law Enforcement’s Leadership Role in Juvenile Justice,” 18-19.

⁸ This curriculum was developed with support from the MacArthur Foundation Models for Change and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. IACP, “Law Enforcement’s Leadership Role in Juvenile Justice,” 19, 21.

⁹ Richard A. Mendel, “Juvenile Justice Reform in Connecticut: How Collaboration and Commitment Have Improved Public Safety and Outcomes for Youth” (Washington, D.C.: Justice Policy Institute, February 27, 2013), 26, <http://www.justicepolicy.org/research/4969>.

¹⁰ “Effective Police Interactions with Youth Training Curriculum,” Just.Start, Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, Criminal Justice Policy & Planning Division, accessed Jan. 6, 2014 at <http://1.usa.gov/1kVOUJf>.

¹¹ Mendel, 26.

youth. The program teaches officers about adolescent development, strategies for working with teens presenting with mental health issues, cultural issues affecting adult/youth interactions, and how to recognize and address implicit bias.¹² In Cambridge and Everett, Massachusetts the juvenile arrest rate decreased by 50 percent following the training.¹³

- The [National League of Cities](#) developed a [chart of police training programs](#) that work to improve relations between police officers and community members, particularly young people.¹⁴
- The [Center for Court Innovation's](#) Youth Justice Board recommends in their report, [“Stepping Up: Strengthening Police, Youth & Community Relationships,”](#) that communities create regular opportunities for police and youth to interact in positive ways that build trust and understanding, such as through structured police-youth dialogues. They also suggest that police have trainings regarding biases in dealing with LGBTQ youth or that resources, such as guides developed with youth and community input, are provided to them on this issue.¹⁵

Ensure that Law Enforcement Presence in Schools Does Not Contribute to a School-to-Prison Pipeline

Advocates working on law enforcement's role in school discipline will find the IACP's recommendations in section 6 of its report especially helpful. For example, the IACP recommends:¹⁶

- School completion must be a central goal of school safety, discipline, and truancy policies.
- Schools should work closely with law enforcement agencies, families, and community partners to develop alternatives to expulsion, suspension and court referral, and effective strategies to overcome truancy that minimize juvenile justice system involvement.
- Law enforcement should work with school partners to clearly establish the roles and expectations of any school resource officers (SROs), offer cross-trainings for law

¹² Strategies for Youth, “Training Principles of *Policing the Teen Brain*,” accessed January 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1fWSvju>.

¹³ Lisa H. Thurau, “Training Law Enforcement on How to Police the Teen Brain: Improving Police-Youth Interactions,” *Translational Criminology* (Spring 2013), 22, <http://bit.ly/1H4knBP>.

¹⁴ National League of Cities, “Police Training Programs,” accessed Aug. 19, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1WFysxd>.

¹⁵ Youth Justice Board, [“Stepping Up: Strengthening Police, Youth & Community Relationships”](#) (New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation, June 2015): 10-11, 17-18, <http://bit.ly/1E6meHN>.

¹⁶ IACP, “Law Enforcement's Leadership Role in Juvenile Justice,” 10.

enforcement and school officials, and develop written collaborative agreements with schools and other juvenile justice system partners (these are often done in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding) that establish SRO protocols and delineate each party's authorities and responsibilities.

- Law enforcement and schools should assess whether school discipline and arrest practices are contributing to racial and ethnic injustice and determine how to reduce unnecessary arrests and disparities.
- Where SROs are employed, they should implement developmentally appropriate responses to youth that minimize juvenile justice system involvement.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON DISMANTLING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

- The [Advancement Project's "Ending the School to Jailhouse Track"](#) works on the national and local level "to examine, expose, and reform practices that lead to the criminalization of students" and to support the work on the ground to end the school-to-prison pipeline. Their website contains many resources, including intergovernmental agreements from other jurisdictions, toolkits, and state resources from around the country.
- ["School Resource Officers: Safety Priority or Part of the Problem?"](#) is a *U.S. News and World Report* article from Jan. 30, 2015, that scrutinizes whether school resource officers are an effective intervention strategy.
- [The School Discipline Consensus Report: Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engaged in School and Out of the Juvenile Justice System](#), is a 2014 report from the Council of State Governments Justice Center that provides recommendations from stakeholders across the country on multidisciplinary approaches to reduce the numbers of students suspended, expelled and arrested each year, while creating safe and supportive schools.

Work Together to Promote Alternatives to Arrest, Court Referral, and Detention

Advocates can partner with law enforcement on deincarceration by jointly promoting alternatives to arrest, court referral, and detention. The IACP recommends some of the following mechanisms:¹⁷

¹⁷ IACP, "Law Enforcement's Leadership Role in Juvenile Justice," 8-9.

- developing protocols that officers can use to standardize the use of diversion options and citations in place of arrest and ensuring officers are familiar with the community resources and diversion options available to youth;
- advocating for the development of effective community-based services for youth in communities where this is lacking; and
- implementing evidence-based risk assessment tools for guidance in juvenile processing and detention decisions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR PROMOTING ALTERNATIVES TO ARREST, COURT REFERRAL, AND DETENTION

- The [National League of Cities](#)' issue brief, "[Alternatives to Arrest for Young People.](#)" highlights cities that have worked with law enforcement to successfully implement clear, objective protocols to divert youth from the justice system at key points such as arrest and booking.¹⁸
- The [Juvenile Justice Resource Hub](#) is a comprehensive source of information on cutting-edge juvenile justice issues and reform trends that has ready access to reliable, curated information and analysis of juvenile justice issues, relevant research, best practice models, and policy levers for reform. The [Community-Based Alternatives](#) section reviews approaches to minimize youth contact with the juvenile justice system, the frequency with which they are detained and incarcerated, and cost-effective ways to improve outcomes for them while keeping communities safe.
- NJJN's policy platform, "[Reducing Youth Confinement.](#)" lays out pathways to reduce the number of youth in confinement, while reducing justice system costs, increasing community investments, treating youth equitably, holding systems accountable, and increasing community safety.
- [Models for Change](#), an initiative of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, is committed to the health and safety of communities and youth by holding young people accountable in the most effective, least restrictive settings of care. Their website provides resources, expert contacts, and information on the extensive work done in the Models for Change states to advance community-based alternatives to confinement.

¹⁸ National League of Cities, Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, "Alternatives to Arrest for Young People" (Washington, DC: undated), <http://bit.ly/1LjZN1z>.

- The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation has worked with nearly 200 jurisdictions in 39 states to safely reduce reliance on secure confinement and strengthen their juvenile justice systems through a series of interrelated reform strategies. The [JDAI Helpdesk](#) is an online tool that provides information on juvenile justice best practices, research and materials generated by JDAI jurisdictions.

Conclusion

Reform is seldom possible without engaging all the relevant stakeholders. The IACP's recommendations can serve as an important pathway to working collaboratively with law enforcement on reforms to benefit youth and their communities.