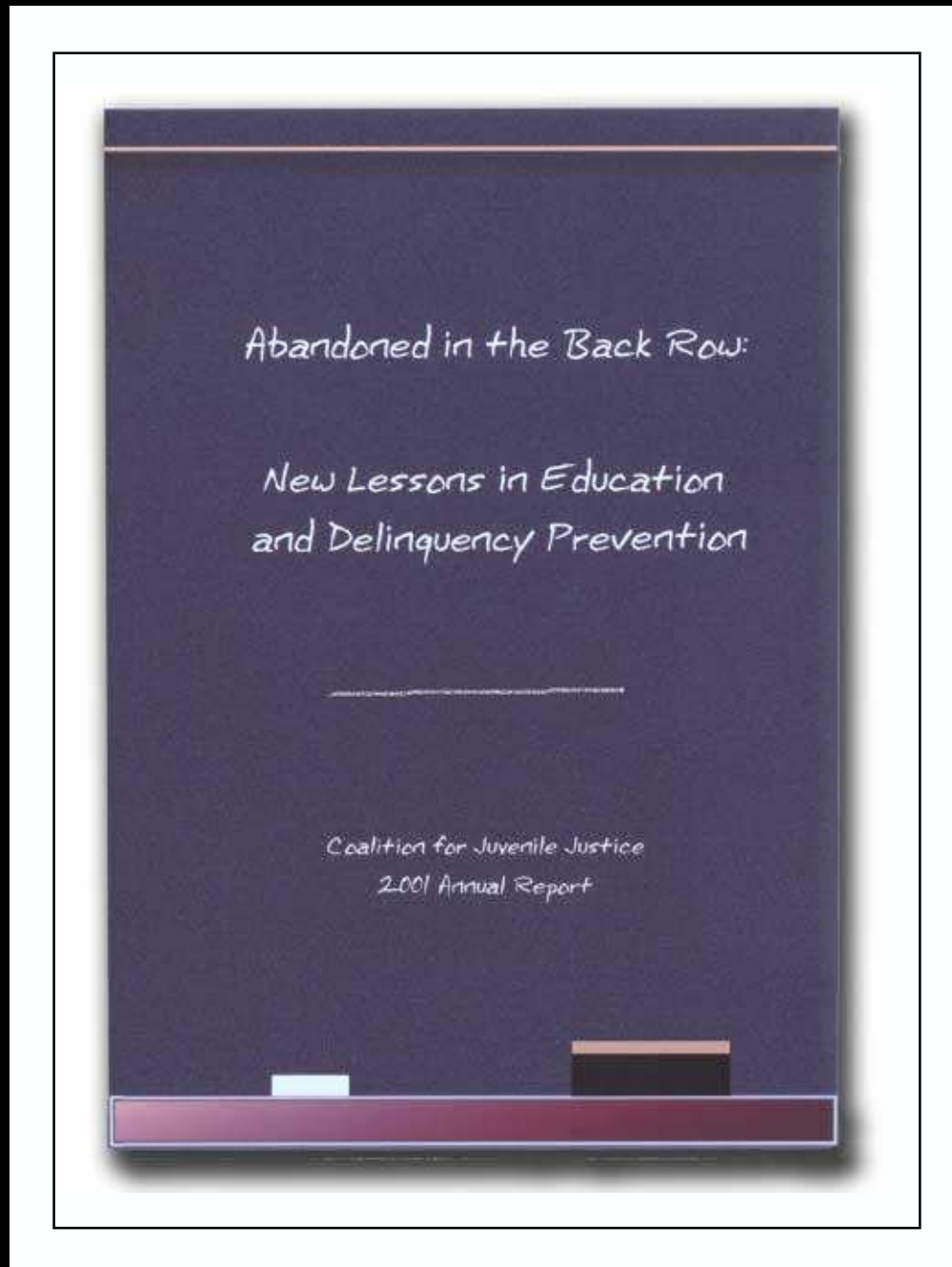


CJJ 2001 Annual Report

An Overview



A CHILD LIKE YOURS

Most students experience social or academic frustration at some point in school. They confront a subject that baffles them despite their best efforts. They are distracted from learning by classmates who taunt them or pressure them into destructive behavior. Whatever the possible reasons, at times school environments and learning approaches simply do not further students' education. Many children never get the assistance they need. For these students, school is a continuing source of disappointment, as they face difficulties in the classroom that go untreated and with time grow more severe.

Study after study confirms that poor school performance is one of the strongest predictors of whether youth will drink, smoke, use weapons or attempt suicide. Young people who receive inadequate education, who exhibit poor literacy skills or who are truant, disproportionately wind up in the juvenile justice system.

Large numbers of incarcerated juveniles are marginally literate or illiterate and struggle with basic math. Incarcerated youth often lag two or more years behind their peers in basic academic skills, and have higher rates of grade retention, absenteeism, suspension and expulsion.

FEWER RESOURCES, GRAVE CONSEQUENCES

Schools may be failing to meet the needs of discouraged and troubled students largely because they are being forced to operate without sufficient funds. Inadequate resources create voids. More than 30,000 special education teaching positions are vacant or filled by unqualified individuals. The U.S. Department of Education recommends one guidance counselor for every 250 students. Not even one U.S. state comes close to meeting that standard.

Youth with learning disabilities¹—like Dyslexia—suffer dramatically from the education system's shortcomings. More than 35 percent of students with learning disabilities drop out of school, twice the rate of students

¹ Learning disability: a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations.

KEY FINDINGS

- > Youth who drop out of school are three and a half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested.
- > Between 70 and 87 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.
- > For juveniles involved in quality education programs, reoffense rates can be reduced by 20 percent or more.
- > Approximately 35 percent of young adults who dropped out of high school are unemployed.
- > 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.

without learning barriers. Youth with learning disabilities are arrested at higher rates than their average peers.

Some youth with cognitive and behavioral disabilities lack impulse control, and demonstrate a poor perception of social cues and a diminished ability to learn from experience. These disabilities make them susceptible to delinquent behavior. Between 70 and 87 percent of incarcerated youth suffer from learning or emotional disabilities that interfere with their education. Yet, more than one-fourth of incarcerated youth are in facilities that do not routinely assess academic or personal needs.

Because their schools may be under-funded, many children of color and students from impoverished and low-income homes do not reap the benefits of a sound education. Youth from low-income families are 2.4 times more likely to drop out of school than are children from middle-income families and 10.5 times more likely than students from high-income families. Among minorities, nearly one-third of Hispanic and 25 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native students drop out of high school.

Study after study confirms that poor school performance is one of the strongest predictors of whether youth will drink, smoke, use weapons or attempt suicide.

LOCKED OUT OF SCHOOL

In a misguided attempt to increase classroom safety, some schools have adopted policies that all too quickly slam doors in the faces of distressed students. For example, under such policies students may be automatically expelled for drug and weapons violations, as well as infractions like writing graffiti. These rigid expulsion policies are often referred to as Zero Tolerance measures, and there is a growing body of research to show a link between disciplinary exclusion and increasingly negative outcomes for troubled students, such as substance abuse and delinquency.

While it is understandable that schools attempt to preserve the safety of the larger group by removing students with problematic behavior, severely punitive measures send harmful messages to students: You are not worth helping. It also teaches the entire school community that problems, including anger and frustration, are to be avoided, rather than addressed by the whole in a productive, meaningful fashion.

PROMISING APPROACHES

Across the country, there are models that demonstrate how communities may ensure that all youth stay in school and benefit from an excellent education. One of the three successful programs featured in the report is Communities In Schools (CIS), which keeps children in school by providing youth with safe environments, mentors and a sense of connection to their communities.

In Columbia, South Carolina, CIS operates “behind the fence” in the state’s juvenile correctional facility. The program addresses the needs of 600 students with a classroom atmosphere that many have never experienced before. Teachers use positive reinforcement and have time to give individualized attention; class sizes are small and manageable. While the national reoffense rate for juvenile offenders is between 60 and 84 percent, for

juveniles involved in quality education programs, the reoffense rate can be reduced by 20 percent or more.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) believes that all youth deserve to receive an education that fully taps and develops their abilities, so that they will become productive members of society. Among the targeted recommendations CJJ offers to the President, the U.S. Congress, community leaders, educators, families, youth and the general public are the following:

- Congress should acknowledge the strong connection between educational failure and delinquency, poverty and substance abuse. Through funding and legislation, Congress should support innovations and programs to assist schools, teachers, communities and families in the monumental task of educating our youth.

WHAT HELPS YOUTH TO STAY IN SCHOOL

- ✓ Early childhood education (Overall, \$7.10 are returned to society for every dollar spent on early education.)
- ✓ Mentors
- ✓ Activities that enhance self-esteem
- ✓ Counseling services
- ✓ Social and life skill training
- ✓ Service Learning—connecting meaningful community service experiences with academic learning

- School systems and boards should reject rigid and sweeping expulsion policies and practices, commonly referred to as Zero Tolerance. Educators should be open to alternative and more meaningful ways of targeting youth with behavioral issues, while also ensuring school safety.
- Parents should be involved in their children's education and support schools and teachers. To the best of their ability, parents and family members should contribute resources, volunteer time and offer emotional support to educators.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For a copy of the full report, *Abandoned in the Back Row: New Lessons in Education and Delinquency Prevention*, send a request accompanied by a check for \$10 to the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 1211 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 414, Washington, DC, 20036, or call (202) 467-0864.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- ✓ Programs that emphasize competency development in reading, writing and math, along with thinking and decision-making skills.
- ✓ Low student/teacher ratios or ratios that fully reflect the needs of the students.
- ✓ Parents, families, teachers, community organizations and volunteers are involved in the academic programs.
- ✓ Youth are assessed for learning disabilities and other special needs and are provided with special education in full compliance with federal law.



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Building Safe Communities — One Child At A Time

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) is forging an effective, nationwide response to juvenile crime and delinquency—building safe communities one child at a time.

CJJ promotes the best policies and practices for prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency; ensures accountability, public safety and protection of victims' rights; and assists all U.S. states and territories in meeting the core requirements of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.

CJJ is a national nonprofit organization that comprises 56 juvenile justice advisory groups in the states, territories and District of Columbia.

OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

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