Juvenile Justice Education, No Child Left Behind, and the National Collaboration Project

By Thomas G. Blomberg, Janine Blomberg, Gordon P. Waldo, George Pesta and Jon Bellows

This article introduces the National Collaboration Project, a project intended to help states successfully implement the juvenile justice education requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Funded by Congress, the project recently was awarded to Florida State University's College of Criminology and Criminal Justice. It focuses on developing and maintaining effective working partnerships among its staff, those responsible for juvenile justice education, the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) and the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE).

The project's initial task is to conduct a survey and assessment of each state's juvenile justice education system. The results will be used to begin developing individual state plans for implementing NCLB requirements. To facilitate this, the project will host a national conference where training, technical assistance and evaluation will be provided to help states with the successful implementation of NCLB requirements.

Delinquent youths benefit from quality educational services and academic achievement while incarcerated because they are more likely to return to public school upon release, which leads to their reduced likelihood of rearrest.[1]

With successful nationwide implementation of NCLB, every juvenile justice student, regardless of state of residence, can receive quality education services. Further, the resulting academic achievement is expected to increase students' chances of successful community reintegration, thereby reducing the likelihood of their continuation in criminal careers. The following describes some of the major challenges and prospects related to state-level implementation of NCLB and the associated National Collaboration Project goals.

NCLB Challenges And Prospects

In 1996, the USDOJ estimated the cost of criminal victimization in this country at $450 billion a year, not including costs for operating the country's criminal and juvenile justice systems.[2] Because juvenile offenders are responsible for a major part of the crime problem and its associated costs, providing them with quality education can be seen as a promising method for reducing delinquency. NCLB mandates "best education" practices for juvenile offenders to increase their likelihood of successful community reintegration and is intended to directly address this important need.

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The quality of juvenile justice schools throughout the United States historically has been uneven and inferior to that of public schools. The first juvenile court was established in Cook County, Ill., in 1899. Within several decades, every other state had a juvenile court system.[3] However, each state's juvenile court system grew in relation to the state's needs and priorities, rather than from a uniform policy and plan, thereby resulting in disparate state systems of juvenile court services and practices.[4] Differing local practices within states further compounded the fragmentation in juvenile justice system policies and practices.[5] For juvenile justice schools, this fragmentation has contributed to the disparate and inferior quality educational programs, with juvenile offenders' educational needs often ignored or neglected. The results of this neglect have surfaced during recent decades, as evidenced by the number of state class action lawsuits for deficiencies in the educational services in juvenile justice schools throughout the country. In the last two decades, 22 states have been subject to class action lawsuits in relation to deficiencies in their juvenile justice education services and practices.[6]

NCLB poses unprecedented challenges for the reform of the country's the schools. The law mandates that the schools meet the same standards required of elementary and secondary public schools. Specifically, NCLB requires high teacher qualifications, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)[7] for schools and the implementation of scientifically validated best practices. Title I, Part D, of NCLB contains critical provisions for juvenile justice schools, including emphasis on students returning to school upon release from an institution, providing transition services, conducting program evaluations of juvenile justice schools using specific student learning and community reintegration outcome measures and developing state juvenile justice education plans.

As in public schools, juvenile justice teachers must meet requirements that include holding a bachelor's degree, achieving professional certification and showing competency in each subject they teach. Further, schools must show a 95 percent participation rate and progress based on a state's annual achievement testing. However, meeting these requirements will be particularly difficult for many juvenile justice

schools due to the characteristic rural location of facilities, their relatively small size, short lengths of student stays and students' disproportionate educational deficiencies. For example, juvenile justice students in Florida are approximately two years behind their appropriate age/grade level. Forty-three percent have disabilities, compared with 15 percent in public schools, and most have chronic histories of truancy, suspensions, expulsions and school dropout.[8]

Further, as specified in Title I, Part D, all juvenile justice schools must be subject to program evaluation, which includes monitoring of student performance in maintaining and improving educational achievement, accruing school credits for grade promotion, making a successful transition back to school after release, completing high school and obtaining employment after release and/or participating in post-secondary education and job training.

In 1998, to determine the relationship between delinquency, quality education, academic achievement and positive community reintegration, the Florida Department of Education established the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program (JJEEP) in Florida State University's (FSU) College of Criminology and Criminal Justice. JJEEP's functions included conducting best practices research and providing accountability to Florida's approximately 200 juvenile justice schools. JJEEP successfully developed an ongoing statewide data management, evaluation and accountability system that incorporates the major NCLB requirements for all of Florida's juvenile justice schools. During JJEEP's early years of implementing research-based best practices and providing accountability for Florida's juvenile justice schools, a number of impediments were encountered and ultimately overcome. The National Collaboration Project will draw upon a number of JJEEP's experiences in Florida to accomplish its goals.

National Collaboration Project Goals

The National Collaboration Project will address five main goals during its first year of operation.

Goal #1: Identify each state's juvenile justice education system's administrative structure, including the personnel responsible for administration and evaluation as well as those responsible for implementing the requirements of NCLB for neglected and juvenile offenders.

Goal #2: Determine current education evaluation capacities and identify common problems for all states, problems shared by certain groups of states and problems unique to specific states.

Goal #3: Develop a network of agencies, administrators and evaluators responsible for juvenile justice education across the nation.

Goal #4: Provide information on NCLB requirements and evaluation methods to states to improve their ability to meet those requirements and effectively evaluate their juvenile justice education systems.

Goal #5: Measure and report the project's first year progress on the capabilities and remaining obstacles of states in meeting NCLB requirements and effectively evaluating their juvenile justice education systems.

To accomplish the first goal, project staff conducted a survey in 2004 of each state's juvenile justice educational system, administrative structures and level of implementation of the NCLB requirements. Currently, the project is reviewing the results and individual contact information collected from national organizations to obtain a preliminary list of key personnel from each state. Once compiled, the list will be used by project staff to contact representatives from each state to verify the person responsible for statewide administration and evaluation of juvenile justice education. These contacts will be questioned by telephone on their states' juvenile justice education organizational structure and will be asked to participate in goal two of the project and its subsequent research activities.

The second goal calls for a second survey to obtain descriptions of each state's evaluation capacities, the amount and type of educational performance data available and the degree of progress toward implementing NCLB requirements for juvenile justice schools. The second survey also will identify major impediments that individual and/or groups of states now face in meeting NCLB requirements. The survey will be administered by telephone and Internet.

Project staff will use results of the survey to construct a typology of states, based on identified common problems across all states, those shared by particular groups of states and those unique to specific states. The typology will facilitate networking among states by grouping common problem areas and isolating state-specific problems — all in the interest of developing effective partnerships and collaboration. Project resources will then focus on group and/or individual state needs in meeting NCLB requirements.

The third goal — building effective collaborations and working partnerships in juvenile justice education throughout the United States — is fundamental to the project's success. Project staff will meet with personnel in both USDOJ and USDOE to get direct suggestions on how best to accomplish goals and objectives; how to facilitate networking with relevant state, project and federal personnel; and how these various groups can work collaboratively to improve states' abilities to evaluate and meet the requirements of NCLB in juvenile justice.

The project will host a national meeting of state evaluators and administrators in juvenile justice education. This will be the first in a planned series of meetings and will focus on building consensus and establishing working relationships among key juvenile justice education administrators throughout the nation. At the national meeting, project staff will share findings, provide information on the requirements of NCLB for juvenile justice, highlight known best practices and form state workgroups (based on a typology of states) for initial drafting of their NCLB implementation plans for juvenile justice. It is intended that the project will develop the capacity to host a series of subsequent regional and national meetings.

To assist in national communication and coordination, the project will host a Web site and Internet listserver system that can distribute information to states. The Web site also will be used to highlight project progress, to advertise upcoming meetings and to provide a forum where representatives from each state can communicate and exchange best practices or technical assistance information.

An important outcome of the activities of the third goal is the development of a national association of juvenile justice education administrators and evaluators that can help states continue their collaboration after the project's completion. This association will partner with FSU's College of Criminology and Criminal Justice to develop and host the first peer-reviewed journal for delinquency and education. The journal will feature scientifically based best practice articles in the area of delinquency and education and will include policy and practice contributions from those working in the field. Housed at FSU, the journal will serve both the research community and the policy and practice community and will be supported by both the association and the college.

The fourth goal, which calls for providing information on NCLB requirements and evaluation methods to states, will be accomplished through two primary strategies: training sessions and conference sessions. During the national meeting of state representatives and staff from USDJ and USDOE, training sessions will present information on NCLB requirements for juvenile justice schools. The training sessions also will include findings from the national survey and content analysis of state interagency agreements between state education agencies and juvenile justice agencies. Conference sessions will focus on building consensus on the content of states' NCLB implementation plans. During the conference sessions, project staff will select states that have already made substantial progress in their implementation of NCLB. These states will participate in the meeting by sharing their experiences and strategies for meeting the requirements. This is expected to benefit other states that are not as far along in their NCLB implementation stages.

To accomplish the final goal of measuring the project's progress and evaluating juvenile justice education systems, project staff will provide USDOJ and USDOE with a summary of all activities for year one. The project will develop a short follow-up survey to assess the states' progress in meeting NCLB requirements. Based on the analysis of these data, the project will provide a comprehensive summary of research results, project activities and the impact of the project on the ability of states to meet NCLB requirements. In addition to the year one report of activities and progress, the project will develop long-term goals to guide the continuing efforts of the National Association of Juvenile Justice Education Administrators and Evaluators.

In achieving its goals, this project is challenged to overcome the differences in states' intrastate jurisdictional issues, complex and fragmented organizational structures, and bureaucratic resistance to change. Although these impediments may require modification to the project's goals during implementation, achieving the ideal of every juvenile justice student receiving quality educational services, regardless of state of residence, is the intent of both NCLB and the project. The academic achievement resulting from these quality educational services will increase the likelihood of successful community reintegration for these students, thereby reducing the incidence of crime, criminal victimization and their associated costs.

Summary

Juvenile offenders constitute a major portion of the U.S. crime problem, both in terms of current crime and the potential for future adult crime. Consequently, promising methods of crime reduction such as quality education services that increase the academic achievement and likelihood of successful community reintegration of incarcerated youths should be vigorously pursued. This is the intent of the 2001 NCLB Act, which mandates "best education" services for the country's incarcerated delinquent youths.

The USDOE, the USDOJ and the American Correctional Association have recognized Florida's system of juvenile justice education as an exemplary state system that embodies the major components of NCLB. This recognition reflects Florida's commitment to accountability and its implementation of a research-driven approach to the identification and validation of best practices in juvenile justice education.

During the initial years of implementing both research-driven best practices and an accountability system for Florida's juvenile justice education system, a number of implementation impediments were experienced and ultimately overcome. Florida's experiences with these impediments should not be repeated by other states, but rather used to inform and benefit states as they attempt to implement NCLB. Most important, Florida has conclusively documented that the use of best education practices as envisioned in NCLB has benefited numerous juvenile justice youths as they exited juvenile justice institutions and reentered their communities.[9]

Florida has determined from its ongoing longitudinal study of more than 10,000 students released from residential juvenile facilities during a three-year period that receiving quality education services while incarcerated leads to academic achievement and many youths successfully returning to school when released from juvenile institutions. Additionally, students who earn a diploma or remain in school for one or two years following release from a residential program have significantly better long-term community reintegration outcomes as measured by rearrests. Students experiencing academic achievement while incarcerated remain in school following release and are much less likely to return to delinquent behavior patterns as compared with those youths who do not experience academic achievement and do not return to or remain in school.[10]

These findings have important and timely policy and practice implications for juvenile justice institutions and the professionals working in these institutions throughout the country. Specifically, if states are able to suc-

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cessfully implement the requirements and practices of NCLB, the quality of educational services will be increased substantially for juvenile offender students throughout the country, providing better opportunities for them to experience academic achievement and improve their chances of successful community reintegration. Thus, improving the quality of juvenile justice schools and the academic achievement of delinquent youths as envisioned by NCLB is emerging as a proven delinquency reduction policy and practice.

ENDNOTES

[1] Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program. 2005. *2004 annual report to the Florida Department of Education: Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program.* Tallahassee, Fla: Florida Department of Education.

[2] Miller, Ted R., Mark A. Cohen and Brian Wierama. 1996. *Victim costs and consequences: A new look.* Washington, D.C: National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice.

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[6] Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program. 2005. *2004 annual report to the Florida Department of Education: Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program.* Tallahassee, Fla: Florida Department of Education.

[7] Achieving AYP is required of all public schools under the accountability provision in the federal NCLB Act of 2001. Achievement measures vary by state but are generally based on annual state achievement testing in reading and math and additional outcome measures such as graduation rates. Under NCLB, schools are required to test 95 percent of their enrolled students, and achievement growth is expected in various subpopulations of students.

[8] Wang, Xia, Thomas G. Blomberg, and Spence D. Li. Educational deficiencies, delinquency and public policy. *Evaluation Review: A Journal of Applied Social Research*, 29(4): August 2005.

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[9] Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program. 2004. *2003 annual report to the Florida Department of Education: Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program.* Tallahassee, Fla: Florida Department of Education.

[10] Juvenile Justice Education Enhancement Program. 2005.

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Thomas G. Blomberg is dean and professor of criminology at the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida State University. He has served as principal investigator of the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program since 1998. Jeanine Blomberg is chief of staff of the Florida Department of Education. Gordon P. Waldo is professor of criminology and criminal justice at Florida State University and program manager for the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program. George B. Pesta is research coordinator for the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program, College of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida State University. Jon Bellows is the project administrator for the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program at Florida State University.

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