

CHAPTER 17 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

17.1 Introduction

This chapter provides concluding discussion of several themes that emerge from the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program's (JJEPP's) major 2001 activities. These activities included quality assurance (QA) reviews, technical assistance, corrective action, research, and policy related initiatives.

The chapter is comprised of four subsequent sections. Section 17.2 reviews and discusses QA, technical assistance, and corrective action, particularly in relation to the future challenges involved in moving toward QA standards that place a greater emphasis on the core academic curriculum. Section 17.3 identifies several challenges in the areas of contracts, contract management, and funding challenges in relation to the continuous quality improvement of juvenile justice education. Section 17.4 summarizes JJEPP's best practices, research findings, and their implications. Section 17.5 concludes the chapter with a brief review of special policy related initiatives.

17.2 Quality Assurance, Technical Assistance, and Corrective Action

As in previous years, the 2001 statewide QA scores improved over the 2000 QA scores in 15 of the 21 indicators. This means that despite the development and application of higher performance QA standards, the majority of Florida's juvenile justice educational programs are meeting these higher standards. This pattern of increasing QA performance may be much harder to maintain in the future, however, as JJEPP moves toward the development and application of QA standards in the core academic subjects beginning with literacy and continuing with math, science, English, and social studies. The challenge that will be faced by JJEPP and the Florida Department of Education (DOE) in this effort will be to effectively assist juvenile justice educational programs in moving from a largely component and compliance QA system toward a more specific process and education service delivery system.

As a result, the role of technical assistance and corrective action will become more essential in years to come. As documented through JJEPP's annual literature reviews over the past three years, there is little consensus or agreement on best educational practices. In fact, and as cited by JJEPP previously, the one hundred leading education researchers of the National Academy of Education concluded that they were a long way from being able to identify standards and associated best practices to help teachers, educational policymakers, or

education researchers. One of the academy's researcher's claimed that the entire process of delineating standards and associated best practices may be counterproductive because such delineation may actually discourage new and innovative teaching methods and insights. One implication to be drawn from such reasoning is that appropriate teaching practices are more like art than a learned profession. This, then, will be the challenge facing not only JJEEP and DOE in the development and implementation of curriculum standards, but juvenile justice educational programs and their teaching personnel as well.

In the development of core academic subject standards, it will be essential to gain input and build consensus between JJEEP, DOE, and juvenile justice education program personnel throughout the state. Our regional meetings format for the annual QA standards revision is a model that could be replicated and expanded in the development of these curriculum standards. In this instance, technical assistance will be ongoing and more multi-directional, involving several different providers of technical assistance and interactions between JJEEP, DOE, and teachers. It will be essential to sequentially build consensus on the content of these curriculum standards and exactly how QA will function in the implementation and use of these curriculum standards. The underlying key to the success of this process will be the active and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders. JJEEP's experiences with the annual revision of QA standards have demonstrated that when the educational program personnel are actively involved in the revision process, and consensus emerges on the standard's content and review methods, appropriate statewide implementation generally occurs. This is one of the salient factors contributing to the annual statewide increases in QA scores, despite increasing QA performance standards.

Beyond these refinements in the vision and methods of technical assistance, there is now emerging a clearer conception and set of processes for corrective action that is likely to continue in the near future, particularly in relation to the appropriate implementation of curriculum standards. What is clear from the past two years of experience with the corrective action process is that as the QA performance standards have increased so have the number of corrective actions. Of particular concern during the 2001 cycle has been the noticeable increase in the number of corrective action plans in the area of special education related services. More specifically, QA priority indicators EI.03 On-Site Transition: Student Planning and EI.06 Exit Transition received the highest number of corrective actions during 2001, generally reflecting poorly developed individual academic plans (IAPs). The move toward curriculum standards will necessarily require even greater attention to IAPs in relation to a research-based but non-prescriptive menu of specific curricular and instructional designs and methods from which teachers employing their professional judgment can select in relation to the needs of individual students. Consequently, the appropriate development and use of IAPs will be integral to this overall process.

During 2002, the corrective actions protocol has been codified with several additional checks and balances. Overall, the new protocol is centered upon timely and regular communication between JJEEP, DOE, and the educational programs implementing corrective actions. An underlying reason for these protocol changes has been a growing realization that in some instances, sanctions for noncompliance may be forthcoming.

17.3 Contracts, Contract Management and Funding

In the past two years, DOE and JJEPP have begun monitoring contracts and school district contract management of Florida's juvenile justice education programs. What has emerged from these monitoring efforts has been documentation of considerable variation in the content of contracts, their timeliness and management. These findings prompted DOE and JJEPP to develop a contract-related technical assistance paper (TAP) that was distributed to school districts in June 2001. Given the increasing expectations for Florida's juvenile justice educational programs and the number of provider contracts, meaningful and clear contracts with appropriate contract management by school districts are becoming increasingly important.

Concerns over funding levels continue to be voiced throughout the state. It is clear from Florida's legislation that the intent of the law is to ensure that DJJ education students are funded at the same or higher level of funding for equivalent students in public schools. Clearly, as JJEPP and DOE develop and implement curriculum standards, adequate funding, and clear and well-managed contracts will be essential.

17.4 Best Practices Research

JJEPP continues to implement a comprehensive data collection effort that is culminating in a valuable database. When the JJEPP database is integrated with DOE, DJJ, and the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) databases, JJEPP's capacity to provide comprehensive descriptions of individual juvenile justice education programs and practices located in over 200 facilities throughout Florida will be greatly enhanced. Ultimately, it will be these comprehensive descriptions of educational programs and practices that will enable empirically informed explanations and predictions regarding what works best in juvenile justice education and for whom.

The 2001 longitudinal results reported in Chapter 11 and the 2000 pilot study of pre- and post-academic gains and outcomes, while preliminary, provide a basis for cautious optimism in the potential of quality education to positively influence the lives of juvenile justice youths. What these data suggest, is that higher scoring QA educational programs appear to result in higher academic gains for their exiting students than do lower QA performing educational programs. Further, and in terms of successful community reintegration, JJEPP's initial self-report findings indicate that 67% of the surveyed youths reported being enrolled in school, 75% reported having obtained a job, and 67% reported not getting in trouble with the police. In terms of official data and community re-integration in relation to educational program quality, several additional preliminary findings are encouraging. The recidivism results revealed that educational programs that performed well in student transition and service delivery had lower recidivism rates compared to programs that scored lower in these areas. Moreover, the higher QA performing programs had more of their students returning to school and remaining in school longer than in the lower performing programs.

While these results must be viewed with caveats given the limited number of programs represented and other data limitations, it appears that the receipt of quality education, producing measurable academic gains may be very important in the ultimate community reintegration success of juvenile justice youths.

17.5 Special Policy Initiatives

Since JJEEP's beginning efforts in 1995 to conduct best practices research, several special topics have continued to receive attention and have often been featured in chapters of our annual report. For example, special education services have been addressed in an individual chapter in each of our previous three annual reports. In 2002, 37% of all students in Florida's juvenile justice facilities were eligible to receive special education services. Despite this large proportion of eligible special education students, the provision of these services ranges from superior to a complete absence. While most programs attempt to provide at least the minimal necessary services, some programs go well beyond what the law requires. Clearly, there is need for more technical assistance in this area, and JJEEP plans to work closely with the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) to provide targeted training in special education during 2002.

As JJEEP continues to review special education services, it seeks new ways to enhance this critically important process. The creation of an indicator or standard area that exclusively focuses on special education will be initiated during the 2003 review cycle. For the 2002 QA review cycle, the data collection process will now include the type of service delivery model used by each program. In addition, JJEEP staff will receive additional training on special education laws, service delivery models, and best practices. JJEEP will continue to work closely with DOE and the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) to provide training opportunities for school district and facility personnel in special education services.

In the ongoing effort to continue to provide technical assistance to juvenile justice education programs, when an educational program scores a noncompliance rating in indicator E2.05 Support Services, DOE will conduct a follow-up investigation into the concerns in order to ensure the provision of appropriate services to students with disabilities. JJEEP staff and DOE staff together will provide on-site technical assistance to the identified deficient programs. Moreover, follow-up assistance will be provided as needed.

Special education services are a fundamental critical component for students with disabilities. JJEEP seeks to continue to find better ways in which programs and school districts can provide quality services within the limitations of the juvenile justice system. By increasing knowledge and awareness of this area, JJEEP continues its efforts to ensure that all students are provided with a quality education while in Florida's juvenile justice facilities.

Gender has been another special topic studied by JJEEP. The number of girls admitted to Florida's juvenile justice facilities has increased considerably in recent years. While the literature calls for gender-specific programming for girls, there is a general lack of research-based promising practices in this area. Fortunately, in Florida, the Practical Academic

Cultural Education (PACE) program operates throughout the state and handles a significant proportion of the state's girls who have not been committed and are largely pre-delinquents. PACE provides gender-based programming and has been found to have an excellent success rate, although the program is essentially a delinquency prevention program and therefore not comparable to these state commitment programs.

Facility size has received attention from JJEEP in 2000 and 2001. The trend toward larger facilities in Florida prompted this interest. Over the past several years and in relation to tough love and economy of scale rationales, the average population of Florida's juvenile justice facilities has increased from approximately 35 to 55. Moreover, while only 18 of the 203 juvenile justice facilities in Florida with education components housed 101 or more youths, these 18 facilities housed nearly 1/3 of all juvenile justice youth combined. Prior research suggests that larger institutions have a number of negative consequences on education and other outcome measures, such as recidivism. Clearly, it is important even in light of recent budget cuts and increasing demands for cost cutting, that Florida's policymakers think through the full set of consequences associated with the move toward larger juvenile justice facilities. What JJEEP's QA scores and associated longitudinal research demonstrate is that the larger facilities have the lowest overall mean QA review scores and the highest rates of recidivism. While these data are preliminary, it is clear that Florida should temper any subsequent development of larger juvenile justice facilities.

Privatization continues to be an important area of JJEEP's research, particularly in relation to the inconclusive literature on the cost/effectiveness of privatization. Moreover, and as briefly discussed in Chapter 13 of this annual report, there is an emerging context in which privatization is now subject to a new level of skepticism. In fact, in Florida de-privatization has become a strategy prompted by some privatization skeptics. What JJEEP's QA results show is that public providers of juvenile justice educational programs generally receive higher QA scores than do private providers. In JJEEP's efforts to account for these QA differences, an examination of the proportion of certified teachers was completed. Public education providers employed 71% professionally certified teachers compared to 26% for private providers. This disparity certainly helps account for some of the QA score differences, and this gap could be reduced if private providers employed more professionally certified teachers. Specific contract requirements, contract management, and appropriate funding levels are required, however, if more professionally certified teachers are to be employed by private providers. Clearly, school districts need to consider new contract management and funding provisions that could facilitate the additional employment of certified teachers by private providers.

Certified teachers teaching in their area of certification is recognized as a best practice. Yet, the availability of certified teachers throughout the country remains limited for both public schools and juvenile justice educational programs. Nonetheless, between 2000 and 2001, the number of certified teachers teaching in Florida's juvenile justice educational programs increased. The number of certified teachers who were teaching in their areas of certification was particularly low, however, in the academic core subjects of math, science, English, and social studies. It is important to continue to advance the quality of Florida's juvenile justice

teachers. It is clear that well prepared, certified, and skilled teachers are indeed integral to quality and effective education.

In closing, the State of Florida is now in the early stages of planning the implementation of a K-20 seamless educational system. This effort represents one of the most far reaching and ambitious education reforms in Florida history. A prominent theme running throughout this reform initiative will be a performance-based incentive and accountability system. Precisely how this K-20 seamless education will operate and how the performance-based and accountability components will be defined, operationalized, and implemented remains unknown. It is fundamentally clear, however, that given today's national and global challenges, effective and accountable education has come to assume unprecedented importance. In our earlier age, America's education was focused upon preparing the young for physical labor and operating simple machinery. These past industrial age education procedures have and will continue to undergo major reform and revitalization. Moreover, while many of today's technological and global challenges are new, they rest upon the ever-continuing need to develop greater capacities for literacy and numeracy. These basic skills take on different definitions and applications as individuals move from early childhood through adolescence and college. Florida is now in the process of attempting to implement the educational infrastructure to respond to these ever increasing education needs.

In sum, Florida's current K-20 reform initiative is well beyond mere fad. Increasing recognition of accelerating conditions of scarcity, globalization, and increasing economic competition mandates for reaching changes in education today, and tomorrow. It is and will continue to be necessary for our education system to routinely and incrementally "raise the bar" as society, technology, and change collide.

JJEEP's model of a research-driven, continuous improvement, and accountability methodology for juvenile justice education provides a number of potentially relevant lessons for the K-20 seamless reform. In fact, during 2002, JJEEP will begin, for the first time, collaboration with Volusia County to apply JJEEP's quality assurance system to the county's alternative education school-discipline programs. We anticipate and look forward to future collaborative efforts with other education components as we strive for proven effective education in Florida and throughout the country.