

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Since 1998, the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program (JJEED) has been carrying out the following four interrelated functions:

- I. Conducting best education practices research that includes: ongoing review of relevant research literature, identifying the most promising education practices operating in Florida's juvenile justice facilities, follow-up pre and post academic gains assessments, and longitudinal analysis of community reintegration outcomes that validates promising practices as best education practices.
- II. Conducting annual quality assurance (QA) reviews of the educational programs operating in approximately 200 commitment, day treatment, and detention facilities that ensure appropriate implementation of best education practices into Florida's juvenile justice facilities.
- III. Providing statewide, school district, and program-level technical assistance to continuously improve the quality of educational programs in Florida's juvenile justice facilities.
- IV. Providing ongoing recommendations to the Florida Department of Education (DOE) on juvenile justice education policies and practices that contribute to the successful transition of juvenile justice youths back into their community, home, school, and work settings.

This 2002 Annual Report to the Florida DOE is comprised of 15 chapters that report on JJEED's interrelated research, QA, technical assistance and policy activities and findings for 2002. Since 1998 and in relation to the best education practices research, JJEED has annually "raised the bar" in terms of what Florida's juvenile justice educational programs are expected to provide juvenile justice youths. These youths present unique and substantial challenges to juvenile justice educators because of their numerous and disproportionate academic deficiencies as well as emotional and behavioral difficulties as compared to their non-delinquent public school counterparts. In sum, effective education for juvenile justice youths poses a number of major difficulties and unique challenges.

Nonetheless, despite these difficulties and challenges, JJEED is pleased to report several important achievements in Florida's efforts to ensure quality education for its juvenile justice youths. As this annual report documents, the overall quality of juvenile justice education in

Florida has continued to improve in 2002. Moreover, and consistent with the 2001 findings, JJEEP can report for 2002 that Florida's efforts to develop and ensure research-based quality education for juvenile justice youths is, in fact, contributing to their successful community reintegration. JJEEP has found that despite the numerous and disproportionate educational deficiencies that Florida's juvenile justice youths share upon entering juvenile justice facilities, the receipt of quality education and resulting academic gains provides many of these youths a positive turning point in their delinquent to adult crime life course. To elaborate, the bulk of the approximately 16,000 youths who annually enter Florida juvenile justice facilities are on a negative life path that is likely to result in adult criminality. JJEEP has found that quality education and academic achievement have the potential to positively alter or serve as a turning point to this negative life path in which many released youths return to school, continue in their academic achievement, become employed, and desist from subsequent delinquent behavior.

These education and delinquent turning point findings are significant to the State of Florida as well as the rest of the nation and beyond. The juvenile justice policy directive is that research-based quality education can make a positive difference in the delinquent to crime life path. Prior research addressing the relationship between delinquency and adult crime has consistently reported upon the continuity between troubled childhood, adolescent delinquency, and adult crime. Moreover, evaluation studies of various juvenile justice treatment and correctional program efforts aimed at altering the delinquent and adult crime relationship have generally concluded that, "nothing works" in changing or altering this negative life path. Florida's unprecedented efforts to ensure research-based educational best practices for its incarcerated delinquent youths have demonstrated that "something does indeed work," namely, the receipt of quality education and resulting academic achievement, which can serve as a positive turning point in the delinquent to crime life path.

This chapter is comprised of two subsequent sections. Section 1.2 provides brief overviews of Chapters 2 through 15. Section 1.3 provides a summary discussion of JJEEP's interrelated functions and processes.

1.2 Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 presents the QA results for the educational programs reviewed during the 2002 review cycle. Of particular note is that an increasing number of programs were designated as deemed or special deemed and, therefore, received an abbreviated review that did not include numerical QA scores. These deemed programs include some of the very best educational programs in the state, although some deemed programs do receive lower QA education scores. Unfortunately, by not including numerical QA scores for the increasing numbers of deemed programs, annual comparisons of overall statewide QA performance are problematic. As a result, the chapter includes a calculation of the deemed and special deemed as a part of this overall statewide QA performance of juvenile justice educational programs by using the deemed programs' last numerical QA scores from full QA reviews. A fundamental purpose of the chapter is to determine if the overall QA performance of Florida's juvenile justice educational programs has continued to improve while the service and performance

requirements and expectations for these programs has continued to be elevated each year in relation to our best education practices research.

Chapter 3 describes JJEEP's corrective action protocol and process, priority indicators, and results for 2002. The chapter includes comparison of the 2002 corrective actions with previous years in order to identify patterned problem areas and notable educational programs' performance improvements.

Chapter 4 describes the various technical assistance activities completed during 2002. JJEEP and DOE were committed to providing additional technical assistance opportunities that responded to the requests of school districts' educational program personnel throughout the state. The technical assistance activities and trainees' responses are summarized in the chapter.

Chapter 5 describes the special education services provided by Florida's juvenile justice educational programs. Included in the chapter is discussion of the special and disproportionate emotional and mental health problems of juvenile justice youths that must be addressed to ensure effective educational service delivery.

Chapter 6 describes the 2002 compliance review of cooperative agreements and contracts. The chapter includes an assessment of the relationship between contract content and contract management quality methods and the QA scores of the recipient juvenile justice educational programs within the school district.

Chapter 7 provides a literature review and empirical assessment of the specific educational deficiencies characterizing Florida's juvenile justice students. One of the primary purposes of the chapter is to document the specific deficiencies of the states' juvenile justice students in order to inform educational programs of the particular educational needs of their students.

Chapter 8 assesses some of the characteristics of higher QA performing educational programs. As part of JJEEP's continuing effort to guide statewide quality improvement in juvenile justice educational programs, identification of the characteristics of high performing programs is essential to improving statewide juvenile justice educational program performance and effectiveness.

Chapter 9 provides an update on JJEEP's multiple efforts to implement a literacy standard for the QA review of Florida's juvenile justice educational programs. The chapter explains the focus upon adolescent literacy as compared to the statewide *Just Read, Florida!* initiative that focuses upon kindergarten through third grade (K-3). The chapter concludes with the review of JJEEP's and DOE's inclusion of a literacy standard for the 2003 QA review cycle, although this standard will not be numerically scored until the 2004 QA review cycle.

Chapter 10 describes some of the problems associated with Florida's use of multiple academic assessment tests in relation to juvenile justice educational program comparisons.

In addition, the chapter provides a methodological update on JJEEP's ongoing efforts to determine the relationship between quality educational programs, student academic gains and pupil progression.

Chapter 11 presents a series of longitudinal outcome findings, including how many released youths returned to school, measures of school performance, end of the year enrollment status, how many youths became employed, and how many youths were recommitted to a juvenile justice commitment facility. These various outcome findings are assessed in relation to the quality of the juvenile justice educational programs from which the youths exited.

Chapter 12 presents self-report findings aimed at extending and validating JJEEP's longitudinal outcome findings presented in Chapter 11. The self-report methodology and specific survey findings for youths and their parents or guardians are presented and discussed.

Chapter 13 describes JJEEP's new web site. The chapter details the web site's components and its unique virtual tour of JJEEP's multiple functions and activities.

Chapter 14 reviews special policy initiatives in which JJEEP was involved during 2002. This includes description of efforts aimed at assisting Volusia County in the development of a research-based QA system for their alternative school discipline schools. The chapter also describes JJEEP's efforts to develop a Center for Juvenile Justice Education and Training. This Center's purpose will be to educate and certify teachers to work in juvenile justice education or in public schools with at-risk youths.

Chapter 15 provides chapter summaries and then draws conclusions and recommendations for the continuous quality improvement of Florida's juvenile justice education programs. The chapter closes with an identification and discussion of JJEEP's 2003 research, QA, technical assistance and policy initiatives.

1.3 Summary Discussion

In the 1990s, Florida embarked upon an unprecedented policy commitment aimed ultimately at providing quality, accountable, and effective education for its delinquent youths. In implementing this policy, it became clear that achieving quality and effective education would require ongoing research that identified and validated best education practices. Specifically, Florida discovered through its efforts to implement quality education that research-validated curriculum, teaching strategies, and methodologies could not be found either in existing practice or in the research literature. For example, in 1998, the 100 leading researchers of the National Academy of Education concluded that they were a long way from being able to identify any standards and associated best practices to help teachers, policymakers, or researchers. As a result, the necessary response taken by Florida was to embrace research that would identify and validate best education practices for the state's juvenile justice educational programs.

To begin implementation of this research, JJEEP identified from the prior literature some of the most promising practices in juvenile justice education, reserving the overused term “best practices” for those relatively few concepts and methods that were found to be effective based on empirical research. Unfortunately, but as expected, this prior literature was largely comprised of impressionistic and anecdotal accounts that were without empirical support or validation.

Nonetheless, given these caveats, the promising educational concepts and methods found to have the most support and the greatest consensus among juvenile justice educators and researchers include:

- assigning youths to small juvenile commitment facilities rather than large facilities
- maintaining low student-teacher ratios in educational programs
- using professionally certified teachers and well-trained paraprofessionals to work with these youths
- providing accurate initial academic assessments to be used in student placement
- developing and using individualized academic plans that fit the needs of each student
- having an effective and appropriate curriculum that meets the needs of the population being served (including individualized curriculum, vocational education, special education, GED curriculum, cultural diversity and psychosocial education)
- providing appropriate transition planning and follow-through as youths move from one system to another
- adopting a comprehensive instructional and technological delivery system that meets the youths’ needs
- developing a system of comprehensive aftercare aimed at effective community reintegration
- providing ongoing professional development and training for teachers working with these students

Recognizing that these concepts represented promising practices that had yet to undergo rigorous research and evaluation, JJEEP implemented an ongoing research strategy that addressed each of these concepts in an effort to validate these promising practices as best practices that could be disseminated throughout Florida. Conversely, it was understood that modifications in these practices may be required if research evidence suggests that they may not be as effective in responding to the community reintegration needs of juvenile justice youths as previously believed.

More specifically, JJEEP’s research efforts and processes can be described as follows. First, annual literature reviews are completed to identify and update known promising and best

education practices. Second, annual assessments are made of each educational program's QA score in relation to the number of promising or best educational practices in operation in the program. Third, annual pre and post academic outcome assessments for each of the more than 200 educational programs (i.e., entry and exit academic assessment test scores, credits earned, diplomas or certificates awarded) in relation to their QA scores and the number of promising or best practices are conducted. Finally, a longitudinal study that employs both official (i.e., arrest, recommitment, employment, school returns) and self-report data is ongoing to determine if a student's receipt of promising or best educational services that result in specific academic outcome gains correlate with students' successful community reintegration.

To date, JJEEP's preliminary research findings document that the juvenile justice educational programs receiving the highest QA scores have the highest proportion of promising or best practices, and the low-scoring programs have the lowest proportion of such practices. With regard to academic outcomes, there also is a positive correlation between high QA performing programs and various pre and post academic outcome gains. Further, the longitudinal results indicate that programs with higher QA scores have more of their students returning to school after they are released and returned to their home communities and substantially lower rates of recidivism as measured by recommitment to DJJ programs.

Current ongoing research involves pre- and post-academic outcome assessments and longitudinal tracking that includes various self-report and official data on recommitment, return to school, and employment from a sample of the 16,000 youths per year who receive educational services in the state's approximate 200 juvenile justice facilities. The goal is to move from promising practices to empirically validated best practices. Moreover, these empirically validated best practices will be employed as QA standards in subsequent review cycles in such areas as literacy, science, and mathematics. It is anticipated that these standards will include a nonprescriptive menu of specific curricula and instructional designs and methods from which teachers, employing their professional judgment, can select in relation to the needs of their classes and individual students.

The following chapters provide details on JJEEP's 2002 activities and findings in relation to its four interrelated functions.