

CHAPTER 11

IMPROVING JUVENILE JUSTICE EDUCATION: THE ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF AN INFORMATION SYSTEM

11.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, over the past several decades, there has been an ever-increasing focus on the accountability of social services. This accountability movement has been accelerated in juvenile justice education by the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). To effectively meet this accountability demand requires an emphasis on gathering pertinent information from a variety of different sources. Since its creation in 1998, the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program (JJEED) has been able to adapt to and influence this continuing demand for increased accountability and the associated different information sources.

In 1998, JJEED found that little research had been completed that identifies and validates best educational practices in juvenile justice schools. Therefore, JJEED's original proposal called for a data-driven system, which incorporated research into its mission and functions. This approach has allowed JJEED and the State of Florida to systematically improve educational services for incarcerated youths over the last seven years. Nonetheless, achieving an integrated research system that incorporates data into various areas of JJEED's operations and utilizes these data for statewide systematic improvement in juvenile justice education has been a formidable task. JJEED continues to make efforts to incorporate the most up-to-date research and data into its four functions of research, quality assurance (QA), technical assistance, and policy recommendations. This chapter considers the important role of an information system in better meeting JJEED's multiple functions.

The remainder of this chapter consists of five subsequent sections. Section 11.2 describes current and future JJEED research initiatives and how they contribute to other aspects of the organization. Section 11.3 addresses the historical research base for quality assurance, the increasing use of data to inform the QA process, and the future direction of QA. Section 11.4 describes the provision of technical assistance to schools and school districts in the past and how future technical assistance will increasingly rely on current research and program information. Section 11.5 illustrates the impact that JJEED's research has had on juvenile justice education policy and how it will continue to provide meaningful information to policy makers. Section 11.6 provides a summary discussion of JJEED's ongoing initiative to develop a data-driven juvenile justice education system.

11.2 Research

In 1998, the State of Florida did not have the data capacity to effectively evaluate juvenile justice school performance or the educational performance of youths in the juvenile justice system. In response to this void, JJEEP began developing a comprehensive, statewide data management system, utilizing databases that contain program performance results, program characteristics, teacher qualifications and characteristics, student performance, and individual students' community reintegration results.

These multiple databases have evolved into integrated and comprehensive research tools that have enabled JJEEP and the State of Florida to address many important questions concerning effective juvenile justice education practices for Florida's delinquent youth population. As the databases have grown over the years, more comprehensive program descriptions, explanations, and predictions have been made that facilitate numerous program applications, improvements, and associated best practices in Florida's juvenile justice education system.

The number of variables in JJEEP's program evaluation databases has tripled since 1998 to allow better evaluation of program characteristics and program performance. Specifically, these databases contained less than 60 variables in 1998, while in 2004, the number of variables increased to more than 180. This increase in information enables more detailed and efficient analyses of program practices and performance and student and program demographics. While variables within these databases may change from year to year, through the inclusion of more detailed information, the overall categories remain consistent. Examples of the types of data contained in these databases include contact information, educational program design, and program staff, student, and program demographics.

In addition to the information collected through the QA process, JJEEP also obtains student-level data from a number of official state sources. These data provide the basis from which to evaluate aggregate student performance in relation to various demographic and program characteristics and to assist in the specification of facility and student outcomes, such as school success (e.g., credits and diplomas earned, return to school) and continuation of delinquency (e.g., arrest and recommitment rates). For example, the student-level data used for the research in this annual report were obtained from the following sources:

- ◆ Florida Department of Education (DOE) – Survey 5 (JJEEP currently maintains six years of Survey 5 data, from FY 1998-99 through FY 2003-04)
- ◆ Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE)– arrest data
- ◆ Florida Department of Corrections (DOC) – placement data
- ◆ Florida Education Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) – employment data

These four datasets include student-level data containing demographic information, educational records, arrest, and employment history. JJEEP has developed a method that allows matching these data from such identifiers as student identification (primarily the social security numbers), first and last names, and date of birth. In tracking the student

records over time, new criteria were developed for certain variables, including prior arrests; employment after release; academic, vocational and elective credits earned; return to school; and attendance. Cohort data were then combined with JJEEP's program performance data to enhance the on-site review process, develop more efficient methods to assess the impact of new measures on educational quality, and longitudinally track the outcomes of these measures in juvenile justice schools.

JJEEP's databases are also used to inform juvenile justice educational programs and school districts about the QA process and results, identify high and low performing programs, and to assist in the identification of specific examples of best practices that may be disseminated. The large amount of data contained in these varied databases allow for a variety of applied research activities. These activities include:

Program Evaluation Research - Program evaluation research is focused upon evaluating the quality of juvenile justice educational programs in relation to program demographics such as size, type, provider, staff characteristics, type of population served, and location. Program evaluation of juvenile justice educational programs is also a major requirement of NCLB. Examples of JJEEP's program evaluation research are discussed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 and include student/teacher ratio, teacher qualifications, privatization, characteristics of high and low performing programs, and identification of problem areas experienced by multiple programs across the state.

Student Educational Characteristics Research - Educational characteristics research is aimed at identifying the characteristics of juvenile delinquents in relation to their non-delinquent peers. This includes determining the extent to which juvenile delinquents may have more severe educational deficiencies than other adolescent groups. This research is guided by the need to identify delinquency risk factors and to diagnose juvenile justice students' specific educational needs. See Chapters 7 and 8 for research projects involving the use of these educational characteristics.

Entry-Exit Academic Gains Research - Entry-Exit research is aimed at determining the specific student educational gains that certain subpopulations may experience while committed to juvenile justice programs. This research is also targeted at identifying which juvenile justice educational programs produce the greatest educational student gains and validating the QA process by testing the relationship between QA ratings and program-level student educational gains. Building on the existing research on academic gains, the implementation of House Bill 1989 requiring DOE to select and implement a uniform academic entry/exit assessment test in juvenile justice schools will enhance this research. This test will allow for accurate measurements of educational achievement of students while incarcerated. This academic assessment is scheduled to be implemented in 2005, and juvenile justice schools will be required to electronically report test results through the DOE's automated student information database. Assessment results will then be used to measure student gains while incarcerated in the areas of reading, writing, and math.

Longitudinal and Life Course Research – JJEEP’s longitudinal and life course research is designed to determine the community reintegration results of students after their release from juvenile justice educational programs. Community reintegration measures include post-commitment educational achievement, employment, and recidivism. Moreover, future longitudinal research will be aimed at analyzing the outcomes of multiple cohorts, specific types of youths, and the environmental factors that affect long-term results pre-, during, and post-incarceration. For results of JJEEP’s longitudinal research, please see Chapters 7 and 8.

Survey Research – A national survey of other states’ implementation of NCLB requirements in their juvenile justice education systems has been recently completed. This survey collected information on lawsuits that states have experienced, their organizational structures, the level of data collection used, their level of monitoring in juvenile justice educational programs, and each state’s status in implementing NCLB requirements in juvenile justice schools. These data indicate that Florida is leading the nation in the evaluation and accountability of juvenile justice education. JJEEP plans to enhance its survey research to include surveys of teachers in Florida’s juvenile justice educational system. This survey will collect information on critical issues of teacher recruitment and retention, best education practices, and the technical assistance needs of juvenile justice education teachers. See Chapter 6 for national survey results.

Demonstration Sites -To bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative research and in the effort to create a better accountability system, in 2004 JJEEP initiated a project involving in-depth case studies of high performing programs. This ‘best practice demonstration sites research’ is intended to collect detailed information that captures the day-to-day practices and processes of high performing programs to allow replication in poorer performing programs. Based upon five years of QA scores and various outcome measures suggested by NCLB, programs are being selected as potential demonstration sites. In-depth field research studies are being conducted on each of these sites to obtain a better understanding of the best practices and processes in place. The case studies employ a multi-tool data collection methodology of observations, interviews, surveys, and document analysis. For a detailed discussion of 2004’s case studies and findings, please see Chapter 10.

The development of a statewide data management system for juvenile justice education has allowed JJEEP to use research and information to guide its other functions of QA, technical assistance, and policy recommendations. More specifically, data and research now inform the revision of QA standards, are used to improve data collection, guide the scheduling of QA reviews, focus technical assistance resources on those programs most in need of assistance, and provide the basis for JJEEP’s annual policy recommendations to DOE. The following sections outline the development of JJEEP’s QA and technical assistance functions and provide examples of how information is used to guide these systems.

11.3 Quality Assurance

In 1995, DOE staff developed the first set of QA standards to encourage continuous improvement in juvenile justice educational programs. One set of standards for all types of programs was drawn from special education performance standards and statutory authority. The standards focused on administration and evaluated each program's philosophy, procedures, and approach to education.

In 1998, the project was awarded to the Florida State University School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, resulting in the creation of JJEPP. During that year, JJEPP began its research into promising and best educational practices for delinquent and at-risk youths through an extensive literature review, and hosted five regional meetings to obtain input from practitioners in the field. A new set of standards, based on the results of the literature review and input from practitioners, was developed for the 1999 QA review cycle. During 2000 and 2001, the QA standards were modified to address new legislative requirements, including contract management, year-round schooling, adult and vocational education, and other educational accountability issues. Minor revisions occurred in 2002 and 2003 based on input from school districts and provider practitioners and the ongoing research on best practices in juvenile justice education.

In more recent years, NCLB has had a substantial impact on the 2004 and 2005 versions of the educational QA standards. For juvenile justice schools, NCLB mandates, among other requirements, transition services, highly qualified teachers, program evaluation, student outcomes, and assessment testing. The 2005 version of the QA standards incorporates many of the requirements of NCLB focusing on student services and accountability. During this time, the *Just Read Florida!* initiative also began, which added several new reading requirements to the QA standards. These numerous legislative requirements, the increased emphasis on accountability, continual input from practitioners, and JJEPP's research analyses of program performance has led to the development of an evidence-based review system. This evidence-based system is being implemented to ensure that accurate information is collected and that quality ratings are consistently assigned to indicators in the educational QA standards, which have been aligned with state and federal policy initiatives.

The evidence-based process begins with JJEPP's methods for reviewing juvenile justice schools. This currently consists of program self-report information; interviews of teachers, students, and educational administrators; observations of educational activities; and a review of students, staff, and school documents. Examples of self-reported information requested include teacher certifications and qualifications; courses taught by each teacher; qualifications and duties of all educational support personnel; assessment information; program characteristics such as size, location, provider, vocational level, security level, program type, and age range of students; course offerings; class schedules; bell schedules; school calendars; and sample educational forms such as student academic plans and transition plans. These documents begin the evidence collection process and allow QA reviewers to have an accurate picture of a program before going on site.

The on-site portion of the QA review is also evidence-based, relying on documented evidence to evaluate the quality of educational services within each juvenile justice educational program. Data are gathered from multiple sources and may include notes from student and educational personnel interviews, classroom observations, and reviews of student files or particular school documents. Indicator ratings are then based on substantiated information using these multiple sources to verify program practices.

For the 2005 review cycle, JJEEP has developed and is implementing even more detailed methods and review protocols for each indicator and benchmark in the QA standards. To ensure that methods are followed consistently, specific evidence is gathered for each benchmark prior to rating an indicator. In determining the specific QA scores, reviewers use a preponderance of the evidence standard to determine whether the intent of the indicator in question is being met. The preponderance of evidence determination is made in relation to the multiple sources of data that reviewers collect and examine during the QA review. In the event of conflicting evidence, reviewers re-check the accuracy of information through triangulation of documents, interviews, and observations. When initial problems are identified, reviewers gather additional information to determine if the problem(s) is systemic or merely an oversight concerning an individual case.

After all evidence is gathered, preliminary QA ratings are assigned, which are subject to final determination by both a JJEEP in-house and DOE review. This process includes two colleagues verifying that the rating justification in each indicator conforms to the corresponding rating given by the reviewer. The Lead QA Reviewer also reads each report to ensure that the evidence gathered addresses the specific requirements and intent of the standards. This process facilitates communication, accuracy, early problem identification, and consistency among reviewers. In addition, JJEEP's Lead QA Reviewer shadows all review staff once per year. Shadowing allows the process to be monitored across reviewers and allows inconsistencies to be corrected. The evidence-based system emphasizes methodological consistency, in-house reviews, and reviewer shadowing to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected by JJEEP. These processes allow for accurate analyses of problem areas and the provision of more meaningful information to DOE, school districts, and providers.

As part of these new QA methods and evidence-based system, and in order to provide efficient and quality services to school districts and juvenile justice educational programs, JJEEP is also using data to inform the QA scheduling process. The 2005 QA schedule is created based on the following criteria: 1) the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) QA schedule, 2) program location, 3) program size, 4) exemplary and/or deemed status, and 5) when the program was reviewed the previous year.

Information-based scheduling allows JJEEP to focus its efforts on poorer performing programs. Since the higher performing programs that have achieved exemplary status (discussed later in this Chapter) only require either a self-report review or one-day on-site review, more time can be spent with lower performing programs. Further, to help ensure consistency, once the schedule is set, JJEEP reviewers are randomly assigned to programs unless they were on-site at that program during the previous year's QA.

If they reviewed a program during the previous year, they are not assigned to the same program the following year.

As JJEPP continues in its seventh year of conducting QA reviews, the focus is to increase reviewer consistency and ensure accurate and complete data gathering through an evidence-based system. Additionally, JJEPP will extend reviews for lower performing programs in order to focus resources on the programs that need the assistance most, and to continue to raise the bar for programs and school districts to utilize research-based practices. JJEPP will continue to collaborate with school districts, providers, DJJ, and DOE to ensure that each educational program that serves juvenile justice and at-risk youths, will be of such high quality that all these youths who return to their local communities will be prepared to participate in school, work, and home settings as successful and well-educated citizens, thereby increasing their potential for future success.

11.4 Technical Assistance

Beginning in 2005, JJEPP is expanding the scope of its technical assistance efforts, and increasingly relying on the information contained in its multiple databases to identify high and low performing programs. As part of this effort, JJEPP is instituting an exemplary program process. The purpose of this process is to acknowledge and reward high performing programs based on QA scores and to allow provision of more assistance and interventions, as necessary, to low performing programs, through the corrective action process and designation of demonstration sites.

A juvenile justice educational program that receives an overall average QA score of 6.5 or higher will be awarded exemplary status. For the two years following, the educational program will receive a shortened one-day review. In addition, those programs receiving an overall average score of 7.0 or higher will not receive an on-site visit for one year. During the subsequent second and third years, the program will receive one-day reviews. While recognizing high performing programs, JJEPP and DOE are focusing their resources upon lower performing programs. Beginning with the 2005 QA cycle, programs and school districts that continue to have the same deficiencies noted during their QA reviews year after year will receive lower QA scores in the identified indicator(s). These programs will receive a corrective action and be required to develop a corrective action plan (CAP).

A CAP is intended to initiate a process that will enable programs to identify systemic processes and procedures that may be contributing to the program's below satisfactory rating in any standard. CAPs will be required for all educational programs that receive below satisfactory ratings (lower than 4.00) in standard one, standard two, or standard three during the 2005 QA review cycle. CAPs will also be required for all educational programs or school districts that fail to address the same indicator for two consecutive years (2005 and 2006 QA review cycles). If programs under corrective action fail to meet minimum satisfactory criteria in the same standards for the second consecutive year or fail to address the same indicator deficiencies for the third consecutive year, QA and corrective action information will be submitted to DOE for interventions and sanctions.

The corrective action process is becoming an institutionalized tool for programs and school districts, affording them greater access to technical assistance. Additionally, technical assistance is increasingly focusing on habitually lower performing programs. DOE and JJEEP staff conduct special on-site technical assistance visits to help these programs facilitate necessary changes and to bring them up to the level achieved by the majority of programs.

While data analyses indicate that there is an increase in the number of programs receiving below satisfactory scores in various indicators and an increase in the number of programs receiving a corrective action, overall results of technical assistance are promising (See Chapter 4). The general decrease in the performance quality of juvenile justice educational programs for 2004 can be largely attributed to the impact of new regulations; however, the improvement brought about by the on-site technical assistance visits remains clear.

To facilitate the provision of technical assistance, JJEEP has developed and maintains an extensive information network, working with juvenile justice school administrators throughout the state on a daily basis. Through JJEEP's website, interested personnel can access current and relevant information related to the education of delinquent and at-risk youths. Further, JJEEP maintains a statewide contact list containing mailing addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail lists of the various parties involved in delinquency education. In fostering these partnerships, school districts and providers annually provide input into JJEEP's quality assurance standards and processes, which assists in developing local, district, and state level consensus for the accountability system in juvenile justice education. Prior to 1998, juvenile justice education providers did not have a forum for sharing information and resources. Since then, JJEEP and DOE have sponsored an annual statewide conference and regional meetings where school district staff and community-based providers exchange 'best practice' information concerning the education of at-risk and delinquent youths, providing an open forum where struggling schools and districts may receive technical assistance from their peers.

In the future, JJEEP plans to augment its efforts in facilitating the distribution of information and relevant data. To accomplish this goal, JJEEP is developing a technical assistance brief system in which descriptive data are used to highlight current trends in juvenile justice educational programming, to identify common processes and practices in high performing programs, community resources and partnerships, and teaching strategies (e.g., for low readers and students with disabilities) that can assist programs in service improvement.

In accordance with the NCLB Title I, Part D, requirement that states use program evaluation results for improvement, JJEEP has increased the scope of its technical assistance for 2004 and will continue to do so in 2005. JJEEP will further focus its efforts on identifying and assisting low performing programs through the provision of on-site technical assistance, increasing the distribution of relevant information to highlight current trends and practices, and designating high performing programs as demonstration sites to assist other facilities.

11.5 Policy

While JJEEP has undertaken extensive data collection efforts over the past seven years, utilizing these data to inform the policy making process has been a difficult task.

Traditionally, JJEEP's policy role has consisted of compiling its research and information in its annual report to DOE, serving on various committees, and presenting at conferences throughout the state of Florida and the nation. With the increasing demands for accountability and measurement at the state and federal levels, however, JJEEP's role in the policy arena and providing data to inform policy is expanding.

Currently, JJEEP is involved in numerous state committees, which include the community transition committee, DOE/DJJ interagency committee, workforce development committee, entry-exit assessment committee, and the NCLB for juvenile justice schools committee. Membership on various committees includes staff from numerous bureaus throughout DOE, DJJ, the Juvenile Justice Providers Association, school district alternative education and dropout prevention administrators, delinquency providers, workforce development, and the Florida legislature, particularly the House Juvenile Justice Committee and the Senate Criminal Justice Committee. These various committees provide a forum where JJEEP can provide information and data to state agencies, school districts, providers, and the legislature to assist them in confronting new legislative requirements, or crafting new legislation, and meeting data reporting needs.

At the local level JJEEP influences policy in juvenile justice educational programs through the implementation of its QA standards and process. Educational program services are guided by the QA system, which in turn is influenced by JJEEP's research. These standards are revised annually to reflect the most current knowledge of Florida's juvenile justice education system.

Future JJEEP policy efforts will include developing an information dissemination system, which will include the publication of research and policy briefs. While the briefs discussed in the previous section will provide programs and teachers with technical assistance information, research and policy briefs that inform state and local decisions makers will also be published. These briefs will be concise summaries that include descriptive data used to highlight current trends in program performance, student characteristics, academic gains, community reintegration outcomes, teacher recruitment and retention, and the progress of NCLB implementation in Florida's juvenile justice system. The results of these briefs will be highlighted on JJEEP's website to allow access to a wide audience of interested parties, distributed through a web-based listserv, and presented at conferences and committee meetings that JJEEP attends.

Through continued participation on state committees, annual revision of the QA standards, and a new research and policy brief publication system, JJEEP will enhance its ability to respond proactively in an ever-shifting legislative and policy environment, thereby increasing accountability and improving the lives of Florida's delinquent youths.

11.6 Summary Discussion

As discussed previously in this chapter, when JJEPP began, the State of Florida did not have the data capacity to effectively evaluate juvenile justice school performance or the educational performance of youths in the juvenile justice system. Since that time, JJEPP has steadily built the capacity to collect, organize, and analyze information, and to integrate this information into its four functions of research, QA, technical assistance, and policy recommendations.

JJEPP conducts multiple forms of research in an effort to understand the complex processes involved in the relationship between education and delinquency. This relationship is evident in both the prevention of delinquency and in the process of delinquent youths desisting from crime. Engaging in varied research methods, such as the development of longitudinal cohorts, case studies of program processes, and student and teacher surveys allows JJEPP to address many important questions concerning effective juvenile justice educational practices for Florida's delinquent youth population.

To conduct these different research efforts requires accurate, consistent, and complete data collection. To achieve this goal, JJEPP is instituting an evidence-based QA review system that outlines detailed methods and review protocols. Further, the process is monitored for consistency at a variety of stages in the process, through in-house and DOE reviews of all QA reports, shadowing of reviewers, and random assignment to programs.

In an effort to increase technical assistance and focus JJEPP and DOE resources on habitually low performing programs, the corrective action process monitors program performance over multiple years to identify systemic problems. Research information will be used to identify statewide areas in need of improvement. These areas will be highlighted at the annual Juvenile Justice Education Institute and Southern Conference on Corrections (JJEI) and other training opportunities where school district staff and providers exchange 'best practice' information concerning the education of at-risk and delinquent youths.

Finally, JJEPP plans to distribute information and relevant data to interested parties by developing a publication brief system in which information and data collected by JJEPP are used to highlight current trends in juvenile justice education research, technical assistance, and policy. Through this integrated research approach, JJEPP will continue to enhance the available information needed to improve the educational services provided to youths in the juvenile justice system, and continue its history of collaboration with school districts, providers, DJJ, and DOE.