

CHAPTER 10

SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

10.1 Introduction

This 2005 Annual Report marks the completion of eight years of JJEOP operations. Over these years, JJEOP has implemented a series of interrelated functions, including Quality Assurance (QA), technical assistance (TA), and research. What has resulted from the successful implementation of these interrelated functions includes a continuous improvement in the quality of services and practices in the state's juvenile justice education programs, and compelling research results which confirm that greater academic attainment while incarcerated increases the likelihood of post-release returns to school and an associated lower likelihood of re-arrests. Despite the disproportionate educational deficiencies that characterize delinquent youths, the exposure to and receipt of increased quality educational programs and services is providing many of Florida's delinquents with a transition away from their delinquent life course. Indeed, something can and does work in positively changing delinquent behavior. But to continue to positively influence the life course of delinquent youths means a continuing commitment to quality education.

10.2 Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2 presents the Quality Assurance (QA) results of the 174 programs reviewed during the 2005 review cycle. The analysis of QA scores for 2005 demonstrates that the overall mean slightly increased compared with the overall mean in 2004. In 2005, 46 programs (36%) scored in the high satisfactory or superior range, and 12 programs (7%) scored in the below satisfactory range. Not only did the number of programs that maintained high satisfactory and superior ratings increase by 5%, but also, this improvement was accompanied by a 3% decrease in the number of programs that received scores in the below satisfactory range.

Chapter 3 documents how the QA process has undergone significant changes over the years and that these changes elevated the standards by which juvenile justice schools in Florida are evaluated and held accountable. Many of these changes relate to new legislation and policies, but also relate to practitioners' needs and research findings. For the majority of standards, particularly QA performance, there has been a significant increase from 2000 to 2003. This was followed by a sharp QA performance decline in 2004. This drop was due to more rigorous evaluation measures and the increasing No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements. In 2005, however, the average QA score increased as programs adjusted to the elevated QA standards.

The trend analysis demonstrates that QA performance is related to size, program type, and education provider. Generally, mid-sized programs that house 26-100 students outperform

smaller (fewer than 25 students) and larger (more than 100 students) programs. In addition, publicly operated juvenile justice education programs perform better than the education programs operated by private providers.

Finally, the trend analysis of teacher certification and in-field/out-of-field teaching was provided. The percentage of teachers with professional certification has increased from 55% in 2001 to 63% in 2005. Similarly, in all core academic areas, the percentage of in-field teachers has increased between 2001 and 2005. The rate of in-field teachers has increased from 11% to 28% in math, 14% to 31% in science, 19% to 38% in English, and 28% to 40% in social studies. Despite these positive figures, out-of-field teaching remains a major problem, especially in math and science.

The QA trend analysis demonstrates a predictable outcome. As QA standards are elevated and juvenile justice educational programs adapt to these elevated standards, QA scores reveal a predictable and temporary decline. Once the new standards are implemented, however, QA scores increase.

Chapter 4 provides results of JJEEP's technical assistance and corrective action efforts. As in previous years, in 2005, transition was the standard which received the most below satisfactory scores (19); followed by service delivery and educational resources each receiving 15. In 2005, however, fewer programs had below satisfactory QA scores and corrective actions compared with 2004, despite the bar being raised for what these programs were required to do. In addition, TA has increasingly focused on habitually low performing programs. The majority of programs that received on-site TA visits in 2004 demonstrated improvement in their 2005 QA scores.

In addition to the TA that was directly provided to programs and school districts, recent state committee work has resulted in developing of a uniform academic assessment instrument, recommendations for implementing NCLB requirements, and improving transition services and vocational opportunities for incarcerated students.

Chapter 5 provides results from a comparison of public school and juvenile justice teachers. Although, all schools and teachers are held to the same NCLB highly qualified teacher requirement, juvenile justice teachers lag behind public school teachers in in-field teaching, professional certification, teaching experience, and retention. Professional certification in public schools¹ is 17% higher than in Florida's juvenile justice schools (80% compared to 63%). Moreover, 79% of public school teachers teach in their area of certification for English, math, science, and social studies combined, while the same is true for only 34% of juvenile justice teachers. Finally, juvenile justice teachers have a much higher turnover rate when compared with public school teachers. Specifically, 49% of juvenile justice teachers left the profession within one year of teaching at their school; in contrast, only 16% of public school teachers left within one year.

Chapter 6 provides the results of a research literature review of the educational characteristics of delinquent youths and best educational practices targeting these educational

¹ Public school teacher percentages are national data.

characteristics. Students in juvenile justice schools tend to have disproportionate mental and emotional disabilities, low IQs, poor prior academic performance, and poor prior school-related behavior as compared with their public school student counterparts.

Empirically grounded education strategies that address delinquent youths' academic deficiencies include rigorous and ongoing assessments, individualized student planning, interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration, teacher training, integrated and holistic curriculum, credit recovery programs, and intensive reading and speech services. Improving school-related behavior includes having a safe and positive school atmosphere, providing appropriate classroom organizational structures, implementing multiple instructional strategies, incorporating technology into instruction, documenting student and parent involvement, and developing community and business partnerships. Additionally, these are among the major best education practices identified from the relevant research literature.

Chapter 7 provides findings from case studies that were conducted in order to identify best practices demonstration sites in juvenile justice education. Stability level is among the salient differences that have emerged between high- and low-performing programs. Stability among program providers, administrators, and educational staff appears to decrease as one moves from the high-performing programs to the average and then low-performing programs. The low-performing programs tend to have experienced a series of provider and personnel turnovers, which appears to have negatively affected their ability to implement and maintain general best practices. In contrast, high-performing programs were also able to hire and retain more qualified teachers. These programs were able to do so by establishing good working conditions and often offering incentives such as continuing education and teacher mentors.

The efforts of high-performing programs to overcome geographic isolation and security level problems have succeeded in acquiring a wide variety of community and business partnerships. These partnerships and community ties have resulted in opportunities for students to gain work experience and have exposure to additional learning resources such as libraries, vocational training equipment, and computer labs. Comprehensive exit and aftercare services is also a strongly distinguishing feature of the high-performing programs.

Finally, in the area of curriculum and instruction, high-performing programs also demonstrate a commitment to improving the language arts and reading abilities of their students by having experienced reading teachers and/or reading and speech specialists, strong reading curricula, reading materials, and the ability to tailor their lesson plans to the specific needs of their students. Individualized curricula also play a large role in distinguishing the high-performing programs from the average and low-performing performing programs. The high-performing programs demonstrate several ways that this can be done, even in a classroom that contains students of varying ability levels. Using assignments with differing difficulty levels is one approach, while specifically tailored computer programs and self-paced curricula are among others.

The potential for the demonstration sites to ultimately aid in improving the performance of lower performing programs could serve to raise the overall quality of juvenile justice

education throughout the State of Florida. In particular, JJEPP will use the case study findings to revise and update the QA standards, as needed.

Chapter 8 provides analyses that examine the dynamics of post-release academic achievement for incarcerated youths. The findings indicate that the majority of students are academic underachievers prior to incarceration and following their release. While controlling for students' academic performance prior to being incarcerated, those students who have higher academic performance while incarcerated are likely to be academically successful in public school after release. Further results demonstrate that females, whites, and older students are more likely to be high academic achievers. Overall, these results show that education during incarceration can mediate the effects of poor academic performance prior to incarceration.

Chapter 9 provides research findings for the combined longitudinal cohorts of nearly 10,000 youths. Academic achievement while incarcerated continues to be shown as a positive effect on the likelihood of a youth returning to school; school attendance following release decreases the likelihood of a youth being rearrested. The chapter also examines these relationships for different student subgroups and finds that (1) males are more likely than females to return to school upon release, (2) youths with lower socioeconomic status are significantly more likely than other youths to return to school upon release, and (3) youths with cognitive, behavioral, or learning disabilities are significantly more likely than those without disabilities to return to school upon release. Not surprisingly, youths who are more than a year behind their age/grade level are significantly *less* likely than youths who are at or above age/grade level to return to school upon release. In addition, youths released from a high- or maximum-security facility are significantly *less* likely than youths released from a low- or moderate-security facility to return to school upon release.

Overall, these longitudinal findings indicate that (1) incarcerated youths benefit from academic achievement while incarcerated in terms of their increased likelihood of returning to public school upon release, regardless of their age, race, sex, or other characteristics, and (2) these same youths benefit from school attendance following release in terms of a reduced likelihood of rearrest.

10.3 Concluding Comments

Florida's policy of a research-driven, quality assurance and technical assistance approach to juvenile justice education has been nationally and internationally recognized as an exemplary system. Over the past eight years, JJEPP has used research to elevate Florida's juvenile justice education services and practices and this elevation in services and practices has led to more of the state's incarcerated delinquents experiencing increased levels of academic attainment. JJEPP's research has confirmed that these incarcerated delinquents who do experience these higher levels of academic attainment are more likely to return to school after release and less likely to be re-arrested.

Greater specification of the types of incarcerated delinquents that respond favorably to specific education services and practices are anticipated in JJEPP's continuing quest to more fully answer what education programs and practices work best and for which groups of incarcerated delinquents. Nonetheless, we now know that academic attainment can, in fact, facilitate a transition away from delinquent behavior.

The major public policy issue facing Florida and other states throughout the country in this time of ever increasing financial scarcity for public services is how to commit sufficient resources to maximize education's role in effectively confronting delinquency. Embracing and implementing NCLB's requirements related to highly qualified and effective teachers, adequate yearly progress, use of scientifically validated best education practices, and ongoing evaluation will do much to effectively confront and reduce the incidence and costs of delinquent and criminal careers. Current estimates of the annual tangible costs of crime and aiding its victims are more than \$600 billion and this does not include the life-long intangible pain and suffering costs associated with so many forms of criminal victimization. Over the past two centuries, we have attempted to reduce crime and delinquency. We have implemented numerous laws, policies, programs and practices and the results have been largely fragmented, uneven and ineffective.

Education has now been empirically validated as an effective delinquency reduction practice, and NCLB mandates quality education for each state's delinquent populations. Florida and the nation are now poised to move in an unprecedented research-driven-policy direction with education as the focal point. We must commit ourselves to funding these education mandates or risk paying so very much later.

