

Chapter 1

Introduction to the 2006 JJEEP Annual Report

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Two thousand and six marked the ninth year of operation for the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program (JJEEP). During this period, Florida's research-driven juvenile justice educational programming and evaluation practices have continued to undergo changes and improvements. At the beginning of the JJEEP project, there were few published studies concerning the factors that contribute to high quality educational programs for delinquent youth as well as the effects of education upon reducing delinquency. In an effort to expand this knowledge base, JJEEP developed a data-driven approach to implementing its mission, which includes conducting research on delinquency and education, conducting annual Quality Assurance (QA) reviews of Florida's juvenile justice educational programs, providing technical assistance to programs and school districts, and developing policy recommendations to improve Florida's educational services for delinquent youth.

As the project developed, the research methods expanded to include conducting educational best practice literature reviews, longitudinal community reintegration studies, federal and state policy analyses, and case studies of juvenile justice educational programs. Relying on the expanded research methods, findings and input from juvenile justice education practitioners, the educational QA standards have been revised annually to elevate the quality of juvenile justice education services throughout the state. Moreover, this approach has facilitated JJEEP's success in implementing various state and federal reform initiatives.

Examples of recent federal reforms that have been incorporated into JJEEP's evaluation system include requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) such as the recruitment and retention of "highly qualified" teachers, program evaluation and monitoring, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), state-wide assessment, and the provision of transition services for youth who are returning to school or seeking employment following their release. Recent state level reforms incorporated into the QA requirements include *Just Read, Florida!*, the state's *A++ Plan*, the implementation of a common state-wide entry/exit assessment, career and technical education, and the inclusion of the Florida Virtual High School. JJEEP will continue to refine its QA standards each year based upon research findings, federal and state policies, and input from school districts.

In 2006, JJEEP identified a number of habitually low performing programs. In response, JJEEP and DOE initiated extensive technical assistance efforts in the Spring of 2007. These efforts emphasize on-site visits that include meetings with school district officials and school superintendents when possible. The visits are intended to establish consensus among JJEEP, DOE, school districts and educational program providers in an effort to identify and correct systemic issues that have contributed to low performance.

JJEEP's longitudinal research has identified several key factors associated with the education of committed youth and their desistence from delinquent behavior. Although attending school post release and the attainment of a high school diploma reduces the likelihood of rearrest, many youth do not return to school or drop out before earning their diploma. In addition, educational attainment for older youth impacts future employment. These findings demonstrate different experiences and results for different groups of students such as younger youth, youth with disabilities, and youth who are functioning below there age appropriate grade level. As a result, JJEEP's longitudinal research will focus upon examining different groups of youth both while incarcerated and during the community reintegration process to better determine the factors that effect particular groups of youth's long-term educational attainment, employment and desistence from delinquency. In terms of effective interventions, this research is ultimately intended to identify what works best and for whom.

This year's Annual Report to the Florida Department of Education (DOE) includes a series of chapters and findings that contribute to our growing understanding of the relationships among quality education, academic achievement, and successful community reintegration experiences of a diverse population of committed delinquent youths. The following chapters address emerging issues and present findings related to JJEEP's research, evaluation, accountability and policy initiatives.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 presents the results of the 2006 QA review cycle during which 163 juvenile justice education programs were reviewed. QA results consist of information related to program and school district performance in the areas of transition, service delivery, educational resources, and contract management. Additional program information is collected about the facility and the educational providers, and school characteristics. These data provide the basis for interpreting the QA results in relation to program characteristics.

Chapter 3 identifies and discusses the corrective action plans issued and technical assistance provided for the 2006 QA review cycle. Corrective action and technical assistance practices were developed to ensure that Florida's juvenile justice educational programs maintain high quality educational services in order to increase the likelihood that students will successfully transition into school, work, and home settings.

Chapter 4 provides information on the characteristics and qualifications of teachers working in Florida's juvenile justice schools. Numerous empirical studies have found a strong relationship between teacher qualifications and the academic achievement of their students. The findings of this research are recognized in NCLB's highly qualified teacher requirements. Although Florida is continuing to increase the number of certified teachers working in juvenile justice schools each year, the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers in the juvenile justice system remains a priority as well as a challenge.

Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive review of the research exploring the relationships among education, employment and delinquency.

Chapter 6 involves the continuing examination of community reintegration data of youth released from residential commitment programs in FY2000/2001. For each subgroup, the relationship between academic achievement (while in residential placement or committed)

and the likelihood of returning to school following release and the relationship between returning to school and the likelihood of rearrest are explored.

Chapter 7 presents an overview of the variation in educational characteristics and performance based on gender. Recently, more attention is being given to the unique needs of delinquent girls concerning mental health, treatment, and behavior. This chapter attempts to determine whether committed girls have different educational needs than a similarly matched group of delinquent boys.

Chapter 8 describes current and future initiatives as they relate to JJEEP's four functions of research, quality assurance, system improvement, and policy. Although there have been measurable gains in the quality of educational services provided to committed or committed youth in Florida since the inception of JJEEP, challenges continue to surface which drive the need for refinements and the development of new strategies and policies. JJEEP will continue to strive to better integrate the use of data and research, and provide timely and relevant information to school districts, the DOE, and the Florida Legislature.

Chapter 9 synthesizes the work of JJEEP and the contents of this annual report through a summary of each chapter's findings and concluding comments.

1.3 SUMMARY DISCUSSION

During 2006, JJEEP conducted QA reviews of 163 juvenile justice educational programs, issued 47 corrective action plans, and provided targeted on-site technical assistance to 21 low-performing programs. In addition, JJEEP has been engaged in a number of research projects including longitudinal research of youth released from residential programs in terms of their continuing education, employment, and recidivism experiences. In addition, case studies of programs resulted in the designation of five consistently high performing programs as demonstration sites. Case studies revealed that these programs exhibited a disproportionate number of educational best practices for at-risk and delinquent youths.

Together, these interrelated project efforts are enabling Florida to continuously improve the quality of juvenile justice educational services across the state and to increase the academic achievement of thousands of the state's committed delinquent youths. Moreover, increasing the number of successful community reintegration experiences for delinquent youth was the founding purpose for JJEEP, and this purpose continues to guide and shape JJEEP's multiple program efforts.

In an attempt to further integrate our functions, JJEEP is planning several new initiatives for the 2007/2008 fiscal year. The QA cycle will be changing to be consistent with the traditional school year beginning July 1, 2007 and ending June 30, 2008. This change will facilitate better coordination of site visits with school districts. In addition, this change will lead to a more timely and comprehensive JJEEP annual report by aligning data collection methods that include data captured through the state's student automated data system and data collected during on-site QA reviews.

In addition, JJEEP will provide additional information on student and program performance to school districts and, in coordination with DOE, will focus on intervention efforts at the district level to improve Florida's lowest-performing juvenile justice educational programs. The intended outcome is that these increased policies and protocols will provide DOE, the

legislature, and school districts with more in-depth profiles of juvenile justice students, staff, educational services, and program performance.