



STATE OF MARYLAND
JUVENILE JUSTICE MONITORING
UNIT

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Dr. William "Britt" Kirwan, Chairperson
Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education
c/o Office of Policy Analysis
Department of Legislative Services
90 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Dr. Kirwan and Members of the Commission,

Thank you for the vital work you are doing to help ensure appropriate education services and resources for the youth of our State. I am writing on behalf of the office of the independent juvenile justice monitor to request that the needs of youth in the deep end of the Maryland juvenile justice system be addressed in the Commission's recommendations.

Among the reasons for including juvenile justice system-involved youth in the Commission findings:

- Young people in juvenile justice-related detention and placement facilities are amongst the most academically challenged in our State;
- There is not currently a formula for adequate, sustained funding to properly meet the education needs of these youth;
- Students at the deep-end of the system are disproportionately kids with special needs and kids living in poverty;
- The youth in the deep end of the juvenile justice system and their families tend to be highly mobile and system involvement tends to further disrupt young people's educations and the education resources provided while they are incarcerated may be pivotal in determining their chances of academic success; and
- Students in juvenile justice facilities have historically been grossly underserved.

These issues require the attention of the Commission to ensure that kids in schools inside juvenile justice facilities are integrated into mainstream discussions about education policy and reform. Attempts to ameliorate the deficiencies in juvenile justice education through legislation in Annapolis have been unsuccessful given that they fail to confront this separateness and due to the lack of information around the issue and consensus about how best to solve it. Equity and comprehensive reform require that we incorporate juvenile justice education into the same sphere of conversation around Maryland public schools that the Commission is organizing.

There are four sections (out of a total of five) in the Commission draft report that should include mention of and attention to education for youth in the juvenile justice system:

- Highly qualified and diverse teachers/leaders:
 - ✓ State explicitly that all of the recommendations apply to teachers in facilities operated by the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS).
 - ✓ Recommend the development of prestigious, rigorous, and selective programs or tracks within Education departments at Maryland colleges and universities to prepare teachers to educate students in juvenile justice-related settings. One of the existing recommendations is to ensure that teachers master the content

they will teach and how to teach it. In the context of juvenile justice, this recommendation would include training teachers in, for example, adolescent development, trauma, cultural sensitivity, etc. A recommendation on page 51 of the draft report is closely linked to these suggestions.

- ✓ Add specific incentives and rewards for educators in juvenile justice settings to attract and retain highly qualified, well prepared teachers that have been specially trained to teach in juvenile justice-related schools.

- College and career readiness pathways:

- ✓ State explicitly that these recommendations apply to curriculums/programs in facilities operated by DJS.
- ✓ Implement an evidence-based, promising, or best practice approach in juvenile justice education within DJS facilities (an approach which should align with the training teachers receive in a college track geared toward education of young people who are in the juvenile justice system). This approach should take into account projected lengths of stay for youth and include an emphasis on identifying the particular educational needs of each student and tailoring individualized education programming based on those needs. Language in the preliminary report about the response to students who are identified as not on track by 10th grade should apply to young people in the juvenile justice system. In essence, the high expectations and rigor that are already described in the “College and Career Readiness” section should be explicitly applied to education within DJS facilities.

- More resources for at-risk students:

- ✓ There should be a new weight for high proportions of young people in a given LEA who are involved in the juvenile justice system and the Thornton formula should be applied in order to fund specific programs and resources designed to support justice-involved students in their LEAs. This additional funding would allow for recruiting an appropriate number of specially trained court liaisons to help with education-related transitions across the state LEAs, for example.
- ✓ Any entity operating schools in DJS facilities (currently the Maryland State Department of Education Juvenile Services Education System [MSDE JSES]) – now or in the future – must be considered an LEA for these purposes so that schools in DJS placement and detention facilities can be eligible to receive additional funding based on the level of concentration of students from impoverished communities. This additional funding will be used to bolster the availability of appropriate resources/personnel in schools in DJS facilities.

- Governance and accountability:

- ✓ State explicitly that schools in juvenile placement and detention facilities are to be included in whatever system of accountability is developed and implemented; and
- ✓ Create an additional independent mechanism for external oversight of education in juvenile justice-related facilities given the particularly high needs and vulnerability of the students involved.

On the subject of funding for youth education in juvenile detention and placement facilities, the home county or city school system should be responsible for basic funding for each young person and the additional cost per youth (depending on the level of needed education-related resources as well as projected length of stay) should be met through the State budget.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions on behalf of some of our State’s most vulnerable youth.

Respectfully submitted,

Nick Moroney

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