

# Building Brighter Futures

Tools for Improving Academic and  
Career/Technical Education in the  
Juvenile Justice System

A Pennsylvania Example

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## **TOOL II: A Checklist for Policies that Support PACTT Principles**

Juvenile Law Center

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## Policies That Support PACTT Principles

This is a checklist of policy components that could be used to either support the principles PACTT has espoused or lift up initiatives with similar goals. Use this checklist to identify which policies you already have in statute, regulation, or administrative guidance, and to help shape your policy goals in support of practice reforms. For a more comprehensive set of policy recommendations, see Tool IX.

### Academic Excellence

- Require academic programs in correctional facilities to meet high academic standards;
- Provide funding for educators in correctional facilities to receive specialized professional development training, including training on working with youth who have experienced trauma;
- Support or incentivize inclusion of correctional educators in professional development activities taking place in the school district in which the facility is located;
- Incentivize academic programs in correctional facilities that link academic learning to hands-on activities, marketable job skills, and current CTE programs;
- Hold states accountable for re-enrollment rates, graduation rates, and academic progress for youth returning to home schools from placement;
- Ensure the availability of remedial education for youth in the juvenile justice system;
- At the federal level, use Race to the Top grants and other funding opportunities to support innovative practices to improve the quality of education in juvenile correctional facilities, collecting data on projects implemented by grantees, and distributing information to the states on which practices are most effective.<sup>1</sup>

### Appropriate Academic Programming

- Require academic assessments of students for individual service and program improvement purposes, regardless of whether the facility receives federal funds. This should be a complete assessment of the student's academic, social and emotional status, including an assessment of whether the child should be referred for an initial special education evaluation;
- Require that assessments be used to connect youth with the appropriate learning environment and educational programs by requiring an individualized academic plan for each student;
- Incentivize programming that links GED studies with career/technical education and other academic learning;
- Incentivize programming that allows youth to transfer from GED programs back into traditional education programs;
- Incentivize programming that connects GED programs with post-secondary education;
- Incentivize access to post-secondary education inside juvenile justice facilities;
- Track student progress via data collection upon entrance, exit, and re-entry.

### Career and Technical Education

- Provide funding and incentives to enhance access to career and technical education, particularly in high-demand career paths;
- Set forth standards in CTE to ensure that programs in facilities develop industry-based competencies, meet industry standards, and provide relevant certifications in high-demand career paths;
- Require data reports and assessments regarding effectiveness of CTE programming in facilities.

### Employability and Soft Skills

- Require correctional schools to provide high quality work skill and life-skill training for all students;
- Incentivize and support internships, apprenticeships and subsidized employment opportunities for adjudicated youth.

## Seamless Transitions and Effective Reentry

- Require the prompt transfer of all education records to the facility and back to the community;
- Require academic programs in correctional facilities to provide an education that aligns with state standards and local graduation requirements;
- Incentivize the use of individualized portfolios for youth in facilities and home schools;
- Establish funding for transition coordinators to help youth plan for reentry upon arrival in the facility;
- Require facility schools to provide youth and the adult(s) authorized to make education decisions with copies of all school records;
- Incentivize or require that reintegration teams ensure that students are enrolled with all records, and on track to graduate;
- Incentivize or require reintegration teams, including representatives of placement, probation, and school, to ensure that a child is re-enrolled in appropriate courses and receives credits for work completed;
- Require schools in the community to accept credits and partial credits from placement schools;
- Provide alternatives to “seat time” so that academic credits are computed based on competencies that can be recognized across systems;
- Provide access to a state diploma for youth who are unable to meet district-specific graduation requirements due to education disruptions;
- Require that students be enrolled immediately, with systems in place to ensure records transfer within a defined period of time;
- Provide funding for electronic records databases to facilitate records transfers;
- Prohibit districts from excluding, or automatically placing in alternative programs, youth returning from placement.

## Tracking Data to Serve Individual Students, Improve Programs, and Inform Policy

- Provide incentives for the development and use of a central repository of student data, universal, standards-based credits, and other education records (e.g. assessment data, Individualized Education Programs [IEPs], etc.) to facilitate timely transfer;
- Develop information-sharing policies that allow for inter-agency data gathering and assessment while protecting youth confidentiality;
- Mandate the collection of data on academic achievement in correctional facilities and upon reentry to ensure accountability;
- At the federal level, establish an indicator under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requiring data collection and outcome reporting on students in correctional facilities in States’ Performance Plans and Annual Performance Reports;
- At the federal level, broaden the juvenile justice exception in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) so that it allows for the release of education records for children in the juvenile justice system both pre- and post-adjudication, but continue to require that (1) reporting or disclosure serves the educational needs of the student whose records are released and (2) re-disclosure is prohibited unless a parent, eligible student, or other authorized education decision-maker consents or the re-disclosure meets another FERPA exception to consent.

## Tool II Endnote

- 1 Additional policies will further support academic excellence for youth in the juvenile justice system. These include ensuring that English Language Learners and youth with disabilities receive the supports needed to succeed in school, among others. For a full list of recommendations, see Tool IX. Although that list focuses on federal policy, the underlying recommendations are also appropriate for state law and policy.