

CREDIT OVERDUE: How States Can Mitigate Academic Credit Transfer Problems For Youth In The Juvenile Justice System

BACKGROUND

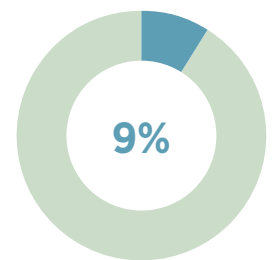
On any given day across the country, more than 48,000 youth are confined to juvenile justice facilities that not only take them away from their homes, but also their schools for weeks or even months at a time. While these facilities typically provide classes to prevent young people from falling behind in their schoolwork, many discover when they return to school that they will not receive full academic credit for their completed coursework, that there is no record of their credits, or that their credits will not count toward graduation. The system has failed them, leaving them further behind.

THE PROBLEM

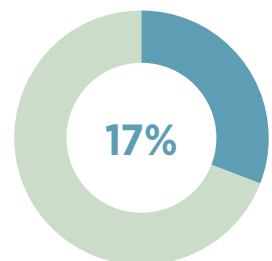
This problem exists on a national scale. A national survey of 208 professionals from 135 counties across 34 states and the District of Columbia confirmed that youth across the country frequently don't receive credit for the work they complete:

- Only 9% of survey respondents said youth always earn credit for all their coursework in detention facilities, which are short-term centers that primarily hold youth waiting for their court dispositions.
- Only 17% of respondents reported that youth always earn credit for all work completed in longer-term juvenile justice placement facilities post-adjudication.
- Roughly a quarter of survey respondents (27%) reported that classes in these facilities are not aligned with school or district standards.
- Less than a third of survey respondents noted that youth do not receive academic credits because records are lost.

When young people do not receive academic credit for coursework completed in juvenile justice facilities, they face a slew of educational consequences, including repeating courses or an entire grade level. Others may find themselves relegated to alternative and disciplinary schools. Unsurprisingly, they become discouraged, and their academic performance suffers, potentially putting a high school diploma farther out of reach. The consequences of not receiving academic credit are particularly devastating for youth who are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system, including Black and Latinx youth, youth with disabilities, undocumented youth or youth who are English learners, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth who experience multiple levels of discrimination due to their overlapping identities.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

As long as states and local jurisdictions continue to send young people to juvenile justice facilities, it is unconscionable to deprive them of the educational opportunities and academic credits to which they are entitled.

The following legislative solutions can help ensure youth receive the credit they are due:

- States must create infrastructure and structural supports to ensure credit transfer.
 - Require interdisciplinary teams to begin rigorous reentry planning as soon as a youth enters a facility
 - Require school districts and schools to designate a transition coordinator to assist youth returning from juvenile justice facilities by ensuring transcripts are complete, timely transfer to the next school, and that the school understands and awards credit for completed work
 - Require schools to maintain and promptly transfer accurate and complete records
- Youth must receive credit-bearing education inside juvenile justice facilities.
 - Require continuous enrollment of youth in the school district of residence
 - Require prompt access to credit-bearing courses that count toward graduation
- Juvenile justice facilities and school districts must enact policies that encourage graduation.
 - Require credits and partial credits earned in facilities to transfer to the receiving school and count toward graduation
 - Require school districts to enroll youth in appropriate schools and provide access to credit-bearing courses upon reentry
 - Provide youth with options to recover or make up credits they have not yet earned. Require school districts to be flexible, award credit through alternative means and waive course requirements for youth who are behind
 - Require states and school districts to provide youth with various pathways to a high school diploma
- Legislation must include accountability and enforcement measures to support meaningful implementation.
 - Ensure that youth and families have access to their own education information
 - Require data collection, internal review and public reporting
 - Develop procedures for effective monitoring of education in juvenile justice facilities
 - Establish a task force or working groups dedicated to monitoring implementation
 - Create consequences for lack of compliance
 - Authorize court enforcement of legislative reforms

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For more information, please visit <https://bit.ly/3nw9GCy>