

December 2, 2016

Dear Colleague:

Each day, across the United States, over 50,000 young people under the age of 21 are confined in juvenile justice facilities.¹ After being released from those facilities, more than a quarter of youth reentering the public school setting drop out of school within six months, and only 15 percent of released ninth-graders graduate from high school in four years.² Almost half of those released return to confinement within three years.³

As a nation, we have made significant strides in decreasing the number of youth confined in juvenile justice facilities, yet we still incarcerate far more youth than do our international peers.⁴ Throughout this Administration, we have been strongly committed to supporting State and local efforts to prevent youth from becoming involved in the justice system and provide improved supports for those youth who do become involved with it. In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released a school discipline and culture guidance package to assist States, districts, and schools in developing practices and strategies to enhance school climate while ensuring compliance with Federal law.⁵ To supplement the guidance package, DOJ and ED collaborated in December 2014 to release guiding principles for providing high-quality education to youth incarcerated in secure facilities.⁶ We are now addressing the day-to-day reality of youth transitioning from confinement and the challenges they face when returning to their schools and communities.

Research has made clear that successful transition services can increase the likelihood of high school graduation and reduce recidivism for justice-involved youth.⁷ Unfortunately, fewer than half of the States track outcomes for incarcerated youth after release.⁸ Only eleven States have staff dedicated to facilitating the reentry of formerly incarcerated youth back into a public school setting. In many States, students returning from juvenile justice facilities are automatically enrolled in alternative schools, many of which have lower graduation rates and student achievement than non-alternative school settings.⁹ These issues, among others, must be addressed to ensure incarcerated youth leaving juvenile justice facilities do not become dropouts due to inadequate support and opportunities to succeed when they transition to schools in the community.

Today, we are releasing new guidance and technical assistance materials that will help State and local leaders provide transition assistance to youth reentering the community from juvenile justice facilities:

- ❖ A third edition of the transition toolkit for practitioners and policymakers, *Meeting the Education Needs of Youth Exposed to the Juvenile Justice System*.
- ❖ A resource guide for educators, families, facilities, and community agencies, *Improving Outcomes for Youth With Disabilities in Juvenile Corrections*, that includes information about evidence- and research-based practices, tools, and resources that can be used to improve supports and long-term outcomes for youth with disabilities in juvenile correctional facilities in four critical areas: Facility-wide Practices, Educational Practices, Transition and Re-entry Practices and Community and Interagency Practices. Please see: <https://www.osepideasthatwork.org/jj>.
- ❖ A resource guide designed exclusively for incarcerated youth who will be reentering the community after leaving a juvenile justice facility, *You Got This: Educational Pathways for Youth Transitioning from Juvenile Justice Facilities*. The guide contains several resources including a re-enrollment checklist and a student bill of rights to empower students with the information needed to continue their education after release.

- ❖ A fact sheet for communities and advocates describing new data on correctional education from the *Civil Rights Data Collection* as well as recent enforcement efforts on correctional education issues by our Office for Civil Rights.

These resources, which are available at www.ed.gov/jjreentry, can help you to provide strong support for youth transitioning out of juvenile justice facilities, to ensure that they are able to successfully rejoin their communities, continue their education, and fulfill their potential. Thank you for your partnership and for your continuing work to improve outcomes for justice-impacted youth.

Sincerely,

John B. King, Jr.

¹Sickmund, M., et al. (2015). *Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement: 1997-2013*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Available at <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp>.

²R. Balfanz, K. Spiridakis, R. Neild, and N. Legters (2003). *Neighborhood Schools and the Juvenile Justice System: How Neither Helps the Other and How that Could Change*. Presentation at the School to Jail Pipeline Conference, Harvard University.

³James Austin, Kelly Dedel Johnson, and Ronald Weitzer (2005). *Alternatives to the Secure Detention and Confinement of Juvenile Offenders*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2. Available at www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/208804.pdf.

⁴Davis, L.M. et al. (2014). *How Effective is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here?* RAND Corporation; U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 21. Available at http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR500/RR564/RAND_RR564.pdf (citing Hazel, Neal, *Cross-National Comparison of Youth Justice, London: Youth Justice Board for England and Wales*, 2008) (“...the rate of youth incarceration in the United States is more than three times the highest rates in other developed nations.”).

⁵*Rethinking School Discipline*, January 8, 2014. U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice. Available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/fedefforts.html>.

⁶*Correctional Education in Juvenile Justice Facilities*, December 8, 2014. U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice. Available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/correctional-education/index.html>.

⁷*Core Principles for Reducing Recidivism and Improving Other Outcomes for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System*, June 28, 2014, available at <https://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/juvenile-reentry>.

⁸Council of State Governments, *Locked Out: Improving Educational and Vocational Outcomes for Incarcerated Youth*, 11, November 5, 2015, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/publications/locked-out-improving-educational-and-vocational-outcomes-for-incarcerated-youth>.

⁹See *Locked Out* at 11.