

YOU GOT THIS

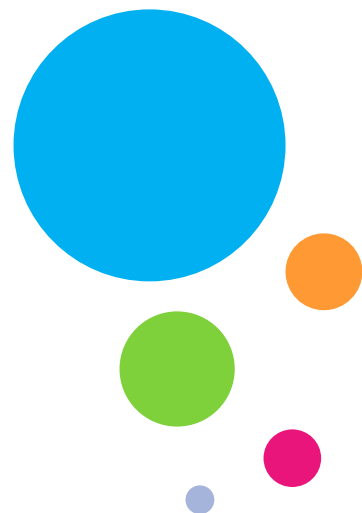
Educational Pathways for Youth Transitioning from Juvenile Justice Facilities

If you will be eligible for transition into a community school after you leave a juvenile justice facility, this packet is for you. We've put together a few tips and suggestions to help you get back into school. You can read all 12 pages or just the ones you need. The most important thing to know is that you have rights and, while it won't always be easy, we're here to help you.

And for others reading this guide who work with youth in some capacity, no matter what role you play, we recommend you provide middle and high school age youth with a copy of this guide as soon as they come in contact with the justice system. Effective preparation can serve as a critical step to ensuring a smooth transition from a juvenile justice facility back to school.

The guide contains the following resources:

- Roadmap of Juvenile Detention to Re-enrollment
- School Choice
- Re-enrollment Checklist
- Helpful Community Resources and Organizations
- Civil Rights Complaint Process
- Daily Planner
- Character Reference and Record Release Templates
- Student Bill of Rights



ROADMAP

Here are **5 steps** to get you on your way.

Step #1 – Know your Rights

Did you know that there's a study showing nearly 90% of justice-impacted students want to go back to school, but only one-third actually re-enroll? Students are often turned away because of lost records or other miscommunications between the school and facility. Knowing your rights can help protect you from being denied a quality education.

Step #2 – Ask for Help

There are a number of State and Federal laws that require both the juvenile justice facility and your future school to keep you in school and on track to graduate. Try to schedule a meeting with a counselor or the person in charge of your transition as soon as you arrive at the facility.

Step #3 – Make a Plan to Transition Home

You should start by asking for a transition team to help you figure out what community school you'll be going to as soon as possible. This will give you and the school time to work through any special needs you have.

Step #4 – Going home...Stay focused

Leaving comes with lots of emotions. The freedom is great, but it can also be overwhelming. Take a deep breath. Find a mentor, teacher or friend to help you stay focused on your plan. You got this!

Step #5 – Going back to school

If you followed the first 4 steps, hopefully all you'll have to do is show up. But if things aren't working out that way, it may be a good idea to get assistance from a local legal aid clinic or, for certain types of discrimination, one of the federal civil rights offices at the U.S. Department of Education or the U.S. Department of Justice.



SCHOOL CHOICE

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

- ✎ Earning a high school diploma shows you had the persistence to stick with high school for four years.
- ✎ A diploma may get you college scholarships or financial aid you can't get with a high school equivalency certificate.
- ✎ A diploma will earn you an average of \$10,000 more per year than someone who didn't finish high school.

HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY CERTIFICATE

- ❖ High school equivalency certificates are nationally recognized and can act as a substitute for a high school diploma in many instances.
- ❖ High school equivalency tests also require persistence: they take 7 hours and only 6 out of every 10 students pass.
- ❖ Most community colleges and career and technical education schools accept applicants with a high school equivalency certificate.

A Few Notes on Alternative Schools

If your school is recommending you attend an alternative school, make sure you do your homework. Alternative schools are usually schools designed to meet student needs that can't be adequately addressed in a traditional school environment. Alternative school structure and curriculum vary depending on the educational goals and student population.

Alternative schools have received mixed reviews, especially because some of them refer a lot of students to the juvenile justice system. In some school districts, at-risk students—particularly students of color and those with disabilities—may be much more likely to end up at alternative schools or “disciplinary alternative schools” that don't provide a high-quality education. However, other parents and students have found alternative schools to be very helpful in giving them extra attention.

Keep in mind that schools are not allowed to have a policy requiring all students returning from juvenile justice facilities to attend alternative school. If someone from the school district or juvenile justice facility is recommending you attend an alternative school, make sure you do your research and find out the following:

- Are the teachers qualified and effective?
- Do they have a structured curriculum?
- What are their graduation rates?
- Do they provide required special education, related aids and services and accommodations for students with special needs?

Check out the reenrollment checklist on page 4 for advice on where to go for help.

A Few Other Options

Don't think a high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate is your only option. There are also options like obtaining career and technical education certificates, associates and bachelor's degrees, or apprenticeships. You could even earn higher education credits and may be able to get Pell Grant funding while in the juvenile justice facility. If you've been transferred to an adult facility, ask if there are any Second Chance Pell programs.

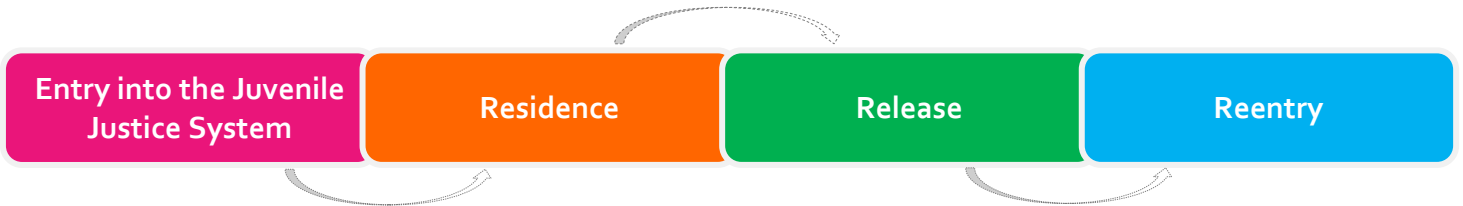
It's YOUR choice.



RE-ENROLLMENT CHECKLIST

Want the best chance at a second chance?

Below is a checklist of the most effective things you can do to make sure you re-enroll on time and on track.



Stage 1 occurs when you first come in contact with the juvenile justice system.

This includes arrest, intake, arraignment, and adjudication. It doesn't mean the court process will be complete, but if you want to stay on track to graduate, don't wait until your case is over to start planning.

- Request a facility orientation.** You should be provided with a handbook on the services and programs available. This handbook should be available in the language you speak, or should be interpreted for you. If you have a disability that makes it hard to read, the handbook should be read to you. You should use orientation time to share where you previously went to school and about your participation in any programs. Ask to meet with the education specialist.
- Request an assessment.** You should ask for an assessment so the education specialist can see your academic progress and your career interests. If you received special education services, tell the facility about your needs and accommodations and share a copy of your individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan, if you have one. If you don't have copies, the facility should be able to get a copy from your previous school. You don't have to have the documents in order to receive the services you need.
- Meet with your transition team.** Facilities offer different types of transition services. If your facility doesn't give you a transition team, ask for one. Your team's key players should include you, a parent/guardian, mentor, the person in charge of your reentry, a teacher from the facility, and a representative from the school you plan to attend when you are released. Ask your team to obtain a copy of your records. You can use the sample release form we provide on page 10 in this guide if the facility doesn't already have one you can use.

Stage 2, residence or "placement," is usually the longest.

No matter how long you're in residence, this is the period of time when you should be planning out your future. Don't just think about going back to school. Think about all the things that have made school (and life for that matter) hard. Now is the time to try to come up with solutions for how you will make things better for your future.

- Make sure you're taking the right classes while in placement.** If you took the assessment in Stage 1, you should be receiving lessons that build on what you know. If classes are too easy, let the teacher know. It probably means you're not doing challenging work that is on your grade level, which may hold you back a grade when it's time to re-enroll in school. If you are learning English or have a disability or other special needs, make sure you're getting your needs met. Bottom line, the juvenile justice facility is required to provide you with the special needs services that are detailed in your IEP.
- Request regular check-ins with your transition team.** This will be based on your individual needs, but you should aim for at least once a month. You should always ask for a meeting when you need to change your transition plan. Here are a few topics you should talk about:
 - How can I learn to set clear goals?
 - If you've thought or learned of additional issues that may impact whether you can go back to school – health, family, transportation, housing, peer pressure – anything really – you should share them with your team.

RE-ENROLLMENT CHECKLIST

- You can ask your team if everything all set for you to enroll in your community school. Who’s going to help you when you’re released? The team should connect you with people from your community school who will help you once you’re released.
- Don’t hesitate to ask for a Motivational Interview, a process where you work with a counselor to identify things in your life you want to change and where you lead the way toward finding solutions. (If possible, check out www.motivationalinterviewing.org for more info.)*

- Take a transition course.** You should receive a lot of prerelease transition planning information. See if the facility offers a course that covers the skills you’ll need once you’re released. Here are some skills to look for...

Stress Management ♦ Independent Living Skills ♦ Decision-making ♦ Team Work ♦ Communication ♦ Problem-solving

Stage 3, release, will likely be filled with lots of emotions.

This used to be the stage where most of the transition issues, like issues related to re-enrollment, took place. If you’ve been working well with your transition team, hopefully this will just be more of a repeat of what you did in Stages 1 and 2.

- Request a record check and release.** Since the school you attend after release will need records of the school work you did in the facility, you should ask to see and check the records to make sure they’re accurate.
 - Many facilities have separate school names instead of the name of the juvenile facility. If your facility has a separate name, look to see if your transcripts and other school records show that the school was in a juvenile justice facility. If so, ask your transition team to remove it. It’ll help later when you’re trying to apply for college and other programs.
 - Did you earn any certificates or other awards during your stay? If so, ask for a record of it for your files. This may also be a good time to ask for a character reference letter. Your character reference can use the letter template provided on page 10 of this guide.
 - Once you’ve verified that your records are correct, work with your transition team to get the records released to your community school. You can use the records release template provided on page 10 of this guide if such a form does not already exist.
- Meet with your transition team again.** You know the drill now. Make sure you’re taking the lead and going over the details of your transition plan.
 - Consider using the daily planner provided on page 9 of this guide to think about what your day will be like. It may help you think of possible trouble areas you may have missed.
 - Get contact information for someone at the facility who can help you with any issues after your release.
- Confirm enrollment.** Make sure your transition team has sent all the paperwork to the school you’ll attend after release, that the school knows of your release, and when you will arrive. Schools respond much better when they’re expecting you. Your school’s representative on your transition team should be able to assist.
- Meet with a mentor.** Hopefully a mentor was identified back at Stage 1, but if you don’t already have a mentor on your team, you should try to get one now. There are lots of national organizations that offer mentoring programs. Check out the “Helpful Organizations and Resources” on page 7 in this guide to get more information on mentoring and other community support.

* Linking to a non-federal site does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education or any of its employees of the sponsors or the information and products presented on the site.



RE-ENROLLMENT CHECKLIST

Stage 4 is reentry, that big next step, also known as aftercare.

This stage usually lasts around 120 days after you return to your community, although it could be longer in some cases. Engagement is the critical step during this phase. Engagement simply means being enrolled in school, doing your school work, or otherwise making sure you're following the rules of your release.

- Go to school.** If your team has been helping you make your way through this checklist, you should already be enrolled by the time you arrive. If the school doesn't let you enroll, ask the person who said no to write down what you need to do and/or bring to get enrolled. If necessary, ask to meet with the principal or vice principal, but keep in mind you may have to wait for an appointment.
 - If you show up to school and get turned away, it's important to stay calm and manage your stress. Let the school know you're serious about coming back to – and staying in – school. If you do get turned away, it might be a good time to use the contact information you obtained in Stage 3.
 - If the school tells you that you're required to enroll in an alternative school, keep in mind what we mentioned about alternative schools on page 3. If you feel like you're being forced into an alternative school, you may want to contact a lawyer or one of the civil rights organizations on page 8.
- Set up regular meetings with a counselor and/or your transition team's school representative.** Since someone from your school and the community should have participated on your transition team, you should talk to them about how you're adjusting. If that's not possible, ask the school to appoint someone to help you with your transition. (Tip: Put your request in writing.)
- Share a copy of your transition plan with the person helping you at school.** It's finally time to implement the transition plan you've been building. You may have to adjust parts of it, but that's normal.
- If after following these steps your school still isn't letting you enroll, get help.** If you've done everything you can to re-enroll, but the school isn't letting you enroll, you may want to contact a lawyer. If you feel like you're being treated unfairly, you may also want to contact one of the civil rights organizations on page 8. They may be able to help with overcoming any roadblocks you're facing with enrolling in school.
- Set up regular meetings with your mentor.** It takes a lot of focus to adjust to a new way of life. Checking in with your mentor on a regular basis can help you stay focused and remind you that you have someone in your corner. One great way to stay connected with your mentor may be to find a small project you can do together. It may also be a great way to let your community know you're there to help and you're glad to be back home!
- Get Connected.** Get involved in afterschool programs, work, or other community programs.



Helpful Organizations and Resources*

REENTRY SUPPORT

My Brother's Keeper Initiative

www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper

President Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and to ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. There is a special focus on those who have been incarcerated. The website includes location and contact information for the nearly 240 communities that have pledged to support this initiative.

National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC)

csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc

The NRRC provides information for returning individuals and families. The NRRC maintains online State and local reentry directories to help individuals returning home after incarceration and their families identify service providers in their communities.

MENTOR: The National Mentoring Project

www.mentoring.org/get-involved/find-a-mentor

MENTOR maintains the Mentoring Connector, the only national database of youth mentoring programs connecting volunteers to opportunities in their local communities. Use the website to locate a mentor near you.

SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Office of Special Education Programs

<http://osepideasthatwork.org/jj>

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs has developed a toolkit to improve outcomes for youth with disabilities in juvenile justice facilities. This online resource provides information and resources on facility wide practices, improving the quality of instruction, re-entry and transition and community collaboration focused on youth with disabilities in corrections.

National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)

nche.ed.gov/helpline.php

NCHE provides assistance to parents, community organizations, shelter providers and local and State representatives on issues related to re-enrollment, housing, and other services affecting youth who are both homeless and justice-impacted.

Tribal Youth Program

www.nttac.org/tribalyouthprogram.org/index.html

Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Tribal Youth program offers resources to grantees and Federally recognized tribes for justice-impacted tribal youth.

Child Welfare Information Gateway

www.childwelfare.gov

Child Welfare has a lot of resources with information about youth who are involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, sometimes also known as cross-over, joint cases, dual-system served, or multi-system involved youth. Search for "juvenile justice" to find national, State, and local resources.

LEGAL SUPPORT

Legal Center for Youth Justice and Education

www.jlc.org

The Legal Center is a national collaboration of Southern Poverty Law Center, Juvenile Law Center, Education Law Center-PA, and the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law. The Legal Center's mission is to ensure that all children in and returning from the juvenile and criminal justice systems can access their right to a quality education. The JLC website contains a lot of information on current initiatives impacting access to education for justice-impacted youth.

Find an Education or Civil Rights Lawyer

lawhelp.org

If all else fails, contact your local legal aid for assistance. Pro bono (also known as free) legal services are also available from many law school clinics. If possible, get counsel from someone with experience dealing with education law. Civil Rights offices at the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice may be able to help as well. More information about filing a civil rights complaint is on page 8.

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CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLAINTS PROCESS

How do I file a complaint of discrimination with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR)?

If you believe you have experienced discrimination based on your race, sex or disability, you may contact an OCR [enforcement office](#) to obtain a complaint form, you may file a discrimination complaint by using the [online complaint form](#), or you can write a letter to the following address:

U.S. Department of Education
Office for Civil Rights
Lyndon Baines Johnson Department of Education Building
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-1100

You can also reach OCR by telephone (800-421-3481) or email (OCR@ed.gov).

What do I need to include in my complaint? You should be sure to include which school, college or other institution you are complaining about, the person(s) who has been discriminated against, and when the discrimination occurred; you should describe the type of discrimination you experienced (for example, race, sex or disability discrimination). You should sign and date the letter and let us know how we can reach you by telephone and mail so we can contact you. If filing online, you will still need to provide an original signature by mail, which may be done by printing and mailing a "Consent Form" linked from the bottom of the on-line complaint form. If you are under 18, the consent form must be signed by your parent or legal guardian.

How soon after the discrimination do I need to file? You need to file your complaint within 180 calendar days of the discrimination. There are certain limited circumstances that allow our agency to grant a waiver. If you need more information about your situation, contact the OCR [enforcement office](#) responsible for the State in which the institution is located, or contact OCR's office in Washington using the information above.

How promptly will OCR respond to my complaint? OCR will promptly acknowledge receiving your complaint and will contact you or your parent or guardian by letter, telephone, or email to let you know whether we will proceed further with your complaint.

What is OCR's role during the complaint process? OCR's role is to be a neutral fact-finder and to promptly resolve complaints. OCR has a variety of options for resolving complaints, including facilitated resolutions and investigations. OCR does not act as an advocate for either party during the process.

What if I am already pursuing my complaint within the school district or college or with another agency? OCR does not handle cases that are being addressed by another agency or within a school's or college's formal grievance procedure if OCR anticipates that the agency you filed with will provide you with a resolution process comparable to OCR's. Once the other complaint process is completed, you have 60 days to refile your complaint with OCR. OCR's first step will be to determine whether to defer to the result reached in the other process.

What if I need help filling out the complaint? Filing a complaint can be a lot of work. You be asked questions you don't know how to answer. In addition to a parent or guardian, you may want to ask someone from your transition team to help you. For more information, contact OCR using the information above or online at <https://wdcrocolpo1.ed.gov/CFAPPS/OCR/contactus.cfm>.

These offices at the **U.S. Department of Justice** also help with certain types of civil rights violations:

- Civil Rights Division • <https://www.justice.gov/crt> • (202) 541-4609
- Office of Justice Programs Office for Civil Rights • <https://ojp.gov/about/ocr/complaint.htm>



DAILY PLANNER

Today's Date:

What are the top 3 things I want to do today?

- _____
- _____
- _____

YOU GOT THIS

Schedule

Things to do

- 6:00 _____
- 7:00 _____
- 8:00 _____
- 9:00 _____
- 10:00 _____
- 11:00 _____
- 12:00 _____
- 1:00 _____
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A few thoughts to keep in mind...

A few tips on how to use this planner...

Start by thinking about your day and writing down all the things you need TO DO, from taking a shower before school to doing homework after school. Next, write down your appointments in the SCHEDULE. Start with the things that have a set time, like catching the bus at 7am or basketball practice at 4pm. Then find free times to add items on your TO DO list. Don't forget to schedule free time...everyone needs a break!



LETTER TEMPLATES

SAMPLE CHARACTER LETTER

Dear *[insert recipient's name or title]*,

I am writing on behalf of *[insert name of student]*. I have served as *[insert student's name]*'s teacher for approximately *[insert how long you've known the student]*. While it may not seem like a long time, I have spent many hours each day with *[him or her]* and believe I can attest to *[insert some of the student's talents and skills]*.

I first met *[insert student's name]* during a *[describe the time, e.g., challenging or complex]* time in *[his or her]* life. I have watched *[him or her]* overcome both personal and academic obstacles. Despite being faced with challenges most people would find overwhelming, *[insert student's name]* has displayed extraordinary resilience.

Most importantly, *[insert student's name]* shows a true commitment to taking control of *[his or her]* education. *[He or she]* is eager to learn and, given the exceptional improvement *[he or she]* made while in my class, I am confident *[he or she]* is ready to re-enroll in *[his or her]* local school and be a positive part of *[his or her]* community.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 123-456-7890 if you would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Insert Name of School]

RECORDS RELEASE TEMPLATE

**CONSENT FOR RELEASE OF PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION FROM EDUCATION RECORDS
PURSUANT TO THE FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT (FERPA)
20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 C.F.R § 99.30**

TO School Name and Representative			FROM Parent or Eligible Student or Child Welfare Agency Representative		
Street Address			Street Address		
City	State	ZIP	City	State	ZIP
Telephone/E-mail Address			Telephone/E-mail Address		

I authorize the aforementioned facility to disclose personally identifiable information from the education records of:

Student Name		Date of Birth			
School Name and Representative		Email Address		Fax Number	
Address		City	State	ZIP	

Purpose for this disclosure (required): _____

Specify which information may be disclosed (required): _____

Signature of Parent or Eligible Student (18+) _____ Date _____

**Please remove any reference to this school being a part of a juvenile correctional facility.*



YOUR BILL OF RIGHTS

Justice-involved youth re-entering schools have a variety of protections and rights under Federal law.

Schools cannot discriminate against me because of certain characteristics.

Public schools or schools receiving money from the Federal Government cannot discriminate against me because of my race, color, national origin, sex, or disability. (Check out the source: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/protectingstudents.html>.)

Schools and juvenile facilities must work together to transfer my records.

Under Federal law, State and local agencies, like public schools, are required to work together with my juvenile facility when I arrive and when I'm released. More specifically, Federal law requires them to share my relevant academic records and IEP and to make sure the schools or facilities I attend have the right documents. Federal privacy laws allow records to be transferred for school re-enrollment. (Check out the source: 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(1)(E), page 10 of the letter available at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/correctional-education/idea-letter.pdf>.)

Most facilities are required to make sure I am given an educational assessment when I enter.

If my facility is one of the many receiving money under Title I, Part D of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended, the facility has to work with my local educational agency to make sure my education stays on track. (Check out the source: It's a federal law - 20 U.S.C. §§ 6434(a)(2)(B), 6435(a)(2)(B), 6436(3), 6453(3), 6455(6). Find it online at <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/chapter-70/subchapter-1/part-D>.)

Special needs have special rights.

If I have been diagnosed with a disability, such as a physical, learning or emotional disability requiring special education and related services, I have the right to have a free appropriate public education with an IEP. If I need a new evaluation for a disability, I have a right to that too. When I leave a facility school to return to my home school, the facility school has to transfer my plan to my home school, and I have a right to the supports and services written down in my IEP at my home school as well. When I transfer schools, I can't be kept out of school because of a delay in transferring my records. I also have the right to have my parent, or, if my parents are unable, a surrogate parent to help manage my education while I'm incarcerated. (Check out the source: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/correctional-education/idea-letter.pdf> & <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/disability-pr.html>.)

Schools must have procedures that could give me a chance to earn credits.

Under Federal law, the State must have a plan to provide a way for me to attend a program that meets my needs after transitioning out of a facility. The State must also have a process to ensure that my credits transfer to my new school. (Check out the source: It's a federal law on State Plan requirements - 20 U.S.C. § 6434(a)(2)(E). Find it online at <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/6434>.)



Advice for Community Leaders working with Justice-Impacted Youth

If you work with justice-impacted youth, this is a great tool for you too. Education agency or community partner? Defense attorney or justice facility staff member? No matter how you serve, we recommend you provide middle and high school age students with a copy of this guide as soon as they come in contact with the justice system. Effective preparation can serve as a critical step to ensuring a smooth transition from facility back to school.

This guide is based on the research and recommendations contained in *Transition Toolkit 3.0: Meeting the Educational Needs of Youth Exposed to the Juvenile Justice System*, a publication of the National Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Neglected or Delinquent Children and Youth.

Availability of Alternate Formats

On request, this report is available in alternate formats, such as Braille, large print, audiotape, or compact disk. For more information, please contact the Department's Alternate Format Center at 202-260-0852 or the 504 coordinator via e-mail at om_eeos@ed.gov.

Notice to Limited English Proficient Persons

If you have difficulty understanding English you may request language assistance services for Department information that is available to the public. These services are available free of charge. If you need more information about interpretation or translation services, please call 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327)(TTY: 1-800-437-0833), e-mail us at Ed.Language.A@ed.gov, or write to U.S. Department of Education, Information Resource Center, 400 Maryland Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20202.

Special Thanks

The U.S. Department of Education would like to give special thanks to the youth ambassadors of the DC Reengagement Center in Washington, DC; the Juvenile Law Center in Philadelphia, PA; and Preparing Leaders of Tomorrow in New York, NY who contributed to this publication. By sharing your personal stories, including the mistakes you made and the lessons you learned, you have created new pathways to quality education for those students who find themselves in similar situations. Your resilience is a lesson to us all.

