



OJJDP

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

Youth Out of the Education Mainstream: A North Carolina Profile

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This Bulletin is one of a series of OJJDP Bulletins focusing on both promising and effective programs and innovative strategies to reach Youth Out of the Education Mainstream (YOEM). YOEM is a joint program initiative of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, U.S. Department of Education. The YOEM initiative focuses on at-risk youth who are truant, dropouts, fearful of attending school, suspended or expelled, or in need of help reintegrating into mainstream schools from juvenile detention and correctional settings. Each Bulletin in this series highlights one or more of these five separate but often related categories of problems that cause youth to forsake their education and thus place themselves at risk of delinquency.

Young people live in a world that is fast paced and full of stress. Much of what they perceive as real in their lives is defined by the mass media. Negative role models abound. Many of the communities they live in offer temptations and distractions that have the potential to divert them from completing their education in mainstream schools. Efforts must be made to prevent them from leaving or to return them to these settings so that they can ultimately complete their education and become contributing members of society. The YOEM initiative was implemented by the Center for the

Prevention of School Violence (the Center) in North Carolina to achieve these goals.

The Center, located in Raleigh, NC, is committed to the philosophy that all young people deserve the opportunity to receive an education that will provide them with the skills they need to become positive contributors to society. The Center's implementation of the YOEM initiative in early 1997 grew out of increasing concern regarding safety and security issues within North Carolina schools.¹ The Center's activities and the direction these efforts are taking show how youth who are in danger of leaving or have already left the education mainstream can be helped through a focused commitment to their success by collaborative efforts that involve schools and communities. Additionally, lessons learned along the way provide a critical knowledge base from which future Center efforts will be pursued.

The Origin of the Center's YOEM Initiative

The Center was created in 1993 as the result of a recommendation made by a statewide task force composed of representatives in North Carolina from the education, law enforcement, and legal

From the Administrator

In 1993, concerns about increasing crime and violence in North Carolina's schools led to the establishment of the Center for the Prevention of School Violence. More than 6,600 incidents of school violence were reported to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in 1994 alone. Subsequent years saw that figure rise to 8,100, with possession of a controlled substance, possession of a nonfirearm weapon, and assault on a school employee the predominant reporting categories.

In 1997, the Center began to implement its Youth Out of the Education Mainstream (YOEM) program. This YOEM Bulletin, one of a series published by OJJDP, summarizes North Carolina's implementation of the initiative at 10 sites across the State.

The Bulletin describes YOEM's impact on five targeted categories: fear of going to school, suspension or expulsion, truancy, dropping out, and reintegration from juvenile justice settings. The lessons learned from North Carolina's experiences with YOEM are worth studying, and I share the authors' hope that they will contribute to the successful implementation of this important initiative in other States.

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

communities.² The Task Force on School Violence was created to follow up on findings from a nonscientific survey of school districts by North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction (DPI), which revealed increases in weapons and violent behavior in schools over the previous 5 years. At Task Force hearings held across the State during spring 1993, students, parents, teachers, school administrators, law enforcement officers, juvenile court officials, and other community members voiced concerns about increasing levels of disruption, crime, and violence in the schools.

The Center, acting as the State's primary point of contact for addressing the problem of school violence, pursued the opportunity to implement the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) YOEM initiative as a mechanism to educate "students and practitioners who work with young people on better ways to resolve problems without violence."³ Violence in mainstream education settings was viewed as a primary component of situations in which students were either in danger of leaving or already outside the education mainstream.

The annual reports on school violence in North Carolina for the years leading up to the Center's YOEM initiative supported the view that unacceptable levels of crime and violence were occurring on school property. More than 6,600 incidents of school violence were reported to the North Carolina DPI in 1994, the baseline year for such reporting in the State.⁴ Schools reported 8,100 violent acts in 1994-95, 8,173 in 1995-96, and 8,141 in 1996-97. Throughout these years, the dominant reporting categories in North Carolina's *Annual Report on School Violence* were possession of a controlled substance (included in North Carolina's school violence categories), possession of a weapon other than a firearm, and assault on school employees. These categories accounted for 85 percent of all violent acts reported over these school years.⁵

In 1996, the Center proposed to conduct a program that would link efforts to prevent school violence with those directed at addressing the needs of young people who are at risk of leaving the education mainstream. The Center's effort was specifically designed to address the fact that many "young people are influenced by environmental risk factors such

What is "The Center" and What Does It Do?

"The Center" refers to the Center for the Prevention of School Violence. The Center is a primary point of contact for information, programs, and research about preventing school violence. The Center's vision is that "Every student will attend a school that is safe and secure, one that is free of fear and conducive to learning." This means that much of the Center's work is directed at making schools more orderly, safer, and more secure. Increasing concern about disruptions of school order as well as the occurrence of criminal and violent incidents on school property serve as the reasons for the Center's existence.

The Center is an interinstitutional service center of the Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina system. It was established in 1993 as an affiliate of the Governor's Crime Commission in the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety. Now based at the College of Education and Psychology at North Carolina State University, the Center has become an invaluable source of assistance for anyone interested in getting violence out of our schools. Few States have such a center.

The Center is organized into three areas: information, programs, and research. With reference to information, the Center serves as a clearinghouse for information about the problem of school violence as well as solutions to it. It houses a resource library of this information and responds to numerous information requests. It maintains a toll-free information line and a nationally recognized, information-rich Web site.

The programs area enables the Center to help communities and schools develop strategies that address their particular needs. The strategies focused upon are those contained in the Center's Safe Schools Pyramid: School Resource Officers; law-related education, including Teens, Crime, and the Community; conflict management and peer mediation; Students Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.); teen court and student court; and physical design and technology. In addition to helping with the development of strategies, the programs area provides technical assistance to interested schools and communities.

Research at the Center focuses upon trying to understand the problem of school violence and determining what strategies are effective in solving it. Key to the Center's research approach is recognition that each school has its own problems that need to be identified so that information generated from research about what is effective in addressing school violence can be implemented successfully. The research area strives to generate research that is of use to practitioners.

In addition to information, programs, and research, the Center is working on a number of special projects that are designed to make schools more orderly, safer, and more secure. These projects involve character education, safe school planning, at-risk youth/alternative education programs, and the training of teachers, principals, law enforcement officers, and court officials.

The Center works closely with those who are concerned about getting violence out of our schools. Center staff participate in presentations, workshops, seminars, and special events in efforts designed to get the message out that schools need to be safe and secure so that learning can take place. All of the Center's efforts are directed at making its vision that every student will attend a school that is free of fear and conducive to learning a reality.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE.
LET'S GET IT OUT OF OUR SYSTEM.

Source: Center for the Prevention of School Violence.

as negative role models exemplified by friends who are chronically truant/absent from school, lack family support and motivation for education, and [see]

violence in or near their homes and/or schools. In addition, school-related risk factors such as lack of motivation in academic performance [and] low

self-esteem . . . influence many young people to turn away from school.”⁶

The Center proposed to target five categories of youth in its YOEM initiative: youth afraid to go to school because of violence or fear of violence, youth who had been suspended or expelled, truant youth, youth who had dropped out, and youth who needed to be reintegrated into school settings from juvenile justice settings. These are the same categories of youth targeted by the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education’s YOEM initiative, under a grant to the National School Safety Center at Pepperdine University in Westlake, CA.⁷

OJJDP funding enabled the Center to begin its YOEM initiative in early 1997. Because the philosophy of the Center’s design was to use the funds in a way that would have the greatest potential to impact the targeted youth, funds were awarded to schools or programs that were already serving youth in the targeted categories. Additionally, the project was structured so that these schools or programs would receive technical support



from the Center. This support was seen as crucial because it provided organization, direction, and the potential for both short- and long-term outcomes.

The Center’s YOEM Sites

Ten schools or programs in North Carolina were funded during the first year of the Center’s YOEM initiative. All of the sites can be classified as alternative learning environments (settings outside the education mainstream), with student populations that are characterized by one or more of the YOEM targeted youth categories. In North Carolina, the term “alternative” as applied to learning environments refers to a school or program that “serves students at any level, serves suspended or expelled students, serves students whose learning styles are better served in an alternative program, or provides individualized programs outside of a standard classroom in a caring

atmosphere where students learn the skills necessary to redirect their lives.”⁸

The Center’s YOEM sites were located throughout North Carolina. Some were in rural areas such as Wentworth and Kings Mountain, and some were in urban areas such as Raleigh and Charlotte (see figure 1 on page 4). In the first year, eight high schools, one middle school, and one elementary school participated. Each sent a team of school and community personnel to a Center training program at the beginning of the project. The training was designed to assist the teams in developing their YOEM projects and to teach them approaches for problem solving in the areas of preventing school violence and helping students who are outside the education mainstream.

In the second year, three schools (the elementary school, the middle school, and a countywide high school) continued to receive funding, and a new high school was added to the initiative. The new

Reported Categories of School Violence (North Carolina)

- ◆ Assault involving the use of a weapon.
- ◆ Assault resulting in serious personal injury.
- ◆ Assault on school personnel.
- ◆ Homicide.
- ◆ Kidnaping.
- ◆ Possession of a controlled substance.
- ◆ Possession of a firearm.
- ◆ Possession of a weapon (other than a firearm).
- ◆ Rape.
- ◆ Robbery.
- ◆ Robbery with a dangerous weapon.
- ◆ Sexual assault.
- ◆ Sexual offense.
- ◆ Taking indecent liberties with a minor.

A North Carolina Profile: Jamie

Jamie is a 19-year-old junior who is attending one of the YOEM project high schools. The staff had said that Jamie has the greatest potential of anyone in his class if he is guided to use his energy and abilities to attend school, complete assignments, earn credits, and graduate. He is one of a few students who asked to be sent to the YOEM school because of the violence at his mainstream school.

Regardless of his good intentions, Jamie continually had run-ins with former gang members. Jamie would come close to fighting every day at school because he was trying to get out of a gang he joined earlier in the school year. He decided to attend the alternative school because he realized that he would not be able to graduate in this environment. Jamie is making steady progress toward his general equivalency diploma.

school, Independence High School in Winston-Salem, NC, is the longest running alternative high school in North Carolina and provides the Center with a YOEM setting that can enhance understanding of providing learning environments for youth out of the education mainstream.

YOEM Targeted Youth Categories

Fear of Going to School

Events throughout the United States during the 1997-98 school year heightened interest in and concern about safety and security within schools. National studies in recent years provide evidence that students everywhere have concerns about disorder, crime, and violence in their schools.⁹ Recent reports provide the following evidence from nationwide data:

- ◆ Ten percent of all public schools experienced one or more serious violent crimes (murder, rape or an other type of sexual battery, suicide, a physical attack or fight with a weapon, or robbery) that were reported to law

enforcement officials during the 1996 school year.¹⁰

- ◆ Four percent of students reported that they were victims of school-related violence in 1995.¹¹
- ◆ Twenty-nine percent of elementary, 34 percent of middle, and 20 percent of high school students say they worry about being victims of crime at school.¹²
- ◆ Twenty-eight percent of students reported the presence of street gangs at school.¹³
- ◆ Thirty-seven percent of students acknowledged that they were afraid of gang attacks at school and 29 percent said they feared such attacks when traveling to and from school.¹⁴

Although North Carolina students have not been formally surveyed about their fears, the Task Force on School Violence heard their concerns at public hearings that were held in spring 1993. More recently, 37 percent of adults who responded to a survey in North Carolina indicated that school violence in their communities was a “very serious” or

“serious” problem.¹⁵ In response, North Carolina lawmakers passed legislation that requires all school districts and schools to design and implement a safe schools plan. Some 20 States have or are currently considering such legislation.

North Carolina’s legislation requires that efforts to create and maintain safe schools must involve all components (physical, social, curricular, and parental) of the school and community. These components align with the Center’s Safe Schools Pyramid approach, which emphasizes the “three p’s” of school safety: place (physical environment), people (school climate), and purpose (education). The strategies that make up the pyramid reflect the different “p’s” and provide approaches for schools to consider in addressing all dimensions of safety (see figure 2). The pyramid rests on the community; schools are reflections of both the good and bad found in the communities they serve.

Two YOEM project sites (a middle school and a high school) addressed students’ fears about going to school by making one of the strategies in the Safe

Figure 1: The Center’s YOEM Sites

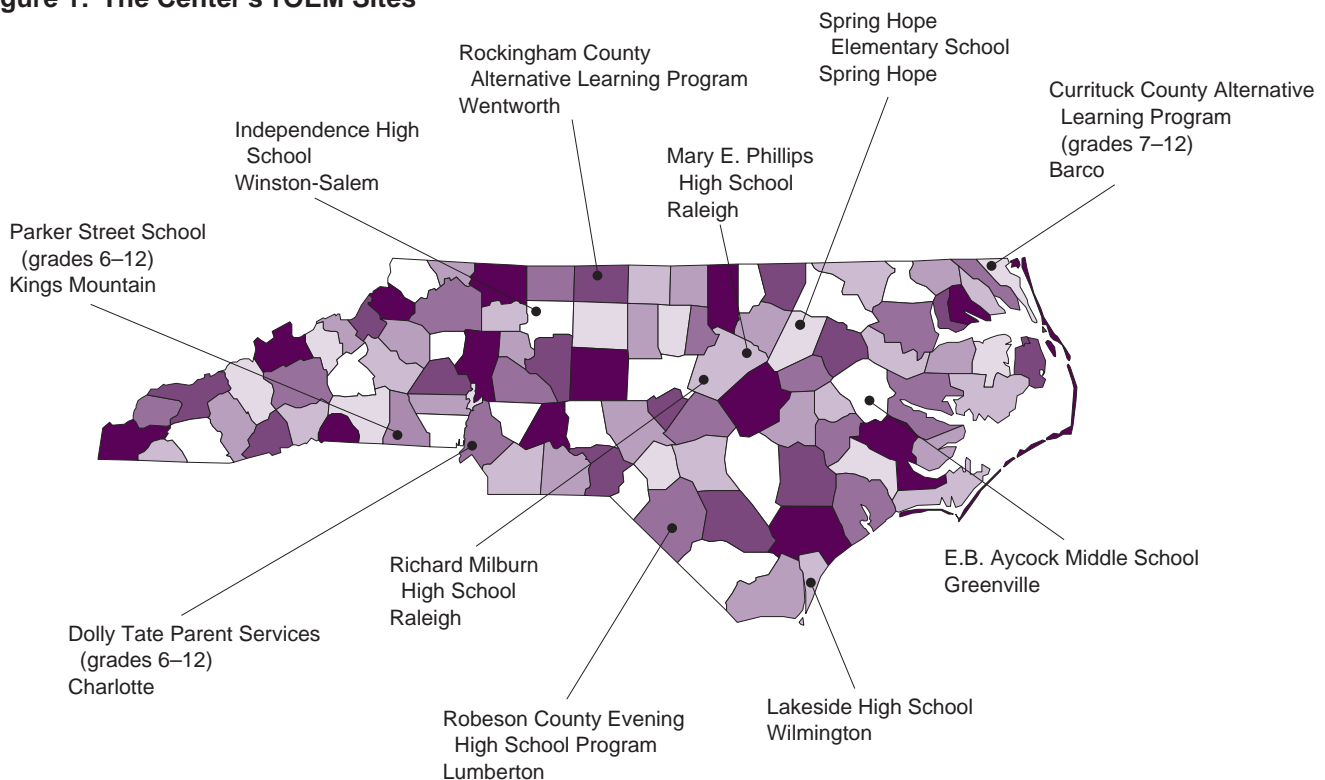
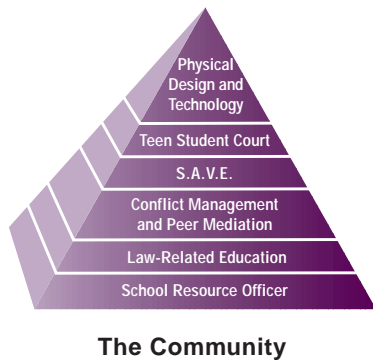


Figure 2: Safe Schools Pyramid



Schools Pyramid—School Resource Officers (SRO’s)—the mechanism through which YOEM was conducted. SRO’s are law enforcement officers who apply a community policing philosophy within a school environment. Schools are their permanent beats, and they are present to address safety and security issues proactively. SRO’s are trained to perform three roles: law enforcement, legal counseling, and legal teaching.

In both schools, SRO’s were involved with small groups of students. In the middle school, the SRO was responsible for supervising workgroups that carried out a campus beautification project. The logic behind this project involved a combination of the “broken window”¹⁶ theory of crime and more recent research that emphasizes the importance of “school connectedness.”¹⁷ The “broken window” theory proposes that crime is more likely to occur at locations that are unattended. If a window is broken and remains unrepaired, another window is likely to be broken and then another. The lack of attention to what needs repair sends a message that the location is “fair game” for vandalism and other types of crime. In contrast, attending to an area—repairing the window—discourages vandalism and crime. The SRO worked with students who were part of the school’s program for exceptional children¹⁸ and who, for that reason, sometimes did not feel safe in the school setting. The SRO was able to build relationships with the students and help them feel safer and more connected to school.

The SRO at the high school worked with male students, some of whom had been involved in neighborhood gangs. The SRO’s presence and the individual

attention provided to these students by the SRO, who worked with them in a school club, the Distinguished Gentlemen, helped them feel safer about attending school.

Throughout North Carolina, SRO’s like the ones described above are being assigned to middle and high schools. There has been an 85-percent increase in the number of SRO’s in the past 2 years because of State funding and the success stories in local communities about the work of SRO’s in schools.

Suspension or Expulsion

Like many other States, North Carolina recently has seen increased implementation of “zero tolerance” policies in its schools. A current study of district safe school plans revealed that many schools are using zero tolerance as a standard for behavior. These school or district policies “mandate predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses.”¹⁹ Often these consequences or punishments include suspension for extensive periods of time or, in extreme situations, expulsion.

North Carolina’s Department of Public Instruction conducted a study of out-of-school suspensions during the 1995–96 school year and found that nearly 82,000 students had been suspended.²⁰ This means that “approximately 5.9% of the State’s students

were suspended out of school at least once during the 1995–96 school year.”²¹ The reasons for these suspensions included class disruptions, rule violations, substance abuse, fighting, and other unacceptable behavior. North Carolina’s DPI maintains a record of unacceptable behavior and its consequences, which can be found in its *Annual Report on School Violence*. For the 14 categories of reported incidents in 1995–96, 5,836 students received up to 10 days of out-of-school suspension, 1,614 received suspensions from 10 to 365 days, and 209 were expelled.²²

Often, when students receive long-term suspensions, they are recommended for assignment to alternative schools or programs. Many of the students at YOEM project sites had been suspended from their mainstream schools for offenses ranging from class disruption to possession of a weapon or controlled substance. One of the sites, the countywide high school, exclusively handles students on long-term suspension for possession of weapons or controlled substances. The mission of the program is to “enable long-term suspended students not only to return to their base schools with new tools for academic success, but to return with a new attitude and changed behavior for all-around success in a traditional school environment.”²³

A North Carolina Profile: Officer Dennison

Officer Dennison has been a School Resource Officer for 2 years. He works at a local middle school and is an advocate for children, especially at-risk youth. He recognizes the problems and severity of these students’ situations and wants to be an integral part of their journey to success.

Officer Dennison loves children and is ready to accept the challenge of helping these students work through the problems in their lives. He recognizes that he is a positive role model and uses it to his advantage by becoming actively involved with students. He visits their homes and meets their families. The children come to him with their problems and also with information on crimes being committed. Officer Dennison gains their trust by building strong relationships. He also stresses the importance of giving them attention and a chance to express themselves. This is very important in trying to make these youth resilient to risks that include poor family settings, use of drugs in their neighborhoods, and lack of proper guidance.

Officer Dennison believes that a key factor in building resiliency in youth is giving them a nurturing atmosphere and helping them set high expectations. Letting them know that they can do whatever they want in life by setting goals and working hard to achieve them has given them greater control over their lives. Their self-esteem has grown as goals are achieved as a result of their efforts. He wants every student to have an opportunity to receive an education, especially those who have the greatest number of risk factors in their lives.

One of the approaches used by this program was teaching legal education, a strategy on the Center's Safe Schools Pyramid. Teens, Crime, and the Community (TCC), funded by OJJDP, includes a curriculum developed by Street Law, Inc., a user-friendly textbook, the involvement of community resource people, and service learning projects. TCC was implemented as a major component of the program's YOEM effort. The students involved in the TCC project developed a coloring book about traffic safety for neighborhood elementary school children. At the end of the project, one student wrote: "This really helped me a lot. It helped me learn how to respect and be nice to other people. I learned if you work hard toward your goals, you will make it. You've got to want it yourself." Another wrote: "I feel that the project has changed my life because it helped me get caught up. I'm not a troublemaker [any]more and I have respect for my elders."

Students on long-term suspension, in situations such as a student assault on a teacher, are increasingly being recommended for placement in alternative set-



tings in school systems throughout North Carolina. The new State legislation, described above, prompts such recommendations if alternative options are available. An ongoing study of alternative settings in the State reveals that even though many exist, there are not enough to handle the number of students who would potentially benefit from them.²⁴ North Carolina policymakers are currently examining how these options can be expanded to meet their needs.

A North Carolina Profile: Educator Teresa Price

Teresa Price is the program director of an alternative learning program that serves an entire county. Throughout her career in education, Price has recognized the need to focus on students with multiple risk factors in their lives. Her first encounters with at-risk students were as a teacher in both middle school and high school. When she saw that some students were living in poverty or had unstable families and communities, she wanted to give them a chance to succeed academically and in other areas of their lives.

Price believes that in order to make students resilient to risk factors such as a weak family structure, a lack of social competency, substance abuse, and the lack of a positive self-image, schools must be more willing to change their internal structure and the way they interact with each student. She advocates reducing the size of classes, individualized teaching, and nurturing relationships between teachers and students. She sees these factors as steps leading to the success of at-risk youth in the education setting.

Truancy

Students who have difficulty attending school every day are headed for trouble. The *Manual to Combat Truancy*, a joint effort of the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, states: "Truancy is the first sign of trouble; the first indicator that a young person is giving up and losing his or her way."²⁵ OJJDP's Bulletin entitled *Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems* shows that truancy is "a stepping stone to delinquent and criminal activity" by explaining how frequently missing school negatively impacts school performance and can even lead to delinquent behavior.²⁶

In North Carolina, truants are counted as part of the tally of "undisciplined juveniles" in the State. In addition to students who are regularly absent from school, this tally includes youth who run away from home or who are considered ungovernable by parents. In 1997, more than 3,600 youth were counted as undisciplined juveniles in North Carolina.

Truancy has a tremendous impact on the learning environment of a school—on the student who regularly misses classes and on the teachers and classmates who must deal with interruptions

in the learning process by students with irregular attendance who try to "make up" for missed classes and homework assignments. Because of this impact, approaches are being used that make getting to school easier and more appealing. Several of the YOEM projects helped students get to school by providing access to transportation. Extended hours of operation also were pursued at several sites because the work schedules of some students interfered with their attendance during regular hours.

In an effort to make school more appealing, systems of positive reinforcement were established at two of the YOEM sites. At one site, students were paid with vouchers from local businesses for work in a "school factory" that produced items with holiday themes. At a second site, students were rewarded with trophies and certificates for improved attendance and academic performance. A year-end banquet was also held to honor graduates who had successfully participated in YOEM activities.

The Center's overall approach to creating safe schools focuses on maintaining educational environments that appeal to young people. Student-initiated school clubs, called Students Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.), focus on the enthusiasm and energy students can bring to creating safe environments for learning. Approaches such as S.A.V.E. decrease the likelihood of truancy because they allow students to develop a connection to school and to feel safe about being at school.

Dropping Out

"A dropout is a student who leaves school before graduation or completion of a program of study for any reason except death or transfer to another school."²⁷ National statistics concerning dropouts are staggering in terms of numbers and implications:

- ◆ Twenty percent of adults in the United States over the age of 25 have not completed high school.²⁸
- ◆ Twenty-five percent of all urban high schools in poor neighborhoods have dropout rates of 50 percent or more.²⁹
- ◆ Eighty-two percent of prisoners are high school dropouts.³⁰

Reasons given by students across the Nation for dropping out of school are: (1) school related (e.g., did not like school, could not get along with others, did not

feel safe, could not keep up with school-work, was failing); (2) job related (e.g., had to work, had to find a job); and (3) family related (e.g., had to support a family, was pregnant, became a parent, got married).³¹

Over the past 3 years, North Carolina has seen more than 19,000 students drop out each year.³² According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, reasons for dropping out include academic failure, discipline problems, employment, illness, marriage, family instability, and/or dislike of school.³³ OJJDP's Bulletin entitled *Keeping Young People in School: Community Programs That Work* also cites these reasons and further explains that dropping out is a problem not confined to the high school level.³⁴

Several of the Center's YOEM project sites approached this problem with the reasons for dropping out clearly in mind. One of the projects targeted pregnant girls and teen mothers who probably would have dropped out if there had not been a YOEM project. The urban high school where this project took place enhanced its program goal of reducing the number of teen mothers who drop out of school by creating an extended-day program. The program allowed students to make up failed courses to earn credits for graduation.

The elementary school also approached the issue of dropping out through its YOEM effort. It is important to understand that "by third grade, students who eventually drop out of high school are significantly different in behavior, grades, retentions, and achievement scores from those who eventually graduate."³⁵ Through its YOEM project,

the elementary school addressed early lack of achievement by targeting end-of-grade test scores. Students with low scores were seen as reaching a turning point in their education. In helping these students raise their scores to grade level, the intent was to prevent all of the problems—from poor grades to poor discipline to potentially dropping out—that can result when students fall behind academically.

Reintegrating From Juvenile Justice Settings

We as teachers have to remember that the students' pasts are not their futures.

—Teacher, 1997 YOEM training

The last YOEM targeted youth category involves the difficult process of reintegrating youth who have been in juvenile detention or correctional settings into mainstream school environments. As more and younger juveniles committed crimes and were arrested between 1985 and 1994, this process needed to occur more frequently.

Studies indicate that while juvenile crime peaked in 1994 and has declined since then, it is still a concern.³⁶ North Carolina's concern was triggered by the fact that from 1979 to 1996 the juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes surged 172 percent.³⁷ According to a recent study by the North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission, "Juveniles in North Carolina are committing more serious violent crimes, more robberies, more crimes against strangers, and more crimes involving drugs and weapons. Figures show

A North Carolina Profile: Laura

Laura is a 19-year-old single parent who lives in a low-income housing complex. She had dropped out of school in the past but started attending the alternative school before her daughter was born. Laura plans on staying in school until she graduates, largely because of the supportive staff and the individualized attention she is receiving.

Laura left her family in West Virginia and moved to North Carolina at the age of 14. Laura says, "Nobody gave me anything, especially my family. . . . I worked hard for everything I got." The lost love and attention of her family were replaced by the staff at the alternative school program.

The only thing that Laura does not like about the alternative school program is how the community perceives it. The negative connotations associated with the program motivate her to prove that the community is wrong. She recently got a job so that she could move out of her apartment and get off welfare. Laura does not like receiving handouts, but she realizes that she cannot make it alone; she cherishes the daycare services and moral support that the program offers. After graduation, Laura plans to become a nurse.

that juveniles appear to be starting to commit those crimes at younger ages."³⁸

These data suggest that there is a growing need in North Carolina for services that address the reintegration of juveniles from detention and correctional settings into mainstream schools. Until recently, the services that students received largely came from the Division of Youth Services, which was responsible for juvenile detention centers and training schools in the State. The Division of Youth Services and the Administrative Office of the Courts, Juvenile Services Division, provide aftercare assistance to youth who have been in juvenile justice settings. However, there was no State agency in North Carolina that collected data on the number of juveniles who attempt to return to mainstream settings. Existing data are school district specific, but it is difficult to obtain these statistics because of the confidentiality of the information involved. Steps are being taken

A North Carolina Profile: Bryan

Bryan is a senior at an alternative high school. Because he chronically missed classes at his mainstream school, he began to fail and was sent to the alternative school. A contributing factor to Bryan's missing classes is that his mother works a late shift; her schedule puts the household on a daily routine that is quite different from a typical one.

Bryan likes attending this school and participates in many activities. In particular, he appreciates the individualized attention and small class sizes. "This kind of attention is the reason why I don't return to my other school," Bryan stated.

Bryan is considered to be at risk because of his single-parent home and a community setting that is lacking in educational motivation. Although his family is not economically deprived, Bryan works after school and is taking on more responsibility.

After graduation, Bryan will enter the Marine Corps; after that, he plans on going to college to pursue a degree in biochemistry. Bryan has a bright future, and he attributes a lot of his progress to his nurturing alternative high school.

to address the issue of confidentiality by providing training sessions to help professional staff adhere to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a Federal law that governs the disclosure of information from educational records. The training sessions will use a joint publication of OJJDP and the Family Policy Compliance Office, U.S. Department of Education, on FERPA.³⁹

In North Carolina and in the Center's YOEM sites, many youth who have been in the juvenile justice system are attempting to reenter mainstream settings. Several of the YOEM sites reported that some of their students had been in correctional facilities. Staff at these sites recognize the difficulties associated with reintegration. "Institutional resistance and barriers between the educational and justice systems often result in a lack of advanced planning and coordination that further exacerbates the problem."⁴⁰ One YOEM alternative school held an open house for the faculties of the mainstream schools in an effort to overcome some of the misunderstanding and fear that might arise when the students return to their mainstream schools. At other sites, school social workers, SRO's, and other school staff worked more closely with the students to assist them in overcoming the difficulties of reintegration.

The Center also participated in training juvenile court counselors in an effort to bridge the gap between the education and justice systems. The training focused on the Center's experiences with the YOEM initiative and addressed the lessons learned from its ongoing YOEM effort. These lessons provide the foundation for the Center's knowledge about the categories of targeted youth and offer direction to the Center's future efforts.

Lessons Learned

The Center's YOEM initiative offers the following 10 lessons from the first year of implementation. They are intended for projects that target youth who are in danger of leaving or have already left the education mainstream. Many of these lessons can be applied to all types of educational environments. The Center hopes that the lessons learned will contribute to the successful implementation of other projects and help educators meet the needs of students to enable them to take full advantage of their educational opportunities.



- ◆ **Lesson 1: The enormity of the problems of youth who are in danger of leaving or have already left the education mainstream should not preclude efforts to help them.** The Center realizes that lack of family support and motivation for education, negative role models, and socioeconomic pressures place many youth at risk.⁴¹ Several YOEM sites addressed the issue of involving parents in their children's education in the following ways: by helping parents to write and sign contracts that enroll students in the alternative school, by encouraging parents to volunteer at school and for field trips, by helping to plan and by attending parents' day and open house events at the school, and by recognizing parents' contributions to the school at the annual school awards banquet. Each site tried to provide positive role models to balance young people's exposure to negative influences in their homes, neighborhoods, and the larger society. A few sites, using services such as day-care, transportation, and extended-day classes, targeted some of the socio-

economic factors that make it difficult for some students to attend mainstream schools.

- ◆ **Lesson 2: Those involved in initiatives like YOEM should not lose sight of the "people" component in their projects.** School personnel are needed who are dedicated, motivated, knowledgeable about their students' needs, and undeterred in their efforts to help youth. Often, a great deal of time is spent considering project components such as resources, goals, objectives, and schedules. However, projects are not likely to be successful without dedicated people to carry out necessary tasks, and it is important to design a variety of activities that demonstrate commitment to these youth.
- ◆ **Lesson 3: Project planning provides direction to those who have only good intentions driving their efforts.** A structured plan that is designed by all the YOEM stakeholders (education, law enforcement, social services, parents, students, and other interested parties) provides a framework in which a project can be implemented. Without such a plan, the details of how, when, and by whom tasks will be accomplished can become obstacles to project success. A combination of planning, good intentions, information sharing, and dedicated staff will enable a project to focus on accomplishing its goals.
- ◆ **Lesson 4: Setting goals is an essential step in project development, but modifications to goals and to corresponding project activities should be anticipated.** A few YOEM sites had to modify planned goals and activities because of timeframe considerations and other concerns. At one site, staff recognized that some goals would have to be met in the long term.
- ◆ **Lesson 5: Freedom to choose how to apply project resources is important to site personnel.** It is important to allow school personnel, those closest to the students targeted by the YOEM initiative, the freedom to spend grant funds in ways they feel would benefit students the most. This freedom will sustain motivation for the project and enable sites to use the knowledge of those who work with the students every day to enhance project efforts.
- ◆ **Lesson 6: Project "customers" (students) should be asked how certain**

aspects of projects are to be conducted. Projects that allowed students to participate in planning appeared to be more successful because students “buy into” those projects more. It is important for these youth to have an opportunity to express their opinions and feel a sense of control over this aspect of their lives.

◆ **Lesson 7: Grant projects can benefit greatly from the technical assistance offered by the Center to the sites.**

Projects conducted in school settings often do not have a technical assistance component. YOEM site personnel repeatedly expressed the view that technical assistance played an important role in keeping them focused and providing help when it was needed.

◆ **Lesson 8: Although an evaluation component can offer knowledge about project performance, it can also bolster project performance.**

This lesson involves site evaluations that were conducted during the first year of the Center’s YOEM initiative. In addition to providing programmatic technical assistance throughout the projects, the Center provided each site with an evaluator who conducted process evaluations and tried to determine

the project’s short- and long-term outcomes. The evaluators determined that their most important role was to motivate sites to maintain their focus on goals and strategies.

◆ **Lesson 9: It is difficult for evaluations to isolate project impacts, especially when projects are blended with ongoing efforts at YOEM sites.** This lesson involves the difficulty of differentiating between the impact of the YOEM initiative projects and the impact of other efforts being put forth at the YOEM sites. This can be a particular concern when site visits and data collection opportunities are limited. This difficulty reveals that most of the YOEM projects were extensions of existing programs and that site personnel successfully blended the YOEM projects into their overall efforts.

◆ **Lesson 10: Safe and stable learning environments, small classes, one-on-one instruction, caring teachers and administrators, and access to resources are the keys to success in education today.** Successful approaches encompass some or all of these characteristics. These factors are seen as especially important for at-risk youth who are involved in YOEM projects.

The Future of the Center’s YOEM Initiative

The second year of the Center’s YOEM initiative focused on how to work successfully with the youth themselves to build resiliency. To date, the following factors have been identified and will be studied further:

- ◆ Involving communities in educational efforts by establishing connections and implementing service learning projects.
- ◆ Providing nurturing learning environments.
- ◆ Building personal relationships.
- ◆ Providing mentors and opportunities for interaction with positive role models.
- ◆ Encouraging academic success by setting expectations that are consistent and high.

The Center views these new lessons as opportunities to link its YOEM initiative with efforts directed at building resiliency in all youth.

Conclusion

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence is a mechanism through which recent efforts to address the problems of youth out of the education mainstream in North Carolina are being pursued. As a result of these efforts, lessons that lend themselves to the best programmatic practices have been developed and lessons that will directly enhance work with youth are being developed.

The lessons learned to date have provided the Center with a critical knowledge base for implementing future efforts. By bringing together schools and communities to address the needs of youth, these ongoing efforts will be comprehensive and student focused and will strengthen their resiliency to risk factors in their lives.

The lessons learned from the Center’s YOEM initiative illustrate what can be gained when efforts are focused through places such as the Center that are committed to a goal. In this case, the goal is for all young people to have the opportunity to receive an education that will enable them to become successful, contributing members of society.

A North Carolina Profile: Two Worlds

Helping today’s youth become more resilient is a very difficult task. All educators are faced with the challenge of teaching their students skills to overcome the many risk factors they face, but they may not understand the extent to which risks define the lives of the young people they teach. A major factor that many youth confront on a daily basis is the community setting in which they live. The sad fact is that many of our young people live in communities that do not promote the same societal and educational values as the schools. In reality, many of today’s young people are living in two completely different worlds—one defined by school and one defined by the streets.

The conflict between the school and the street is one I experienced firsthand. Throughout my childhood, I would sit in front of my house waiting for the schoolbus to arrive; across the street, some of my friends were gambling, selling drugs, and cutting school. Their world was my world, but I still made it out successfully. How did I do it? What were the motivating factors that propelled me to go far in life, even though I faced many of the same risk factors as my friends who did not make it? My stability and advantage came from two nurturing parents who maintained high educational expectations for me. Most of my friends did not have this kind of support, and they became vulnerable to outside influences.

From where I am today, as the YOEM coordinator for the Center for the Prevention of School Violence, I can see how the protective factors of family and education outweighed the risks presented by the streets. There is a definite division between the school and the community for many young people. To build resiliency in youth, cooperation among the family, school, and community is necessary. With such resiliency, the likelihood that the two worlds will collide can be greatly diminished, and the world that results will be a better place for all.

For Further Information

For further information on the Center's YOEM initiative, contact:

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