NDTAC

The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center
for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk
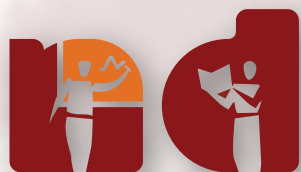
PRACTICE GUIDE

Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems Through Interagency Communication and Collaboration

About the National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk

This document was developed by the National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk (NDTAC), which is funded by a contract awarded by the U.S. Department of Education and to the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in Washington, D.C. The mission of the National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk (NDTAC) is to improve educational programming for youth who are neglected, delinquent or at-risk of academic failure. NDTAC's mandates are to provide information, resources, and direct technical assistance to States and those who support or provide education to youth who are neglected or delinquent, develop a model and tools to assist States and providers with reporting data and evaluating their services, and serve as a facilitator to increase information-sharing and peer-to-peer learning at State and local levels. For additional information on NDTAC, visit the Center's Web site at http://www.neglected-delinquent.org.

Preface

In May 2010, the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) at Georgetown University released the monograph *Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems* (Leone & Weinberg). The monograph examined a number of topics relevant to the education and experiences of youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and "crossover youth" who find themselves at some point in their lives involved with both systems. The authors' intent was to review issues concerning, and provide information about, youth whose educational needs have been inadequately addressed by agencies entrusted to serve them. The monograph was primarily designed as a source of information for policymakers and practitioners interested in improving education services for these vulnerable youth. It examined challenges faced by these youth, barriers to providing effective services for them, and the policies and practices of several jurisdictions that have attempted to meet their unique needs. The monograph concluded with a discussion of principles and the design of systems "to serve these youth and ensure they experience more positive outcomes in school and ultimately, in the community as young adults" (pg. 8).

In partnership with CJJR, the National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk (NDTAC) is developing a series of practice guides that build on the monograph's principles and their respective practices by providing the field with concrete strategies for adopting those principles and practices. The strategies, as well as potential challenges to accomplishing them and recommendations to overcome those challenges, were developed by NDTAC and are drawn from the experiences of the authors and supported by general research. It is NDTAC's and CJJR's hope that these guides provide administrators and practitioners in juvenile justice, child welfare, and beyond with the "how-tos" they need to achieve the type of comprehensive system envisioned by the CJJR monograph.

This NDTAC practice guide examines the principle that **interagency communication and collaboration** is vital to fostering better outcomes for youth involved with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Before systems can offer high-quality education services, including those focused on young children, providers within the system must work together to align resources and capitalize on each other's strengths. In doing so, education and related services can be better tailored to meet the needs of children and youth. Successful interagency communication and collaboration require strong leadership within and between agencies, to champion and sustain collaborative efforts. Additionally, agency staff will need motivation and readiness to buy into policies and practices that may represent changes to what they are used to. Finally, in measuring and evaluating a system's impact on better outcomes for these youth, participating agencies must be willing to share information and data with each other and work collectively to analyze and document both their successes and areas for improvement. As such, interagency collaboration is a necessary, but not sufficient, step toward addressing the unmet educational needs of children and youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

Contents

Introduction

Youth involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems generally demonstrate poor performance on educational outcome measures. These youth are likely to experience academic and behavioral challenges, be in need of special education and related services, have mental health needs that affect academic success, and drop out before finishing high school (Leone & Weinberg, 2010). A key factor in such outcomes for these youth is the lack of collaboration between the child welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems. Fostering a system of shared and coordinated responsibility on the part of child-serving agencies is one way to improve the educational success and overall well-being of system-involved youth. Such a collaborative system is one in which all agencies take it upon themselves individually and communally to ensure that all students under their care progress academically.

NDTAC proposes that Title I, Part D, and other Federal programs can promote increased interagency collaboration and, in turn, these programs and their outcomes for youth are strengthened by this collaboration. By aligning the use of Federal funds under a State Plan, monitoring programs to ensure coordination and collaboration within and across agencies, and sharing outcome and other relevant data between agencies, States can work toward a more collaborative approach to providing education services and supports to youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Furthermore, collaboration can reduce fragmentation and duplication of services, improving program efficiency and outcomes for youth.

Achieving effective interagency collaboration can be challenging. Substantial barriers often exist within and between agencies, and each agency must be committed to overcoming them to be successful. Some of the barriers to collaboration within systems include:

- **Philosophical Barriers.** Each agency involved in a collaboration has its own mission, mandates, and goals. Making interagency collaboration work requires the dedication of staff, funding, and time, as well as a willingness to accept philosophical differences and implement cultural and structural changes within each organization. It requires that all agencies see the collaboration as furthering their own mandates and objectives.

- **Structural Barriers.** Typically agencies have separate funding streams and independent management and decisionmaking structures. This independence may conflict with the need for agencies to work together to coordinate services and supports for the youth they serve. Doing so requires that agencies share relevant information and work with each other, which can be challenging on many levels.

- **Language and Communication Barriers.** Agencies typically have their own "languages," made up of unique terminology, acronyms, and services. A lack of understanding of another agency's language may result in frustration and unwillingness or inability to communicate and thus collaborate with one another.

- **Staff Resistance.** For agency staff, formal interagency collaboration may be seen as a major change in job responsibilities, increased workload, and decreased autonomy. Additionally, agencies are generally staffed by individuals who are trained in particular disciplines, are socialized within a particular agency culture, and are focused on addressing particular problems and needs. Interagency collaboration requires agency staff to operate outside this comfort zone, learn to communicate and work with individuals from different disciplines and cultures, and embrace a shared set of goals and needs. (Shufelt, Cocozza, & Skowyra, 2010)

Despite these challenges, interagency collaboration is worth the effort on behalf of agencies because of the concrete benefits realized by agency staff, the youth and families they serve, and the overall child-serving system. It may be useful for agencies to think of collaboration as a continuum. Upon examining their relationship with their peers, agencies may find that they simply coexist with each other and operate more-or-less in silos. But as agencies find themselves willing to work more closely with one another, levels of communication, cooperation, and coordination may increase. The ultimate goal then would be that all agencies belong to one system, where there is frequent, purposeful communication characterized by mutual trust, and coordination and integration of services that create greater system efficiency and effectiveness.

Although it is not an easy task, effective interagency communication and collaboration is necessary to develop the type of system needed to address the comprehensive educational and related needs of youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. The remainder of this guide provides strategies that administrators and practitioners can follow to implement practices the foster interagency communication and collaboration. Additionally, resources and examples focused on helping users understand and implement the strategies are included at the end of this guide.

Practice 1: Engage in Collaborative Decisionmaking

One way in which agencies can work toward interagency collaboration, building on their communication and cooperation efforts, is to make relevant cross-system practice and resource decisions jointly rather than independently. This means that youth involved in two or more systems will have their needs addressed through joint meetings between those agencies providing care. This is not easy and requires strong leaders in each organization and their willingness to make it happen. Once leaders establish a collaborative policy, the process can be pushed out across individual agencies. This process may be accomplished through leadership teams established to promote more effective intra- and interagency communication and better collaboration.

Joint decisionmaking can lead to more effective services targeting the needs of youth, families, and the community and requires strong cross-agency leadership. An example of this practice is having child welfare agencies work collaboratively with education programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start to provide quality early education for children living in foster care. Such a program might require the intervention of family courts having jurisdiction over child welfare cases (Leone & Weinberg, 2010). In this example, as in others of collaboration among child-serving agencies, the ultimate goal of cross-agency decisionmaking is to use all available resources to meet the needs of children and youth who are at risk.

Strategy 1: Memoranda of Understanding To Share Information

Agencies charged with providing education and related services to youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems may consider the establishment of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) as one of the initial steps in engaging in collaborative decisionmaking. Doing so may expedite the availability and improve the quality and relevance of services provided and help eliminate duplication of efforts and services. MOUs can outline in detail how such agencies will share information regarding specific needs, demographic information, and historical data relative to youths' records. The creation of such documents will allow all entities access to relevant information and data (strengths and weaknesses within the family unit; current medical, mental health, and educational records; outcomes of previous intervention strategies, etc.), which can be analyzed to build protocols for providing needed services for youth and families in a cost-effective manner that avoids duplication of efforts. Support for this type of change requires the engagement of families and other advocates to push cross-systems agencies to deliver a process that works for them. The Family Educational Rights and

Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) are frequently made false barriers to the sharing of information, but families can help resolve issues if protections can be put in the MOU to make them feel safe when relevant and appropriate information is shared between agencies.

An MOU for information sharing between child-serving agencies should verify agreed-upon arrangements of policies, procedures, agency responsibilities, and resources. The MOU should encompass:

- Purpose

- Governance

- Participating agencies and their responsibilities

- Shared funding and costs

- Legal issues regarding confidentiality and disclosure of information

- A common consent form

- Infrastructure for information sharing

- Information security and penalties for improper disclosures

- Training and conflict resolution processes

- Resources to support needed information technology (IT) (Mankey, 2008)

By establishing clear expectations and protocols, MOUs may be one solution for agencies' difficulty receiving timely and reliable information on youth. To expedite the sharing of information, an MOU should address three critical components: collaboration, confidentiality, and technology (Mankey, Baca, Rondenell, Webb, & McHugh, 2006). Improving the exchange of information is necessary for assessing youth, family, and community needs; determining appropriate supervision, sanctions, and incentives for youth; and coordinating a wide array of needed services while avoiding fragmentation and duplication. Reliability in access to information can make service delivery more youth- and family-focused and more aligned with service plans (Constantine, Aronson, & Shannan, 1997). While the provisions of MOUs may lead to more efficient access to useful data, improvements in data quality, and the elimination of redundancy, implementing these documents may require a significant shift in the established information-sharing practices of many agencies.

Examples and resources for understanding and helping to implement this strategy are available at the end of this guide in the **Resources and Examples** section.

Challenges/Obstacles to Accomplishing Strategy 1:

- Agency regulations or policies that may restrict, prevent, or discourage sharing information between agencies (e.g., FERPA, HIPAA)

- Lack of a leader or "champion" at a high enough level to make this happen

- Fear that the agency may be subject to legal action if sensitive information is released and making sure agencies' legal sections do not overprotect from information-sharing liability

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges/Obstacles to Strategy 1:

- Assemble issue leaders who are championing the MOU with the legal staff from multiple agencies to discuss what Federal and State statutes, local laws, and charters stand in the way of information sharing. They also should address what can be shared, how it can be shared, with whom it might be shared, and who grants permission for information sharing within each agency.

- Review MOUs from jurisdictions that have overcome obstacles to sharing information, and have agency attorneys contact attorneys and others in those jurisdictions to discuss concerns.

- Set up specific procedures, including forms to be used and any electronic transmittal of forms or records, that will expedite the sharing of information.

- Create or change statutes, policies, and/or regulations to establish in writing the prescribed number of business days one entity has between receipt of the request for records and their provision (many of these requirements are already included in State and Federal statutes).

- Tie enhanced funding to the ability of multiple agencies to sign an MOU focused on interagency information sharing.

- Adopt common screening tools to identify youth who are at risk for atypical development, especially as it relates to school performance (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, cognitive impairments).

- Develop and use common parental permission document(s) for the release of information.

- Make release documents available in local courts and intake offices.

Strategy 2: Consolidated/Single Case Management and a "No Wrong Door" Approach

Many communities and State agencies throughout the country are adopting a "no wrong door" policy with regards to providing various social services to diverse groups within the community. "No wrong door" refers to a service system that welcomes youth and families in need and helps them connect with services regardless of the agency where they seek access (Montgomery County Office of Family and Children First, 2010). "No wrong door" policies require all child-serving agencies to respond to youths' and families' needs directly or through linkage to other appropriate programs (2010). This is an alternative to addressing only the needs that are within the scope of a specific agency, without helping consumers connect to other needed services.

For example, focusing on stated and assessed needs for a youth who is struggling in school and whose case has been brought to the attention of the school's student assistance team, a comprehensive list of available services in the community should be used to connect the youth and his or her family with needed services and supports. Having the opportunity to meet with the youth and his or her family at the school, for example, allows the child-caring professionals to suggest possible solutions to problems, such as need for adequate housing, transportation, mental health counseling, and tutorial services that affect the student's ability to be successful in school. Such a meeting not only affords the opportunity to hear directly from the family about their immediate needs, but also allows the professionals in the situation to base decisions made on the family's direction. Creating an MOU (as discussed in Strategy 1) is a logical first step that may afford child-serving agencies an opportunity to offer the same services to youth who are neglected or delinquent and their families, while providing a framework for the policy changes that are essential, if the practices are to change.

Consolidating case management for juvenile justice-involved youth could help in a situation where a teacher recognizes that one of his or her students needs counseling. The teacher may have access to a history detailing the student's prior treatment plan as well as contacts within the mental health community to help establish new services for the student and his or her family. The student's probation officer could perhaps also become involved. Because all of the professionals in the situation would have access to the same information, the steps needed to secure help for the student could be taken expeditiously without facing as many bureaucratic obstacles.

Another example of consolidated case management is the use of a validated risk and needs assessment instrument, which can be used to consolidate the needs of a youth involved with the juvenile justice system into one plan that ultimately affects educational transitional activities for a youth re-entering the community from placement. Such effective communication and partnerships among education, probation, courts, mental health/substance abuse, and families united under a single case plan may result in better supervision, decreased re-offending behaviors, and, in turn, better educational outcomes for students.

Examples and resources for understanding and helping to implement this strategy are available at the end of this guide in the Resources and Examples section.

Challenges/Obstacles to Accomplishing Strategy 2:

- Coming to consensus on what the case management system should include for each agency to have its information both included and considered to be of importance

- Mis- or unaligned methods for assigning cases between agencies

- Deciding who will pay for specific services

- Agency confidentiality policies and practices

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges/Obstacles to Strategy 2:

- Provide wraparound services whereby all agencies (education, child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health) contribute financial and personnel resources to support programming for youth in the community.

- Establish a flat case rate, and have agencies pool funds.

- Identify points of contact within and across agencies.

- Offer cross-agency training on the importance and characteristics of consolidated/single case management.

- Develop MOUs that address confidentiality and methods for assigning cases through a formal process agreed to by all agencies involved in the memorandum.

- Create an evaluation/assessment plan for determining improvement of services and outcomes resulting from single case management, as evaluated by both internal staff and an unbiased evaluator; incorporate accountability measures into the employee evaluation process.

Strategy 3: Align Relevant Policies and Corresponding Practices of Child-Serving Agencies

A significant part of successful communication and collaboration calls for child-serving agencies to share information and work toward aligning individual agency policies to create a core of common policies and practices. A core of common policies and practices should cover such areas as information sharing, co-location and cross training of staff, blended/braided funding, and the coordinated service and support array used to address the needs of youth and families under agency care. Decisions should be collectively made when prioritizing the core common policies. Such policy shifts should be communicated to affected staff in multiple formats. If in a unionized State or system where coordination is expected, posting new and/or revised policies on the appropriate union-designated space will be required. Such a policy shift could, for example, help agencies address confidentiality practices and reduce resistance across systems as they handle information regarding treatment and case histories of youth who are neglected or delinquent.

Such situations of policy alignment may occur, for example, when a governor issues an order to directors of education, child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, substance abuse, and labor to come to a consensus on priorities for funding services to children and families. Through a consensus retreat process, the directors identify top priorities. The next step in this process would be for each agency to create and/or revise individual policies and practices to allow them to focus resources on these top priorities and promote blended/braided funding across agencies and programs. The expectation should then be that agencies report back to the governor periodically to provide updates on their progress. This type of effort can help secure funding from public and private sources, as many funders are now asking for proof of collaborations among child-serving and community organizations. By aligning policies and practices around shared priorities, agencies help foster a system united around a common mission.

This strategy is a difficult task for child-serving agencies to accomplish; however, the benefits of achieving the alignment of relevant policies can drastically affect the corresponding practices within and between agencies. If accomplished, this strategy also will heighten the potential for the practices to be sustained into the future and may be useful in addressing accountability for the entire agency as well as at the individual staff level.

Examples and resources for understanding and helping to implement this strategy are available at the end of this guide in the Resources and Examples section.

Challenges/Obstacles to Accomplishing Strategy 3:

- Achieving buy-in from agency heads/leaders to the idea of aligning policies and practices

- Reaching consensus on wording and purpose of policies that might be aligned

- Addressing philosophical barriers that exist between child-serving agencies focusing on perceived differences in mission, beliefs, and values

- Working around the fact that individual agency outcomes are often tied to respective funding sources

- Ensuring the planning and training of staff required to put these new policies into practice

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges/Obstacles to Strategy 3:

- Restate the mission for serving children, youth, and families from the highest agency in the State, then create variations on that mission within each children's agency.

- Find common ground in the mission, charter, or statute that created each agency, which may send the message that agencies have similar mandates (i.e., early intervention and prevention mandates; common general goals focused on better meeting the needs of children, youth, and families; safety of citizens).

- Use boundary spanners—individuals who have knowledge and/or training in two or more child-serving agencies' practices—to advocate for change within and across agencies and bridge the gap, especially in the area of effective communication.

- Be strategic in determining which policies and practices can be aligned by bringing family and youth to the table, having multiple levels of staff present, preparing staff for the work, and sharing findings of outcomes that reflect good interagency collaboration.

- Implement interagency workgroups to solve joint-agency problems and to identify and implement joint-agency solutions.

Practice 2: Share Resources and Expertise

When agencies are regularly communicating and collaboratively making decisions as to what services to offer youth and families as well as how to deliver them, sharing fiscal, personnel, and other resources and expertise is one way to increase system efficiency and effectiveness. Although collaborative work among agencies has historically been difficult to achieve, there has been a push in public and private funding to not only promote interagency communication and collaboration but also to require evidence of it as a prerequisite for awarding funds. Ultimately, sharing information, resources, and personnel may lead to not only more efficient and effective intervention and prevention for youth and families, but also greater fiscal accountability through the elimination of redundant efforts.

Strategy 1: Co-Location of Staff

Within agencies seeking to establish coordination of services for youth who are neglected or delinquent, co-locating staff can ensure availability of all needed services regardless of which agency initiates the request on behalf of youth and/or families. For instance, mental health professionals assigned to work within juvenile justice or educational settings can either provide needed counseling or refer youth and/or families to appropriate providers for needed services. These mental health professionals are likely to be much more knowledgeable of available programs than a classroom teacher or juvenile justice staff member. Another approach is to have staff members from the child-serving agencies, such as social services, probation, mental health, and schools, relocated in one shared location, which operates as the referral cite for youth seeking a wide array of mental health, education, and related services (Ferreira, Hodges, Israel, & Mazza, 2007).

As staff from one agency are integrated into the staffing of another agency, jurisdictions may find it necessary to reinforce the practice with an MOU or similar agreement about reporting, service plan preparation and implementation, preparation and sharing of information, and how to plan, pay for, and deliver co-training for combined staff. States and/or localities may use a supervisory liaison to overcome problems related to working hours and training. Formalized agreements between agencies that spell out concerns about confidentiality and practice can make co-location of staff easier while ensuring that staff, youth, and family rights are protected.

Examples and resources for understanding and helping to implement this strategy are available at the end of this guide in the Resources and Examples section.

Challenges/Obstacles to Accomplishing Strategy 1:

- Co-location may often seem to be an overwhelming task, and staff may not know where to begin in the process

- Staff resistance to the idea or practice of co-location

- Lack of adequate space and/or infrastructure to house and support co-located staff

- Uncertainty as to how resources will be shared and who will cover various expenses associated with the co-location (e.g., desks, telephones, computers)

- Uncertainty of how co-located staff fit into the organization in which they are co-located (e.g., lines of authority and supervision)

- Lack of clarity among agency staff as to the service/utility co-located staff will provide

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges/Obstacles to Strategy 1:

- Involve staff from the beginning in the planning process, listen to them, and, where possible, incorporate their suggestions, such as the full-time or part-time staffing requirement for the position(s) affected, acceptable ranges and limits in caseloads, and the primary and secondary duties that support the effort.

- Establish a cooperative agreement that addresses the provision of resources such as office space and IT services, salary ratios, etc.

- Determine the potential for intra- and interagency job sharing.

- Use boundary spanners who can assist staff to "bridge the agency gap," as related to cross-agency jargon and overarching agency-related trends and practices.

- Educate leaders on the importance of supporting agency heads and the efficiencies of shared resources and expertise through a marketing campaign.

- Prioritize decisions about which staff members should be co-located (e.g., placing staff and services in the school may be the easiest and most effective starting point).

Strategy 2: Share Databases

When agencies become involved in interagency collaborations and are serious about sharing data, it may be the case that databases from each agency have to be merged or integrated within a new cross-system information warehouse. Doing so requires identifying organizations and databases that contain pertinent information, obtaining access to data-sharing initiatives and receiving training on interpreting data, developing clear processes and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and using data, including data-sharing agreements, and ensuring the shared database is financially sustained (Children's Bureau, 2010).

Although the sharing of databases may occur by choice, often times it arises out of necessity. For example, in light of a State's concern over meeting the needs of crossover youth and youth of transition age, the child welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems may need to assess their data system compatibility. It is possible that some or none of the agency's systems can interface successfully with each other, and the State may decide in such instances that agencies need to develop protocols (e.g., assigning unique, anonymous child identifiers) and practices (e.g., purchasing shared data system software or system patches) that allow data sharing. Doing so may ensure that all agencies are able to gather the information they need on academic performance, educational needs, discipline and/or delinquency history, neglect and/or abuse history, and more. The more relevant information agencies have and the ease at which it is available, the easier it is for them to align practices, supports, and services to promote better outcomes for the youth and families they serve.

Examples and resources for understanding and helping to implement this strategy are available at the end of this guide in the Resources and Examples section.

Challenges/Obstacles to Accomplishing Strategy 2:

- Incompatible or out-of-date IT systems

- Cost of upgrading or replacing incompatible data software/systems

- Lack of funding to draw on to support such an initiative

- Lack of commitment of administration to find the fiscal and personnel resources to make this happen

- Lack of technological expertise and/or resources within and between agencies

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges/Obstacles to Strategy 2:

- Prior to finalizing database-sharing agreements and issues, allow for "view only" capability for appropriate staff outside of the host agency that controls the shared database.

- Formulate a strategic plan that establishes an acceptable timeframe to develop a shared database, with each agency identifying dollars in their budgets to support each step in the strategic plan.

- Identify appropriately trained staff who will enter information into the database or provide for ongoing electronic uploads and overall maintenance of data.

- Identify a team of users who form a committee to regularly review the information being input and make changes to what is needed as changes come from funding sources.

- Establish clear rules for documentation of all data, so that all variables and values are explained and labeled in an electronic codebook and all changes and updates are logged in.

- Have a designated staff person onsite at each agency or one who can work between agencies to train staff on use of the shared database.

- Ensure that any newly created databases are compatible with existing one(s) shared across agencies and programs.

- Secure Federal and/or foundation funding to promote information sharing across databases.

Strategy 3: Cross-Agency Training

An essential element for creating effective interagency collaboration is cross-agency training for staff of all agencies that are involved in addressing the needs of children and youth. Such training instills common understanding of issues dealing with policy, programs/services, sharing of information, etc. Cross-agency training can help solidify ties among diverse agencies (e.g., juvenile justice, mental health, education) that are perhaps working together for the first time and address philosophical barriers to effective communication and collaboration. For example, regional and local offices of child welfare and juvenile justice agencies have been known to establish monthly staff development activities focusing on common topics that affect the youth and families they serve. These topics may focus on safety, special education rights and laws, educational transition needs, positive youth development strategies, evidence-based and best practices, facilitating family and youth-driven care, and data gathering and analysis. Additionally, trainings may be more specific, like providing training around permanency planning for juvenile justice staff and/or transition and reentry training for child welfare staff. In this way, each agency's staff can better understand the work of the others and develop ways to achieve shared or similar goals through collaborative policies and practices. Establishing consistent opportunities for training among staff of multiple agencies creates an environment of partnership, which may result in better interagency collaboration and communication.

Examples and resources for understanding and helping to implement this strategy are available at the end of this guide in the Resources and Examples section.

Challenges/Obstacles to Accomplishing Strategy 3:

- Lack of time to plan, schedule, and implement all-staff training

- Lack of leader(s) to ensure that cross-agency training occurs in a strategic and logical manner

- Staff attitudes that each agency should have its own training curriculum based on its own philosophical beliefs, precedent, and/or longtime practices

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges/Obstacles for Strategy 3:

- Develop annual training modules for ongoing staff development that include the use of boundary spanners and consultants, being inclusive of those training concepts and principles that are important to each and all agencies.

- Implement staff development activities in schools that are inclusive of non-teaching related auxiliary staff such as school resource officers and mental health professionals.

- Invite professionals from outside agencies to provide training for teaching staff on topics and community resources that may affect a youth's academic achievement.

- Develop aligned philosophies, values, and beliefs and improved working relationships through sharing resources and training opportunities across agencies and departments.

Practice 3: Target Services To Meet the Needs of Children, Youth, Parents, and Caregivers

A truly collaborative system is one made up of agencies committed to working together to foster better outcomes for youth and their families. One way in which agencies can become more unified and strengthen their collaborative relationship is to plan for and deliver targeted services that meet the unique needs of each youth and family served. For example, a State may have a Children's Cabinet with a governor-mandated standing committee on keeping youth who are in the juvenile justice or child welfare systems connected to school, family, and community. The committee, made up of agency leaders, may meet monthly, encouraging and facilitating collaboration between agencies that may not regularly make time to do so. The committee also may be required to report back to the cabinet and the governor, encouraging the agencies to focus on meeting established goals and outcomes, such as making sure youths' credits earned in any residential program easily transfer to community schools, ensuring support for students preparing Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms for college, and carving out a portion of the summer jobs for system-involved youth. In addition to such committees and other efforts mandated by executive order, it may be strategic for the justice system to become involved in moving this

practice forward in a jurisdiction through the issuance of a court order.

To plan, implement, and sustain individually tailored interventions and supports for children and youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, agencies must share information and engage in collaborative decisionmaking. In addition, performance and outcomes must be monitored through an established plan with the responsibility for the assessment being assigned to either an education liaison or volunteer mentors.

Strategy 1: Engage Youth and Family as Key Decisionmakers and Assets in Determining Needed Supports and Services

Determining the supports and services to provide to youth who are neglected or delinquent and their families begins with engaging youth and their families in identifying their needs. Establishing an environment of mutual trust in which youth and their families feel comfortable sharing personal and sometimes painful information with agencies and providers can be accomplished through the infusion of a philosophy that youth and families are key decisionmakers and assets to the process. Youth and families are viewed not as part of the problem but rather as elements of the solution.

As systems work to implement and support true family and youth engagement, they may find that doing so requires more than a request or even a mandate. Over time child-serving agencies have realized that ensuring true family and youth engagement requires mutual trust between families, youth, and professionals. To establish this trust, agencies must create stable, safe, and nurturing opportunities for youth and families to be involved. This trust and supportiveness are the foundations upon which agencies adopt policies and practices that incorporate youth and family voice and that are designed to meet the unique needs of system-involved children and youth and their families.

For agencies, involving family and youth as partners consists of:

1. Acknowledging families as experts on their own needs

2. Ensuring an active and meaningful role for family members in a variety of areas

3. Providing diverse opportunities for family members to participate in shared decisionmaking (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008)

Many States and localities have employed this strategy through the adoption of a systems of care philosophy that services and supports should be family-driven and youth-guided. In addressing the importance of engaging youth and family as key decisionmakers, agencies may considering putting into place some of the practices that

have been found to be effective in more than 170 system of care sites:

- Ask youth and families to define what their basic needs are.

- Work with youth and families to clearly define roles and help everyone understand them.

- Develop an agreement with youth and families about how best to involve them in activities.

- Get acquainted with local family and youth organizations and support groups.

- Seek out, respect, and value the diverse identities and backgrounds of youth and families in the community.

- Create and maintain culturally- and linguistically-competent practices to accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of youth and families.

- Provide child or dependent care when needed so youth and families can participate in meetings.

- Assist with transportation by arranging carpooling, gas reimbursement, and vouchers, and hold meetings close to public transportation.

- Hold meetings at a time when youth and families can attend, which may be outside normal working hours of staff.

- Offer youth and families fair and reasonable compensation for their expertise and time.

- Provide beverages, snacks, or full meals if the meetings are held during typical meal times.

- Use technology (such as Web conferencing, e-mail, and conference calls) where and when appropriate to eliminate the need for face-to-face meetings.

- Coach youth and families on how to tell their stories.

- Use as little professional jargon as possible.

- Create a youth- and family-friendly environment. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2011)

Examples and resources for understanding and helping to implement this strategy are available at the end of this guide in the Resources and Examples section.

Challenges/Obstacles to Accomplishing Strategy 1:

- Biases of staff and a view of parents as a major contributor to the youth's problems

- Belief that agency staff know better than youth and family members what is right for youth—a "we are the professionals and we know best" approach

- Youth and families who face multiple challenges and/or may be unable to identify or articulate their needs

- Fear that youth and families will want or need more than staff know how to provide/respond to

- Youth and/or family members feeling uncomfortable in the professional planning process

- Youth and/or family members consistently absent from the planning process

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges/Obstacles for Strategy 1:

- Adopt principles and policies that see family and youth driving services and supports by identifying specific action steps for youth (developed with youth), families (developed with family members), and agencies (developed jointly with agency, family, and youth); base these principles and policies on research and practice indicating success of this approach.

- Implement evidence-based and best practice programming that engages youth and families in the educational process.

- Employ a "families as allies" approach to determining services and supports to enable programs and agencies to more effectively communicate and collaborate.

- Use family voices in communicating to legislators and other decisionmaking stakeholders about the development and provision of programs to support children and youth.

- Engage family advocacy organizations in assisting schools and families in understanding the value and importance of engaging families as partners in the teaching-learning process.

Strategy 2: Implement Evidence-Based and Best Practice Programming That Supports Individual Students' Success in School and Life

It is important that multiple child-serving agencies strategically plan and coordinate funding and service delivery for children and families by adopting and promoting the use of evidence-based and best practices. Doing so helps reduce the duplication and fragmentation of services and achieve better outcomes for youth and their families. To address the needs of youth who are neglected or delinquent, including their educational needs, consideration should be given to evidence that supports practices that will meet the unique needs of this population and will result in a healthier community. Such practices are likely to differ from what would be effective with students not involved with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. A number of research studies support including strategies that target social and emotional changes as part of the educational environment. Additionally, NDTAC suggests that four areas be emphasized when creating optimal learning conditions for this group of students:

1. **Safety.** Learners must be, and feel, safe. Safety involves emotional as well as physical safety—for example, being safe from sarcasm and ridicule.

2. **Support.** Learners must feel connected to teachers and the learning setting, must have access to appropriate support, and must be aware of and know how to access the support.

3. **Social and Emotional Learning.** Learners need to learn to manage their emotions and relationships positively and be surrounded by peers who also have socially responsible behavior.

4. **Engagement and Challenge.** Learners need to be actively engaged in learning endeavors that are relevant to them and that enable them to develop the skills and capacities to reach positive life goals. (Osher, Sidana, & Kelly, 2008)

To address the mental health and/or substance abuse issues of youth in juvenile justice that may affect their academic performance, systems may want to use an evidence-based program like the Family Integrated Transitions (FIT) program. The FIT program has been studied and determined to have positive results for these youth. It is an intensive youth and family community-based treatment intervention that begins during the youth's final 2 months in a residential setting and continues for 6 months post-release while the youth is under parole supervision. The first and most important task of the family-based intervention is to engage the family in treatment. The program then strives to promote behavioral change in the youth's home environment, emphasizing the systemic strengths of family, peers, schools, and neighborhoods to facilitate the change in behavior. The FIT clinical team is made up of mental health and substance abuse professionals and is accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2004).

Systems also may consider creating and adopting a program or practice to affect youth behavior in residential, alternative, and other school settings to create a learning environment where students feel safe and that is conducive to learning and success. Programs like Positive Behavioral Supports and Intervention (PBIS) can provide behavioral support to help prevent and reduce problem behaviors in youth. Through proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting

appropriate student behaviors that create positive school environments, students are taught which behaviors are expected and which are unacceptable (Sidana, 2006). Systems may consider placing mental health professionals in facilities and classrooms to help address students' mental health needs that affect their behavior. Overall, youth may be better able to achieve academically in more structured, safe, and supportive learning environments.

Examples and resources for understanding and helping to implement this strategy are available at the end of this guide in the Resources and Examples section.

Challenges/Obstacles to Accomplishing Strategy 2:

- The often high cost of evidence-based programs and practices

- Lack of trained staff and/or time, money, and personnel needed to train staff to support these new initiatives

- The time it takes for such initiatives to take hold

- Resistance to change the way staff have operated for years (e.g., a reliance on punitive approaches, failure to address conditions for learning and student engagement)

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges/Obstacles for Strategy 2:

- Evaluate effectiveness of existing programs, focusing on positive educational and related outcomes such as credit recovery, support services such as school-based counseling, activities and programs that engage or re-engage the youth in school.

- Implement programs such as PBIS and Response to Intervention (RTI).

- Stop funding programs and services that do not demonstrate impact on positive educational and related outcomes and provide ongoing training and support for staff on programs and services that promote positive educational and related outcomes.

- Publicly acknowledge improved outcomes through communication, collaboration, and evidence-based practices—share with all relevant agency and provider staff as well as community, local, and State stakeholders and decisionmakers (city council members, judges, State legislators).

Conclusion

Interagency communication and collaboration is a key principle and practice in addressing the unmet educational needs of youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. When child-serving agencies communicate and work with each other, and are committed to coordinating services and supports for the youth and families they serve, they become part of a more integrated system. Such a system may prove more efficient and effective than one in which child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and related agencies work in silos. This guide is designed to provide agency administrators and staff with concrete strategies and real-life examples for implementing three practices geared to increasing effective interagency communication and collaboration. NDTAC hopes this guide also promotes administrators of Title I, Part D, and other Federal education-related funds to consider how the programs funded by these dollars can promote greater communication and collaboration between child-serving agencies and, in turn, improve academic and related outcomes for the youth they serve.

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Resources and Examples

Practice 1: Engage in Collaborative Decisionmaking

Strategy 1: Memorandum of Understanding To Share Information

1. Several States have adopted MOUs and other agreements to facilitate easier sharing on information between departments and agencies:

   a. *Arizona Multi-Agency Child/Youth Coordination of Care Authorization for Release of Information*
   http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/arizonaAuthorizationForReleaseOfInformation.doc (MS Word)

   b. *Children and Youth Planning Board Memorandum of Understanding for Juvenile Justice information Sharing* Jefferson Parish, Louisiana
   http://www.jeffparish.net/downloads/6488/6883-JSInforSharingMOU2011.pdf (PDF)

   c. *Business Associate/Qualified Service Organization Agreement*
   South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH)
   http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/southCarolinaDataSharingAgreement.doc (MS Word)

   d. *Provider Manual: Disclosure of Behavioral Health Information*
   Arizona Department of Health Services Division of Behavioral Health Services
   http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/arizonaProviderManual_disclosureOfBehavioralHealthInfo.pdf (PDF)

2. Louisiana also enacted legislation to, among other collaborative efforts, facilitate interagency information sharing:

   a. *Act 1225 of the 2003 Louisiana Legislative Regular Session, pages 10–13, Chapter 14. Interagency Agreements for Information Sharing Concerning Juveniles*
   http://www.legis.state.la.us/leg_docs/03RS/CVT10/OUT/0000KTKP.pdf (PDF)

   b. *Article 543 of Louisiana's Children's Cabinet, Interagency information sharing; interagency agreements*
   http://www.legis.state.la.us/lss/newWin.asp?doc=321979

3. King County, Washington designed a guide designed to improve communication by providing a better understanding of what and how much information can be shared, and whom it can be shared with between the juvenile dependency and juvenile justice systems.

See http://www.cwla.org/programs/juvenilejustice/resourceguide.pdf (PDF).

4. OJJDP's *Sharing Information: A Guide to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and Participation in Juvenile Justice Programs* (1997) guide is designed for educators, law enforcement personnel, juvenile justice professionals, and community leaders interested in developing interagency information sharing agreements while complying with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. See http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/163705.pdf (PDF).

Strategy 2: Consolidated/Single Case Management and a "No Wrong Door" Approach

1. Montgomery County, Ohio uses a "no wrong door" approach to serving children, youth and families. See http://www.mcohio.org/services/fcfc/no_wrong_door_reference_guide.html.

2. Nassau County, New York's system of care community embraces a "no wrong door" approach to providing mental health and related services to children, youth, and families in their community. See http://www.ftnys.org/downloads/NWD_Brochure-_Final_Draft%20with%20center%20hours2%20%5B1%5D.pdf (PDF).

3. Wraparound Milwaukee has a long history of providing coordinated and comprehensive mental health services to children, youth, and families and utilizes single case management and a flat case rate for services across child-serving agencies. For more information, view the presentation *Creative Use of Partnerships to Make Quality Service Delivery Possible Within the Context of Limited Resources* (2008) at http://www.uky.edu/SocialWork/qicpcw/documents/Wraparound%20Milwaukee.pdf (PDF).

Strategy 3: Align Relevant Policies and Corresponding Practices of Child-Serving Agencies

1. Maryland has developed a comprehensive structure for promoting, aligning, and managing the flow of policies, programs, and services for children and youth. The chart at http://forumfyi.org/files/Elements_of_Success1_Structure.pdf#page=17 (PDF) illustrates the different bodies in place and the roles they play in the State.

   a. For more in the role of State structures in the coordination and alignment of State child-serving policies and practices, see the Forum for Youth Investment's *Elements of Success Issue 1: Structural Options. State Children's Cabinet and Councils Series* (2008) at http://forumfyi.org/files/Elements_of_Success1_Structure.pdf (PDF).

2. Nashville, Tennessee engaged all child-serving agencies and the communities they serve to create a shared vision for youth and a master plan to carry out that vision, which provide the framework for delivering Nashville's youth services and supports. For more information, see http://sparkaction.org/content/nashville-tn-building-big-picture-action-p.

3. Arizona, in order to establish an integrated system of care among education, health/mental health, juvenile justice and other their child-serving agencies, created an MOU that established alignment of the system's policies and practices around a single vision and 12 core principles. See http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/arizonaSOCMOU.doc (MS Word).

4. The Ready by 21 *Policy Alignment Guide* helps policymakers ensure that new child and youth policies align with existing efforts to create a seamless system of supports. The guide can be used to inform any policy that creates a funding stream related to children and youth, no matter what specific topic it addresses (e.g., education or youth employment or juvenile justice) and no matter what form it takes (e.g., a legislative statute, an executive order, or an agency or foundation request for proposals). See http://forumfyi.org/files/Rb21_Policy_Alignment_Guide.pdf (PDF).

Practice 2: Share Resources and Expertise

Strategy 1: Co-Location of Staff

1. Schenectady County, New York created an integrated Juvenile Justice Center with co-located child welfare and probation staff and drug/alcohol and mental health specialists, modeling such integration from other counties in the State. For more information, see http://www.schenectadycounty.com/default.aspx.

2. Montgomery County, Maryland co-locates mental health therapists with Child Welfare Services staff in two city offices. These therapists provide specialized, in-home services for children with emotional problems in the child welfare system and their families. For more information, see http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhstmpl.asp?url=/content/hhs/childwelfare/index.asp.

3. The Jefferson Parish, Louisiana Juvenile Assessment/Intake Center is a combination of financial, personnel, and planning resources between the Department of Juvenile Services, Juvenile Court, Sheriff's Office, Public School System, and District Attorney's Office. Resources are centrally located to overcome traditional barriers during juvenile arrest intake and to facilitate the process and information flow between and among child-serving agencies. The staff of the Center includes a multi-disciplinary team of professionals—case managers, correctional officers, and a school liaison worker—who work in concert to provide a comprehensive intake process. For more information, see http://www.jeffparish.net/index.cfm?DocID=4399.

Strategy 2: Share Databases

1. The Arizona Department of Education grants access to three other State agencies—Department of Corrections, Department of Juvenile Corrections, and Administrative Office of the Courts—through their ED*Facts* system for Consolidated State Performance Report (CSPR) data collection, and through the Arizona LEA Tracker (ALEAT) for uploading plans and program information. For more information, contact State Title I, Part D, coordinator James Lovett at james.lovett@azed.gov.

2. The Philadelphia Policy Analysis Center (PAC) uses the Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS) to collect data from mental health, education, and social services. Analysis of the data helps shape policies and practices focusing on truancy, early education, and homelessness. For more information, see http://www.gse.upenn.edu/child/projects/kids.

Strategy 3: Cross-Agency Training

1. Tennessee, through a Federal *Integration of Schools and Mental Health Systems Grant*, provided professional mental health training to school counselors and social workers as well as all other school personnel on how and when to make appropriate referrals to mental health services. For more information, see http://www.tennessee.gov/education/schoolhealth/counseling/doc/FinalReportCover.MHgrantExecSummary.doc (MS Word).

2. The National GAINS Center for People with Co-occurring Disorders in the Justice System and the University of Washington developed the cross-agency training curriculum *Working Together for Change: Co-occurring Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders Among Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System*. The curriculum is designed to address major gaps in service provision for youth with co-occurring disorder treatment needs involved with the juvenile justice system and focuses on increasing collaboration among professionals in the fields of mental health, substance abuse, and juvenile justice. For more information, see http://www.ncmhjj.com/curriculum/juvenile/index.htm.

3. Connecticut, Ohio, Illinois, Texas, and Washington contracted with consultant Dr. Holly Hills of the Florida Mental Health Institute of the University of South Florida to develop a comprehensive mental health

training curriculum, *Mental Health Training Curriculum for Juvenile Justice (MHTC-JJ)*, for staff working in a broad array of juvenile justice settings, including probation, detention and corrections. The curriculum includes modules focusing on:

  a. Mental disorders in youth and important adolescent development concepts

  b. The use of screening and assessment instruments to identify mental disorders in youth involved with juvenile justice

  c. Common treatment strategies used with this population

  d. The role of the youth's family in their treatment

  e. Practical strategies for interacting with and responding to youth with mental health needs.

For more information, see http://www.ncmhjj.com/pdfs/publications/Advances_Innovations.pdf#page=9 (PDF).

Practice 3: Target Services To Meet the Needs of Children, Youth, Parents, and Caregivers

Strategy 1: Engage Youth and Family as Key Decisionmakers and Assets in Determining Needed Supports and Services

1. The New Mexico organization, Parents Reaching Out, produced *Family Involvement: Building Community Partnerships* (2008) as a tool identify needs and develop service plans that address the growing emphasis placed on parent involvement at the local, State, and national level, with an emphasis on schools. See http://parentsreachingout.org/pdfs/english/familyinvolvement/edufi.pdf (PDF).

2. Models for Change-Pennsylvania's and the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers' *Family Involvement in Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System* (2009) identifies and develops strategies and models that support family involvement in the juvenile justice system in effective and measurable ways that are rooted within balanced and restorative justice practice. See http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/238/Family_Involvement_in_Pennsylvanias_Juvenile_Justice_System.pdf (PDF).

3. NDTAC has two guides focused on engaging families in the care and support of youth in the juvenile justice system:

  a. *Working With Families of Children in the Juvenile Justice and Corrections Systems: A Guide for Education Program Leaders, Principals, and Building Administrators* (2006) http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/resources/spotlight/spotlight200611a.asp

  b. *A Family Guide to Getting Involved With Correctional Education* (2008) http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/resources/spotlight/familyGuide2008.asp (PDF)

Strategy 2: Implement Evidence-Based and Best Practice Programming That Supports Individual Students' Success in School and Life

1. OJJDP features two guides focused on identifying and implementing evidence-based and best practices for youth in the juvenile justice system:

  a. *OJJDP Model Programs Guide (MPG)* http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/

  b. *Evidence-Based Resources for OJJDP Program Applicants* http://www.ojjdp.gov/funding/ResourcesonEvidenceBasedPrograms.pdf (PDF)

Additional Interagency Communication and Collaboration Resources

1. *Collaboration in the juvenile justice system and youth serving agencies: Improving prevention, providing more efficient services, and reducing recidivism for youth with disabilities* American Institutes for Research (2002) http://cecp.air.org/juvenilejustice/docs/Collaboration%20in%20the%20Juvenile%20Justice%20System.pdf (PDF)

2. *Cross-System Collaboration and Partnership* New Ways to Work http://www.nww.org/documents/ytatdocuments/Crosssystemcollaboration307.pdf (PDF)

3. *Promising practices: Building collaboration in systems of care* Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (1999) http://cecp.air.org/promisingpractices/1998monographs/vol6.pdf (PDF)

Acknowledgments

www.neglected-delinquent.org

The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center
for the Education of Children and Youth Who are Neglected, Delinquent or At-Risk

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