



School Reintegration for Youth Returning from Residential Placement: Voices from the Field and Recommendations for Pennsylvania

Presented by:
Support Center for Child Advocates
The Institute on Disabilities at Temple



The Support Center for Child Advocates (*Child Advocates*) is the country's oldest and largest volunteer legal services agency serving children who have experienced abuse and neglect. We provide legal assistance and social service advocacy to more than 1,000 children and youth in Philadelphia each year. We work to ensure safety, health, education, family permanency and access to justice for all of the youth we serve. Whenever possible, *Child Advocates* seeks to maintain children in their own homes. Our attorneys and social workers move public systems to deliver entitled services and private providers to open their doors to our child clients and their families.

The Institute on Disabilities at Temple University is one of the sixty-seven University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service funded by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Institute on Disabilities at Temple University learns from and works with people with disabilities and their families in diverse communities across Pennsylvania to create and share knowledge, change systems and society, and promote self-determined lives so that disability is recognized as a natural part of the human experience.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Philadelphia's Support Center for Child Advocates (*Child Advocates*) and the Institute on Disabilities at Temple University (Temple IOD) collaborated over a two-year period, with support from the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council, to **understand existing barriers** and **outline concrete strategies** to better support youth returning to a community school after exiting a congregate residential placement.

In recent years, and especially during 2020, the number of Pennsylvania youth placed in group facilities through juvenile justice, child welfare, and/or behavioral health systems has steadily declined. Still, for the thousands of Pennsylvania youth who continue to be sent to congregate facilities each year, such placements often result in school disruptions and lost academic progress for young people who have complex, interconnected needs. Outcomes are worst for youth with disabilities, youth of color, and youth who identify as LGBTQIA+, who are at highest risk of being pushed to residential settings. For this student population, school can be a bridge that reconnects youth to community and a path forward, or a driver of further dislocations that make it ever harder to reach graduation.

Multiple factors contribute to learning and/or credit deficits after residential placement, which are exacerbated when youth attend an on-grounds school operated with little public oversight. For youth to reintegrate successfully back to a community school, timely information sharing and collaborative planning are crucial. But there are no uniform requirements or processes for discharge planning or information sharing in Pennsylvania. Instead, individuals from multiple sectors, public systems, and contracted service providers each operate according to their own varying knowledge of and diligence in supporting youth returning to a community school.

To better understand current practices related to school reintegration in communities across Pennsylvania, *Child Advocates* and Temple IOD conducted in-depth interviews with a range of professionals involved in the process. Interviews provided perspectives on challenges and best practices from staff at public school districts, Intermediate Units, charter schools, congregate care facilities, systems-involved youth and their families, community-based providers, and advocates from across the Commonwealth. Interview subjects represented the juvenile justice, child welfare, and behavioral health systems, as well as a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas throughout a number of Pennsylvania counties.

Combining insights from interviews across the state, relevant literature, and existing policy, this Report describes current practices and recommends strategies to improve in six crucial areas when youth return to a community school. Challenges to educational reintegration are best addressed through multidisciplinary planning for discharge starting from the time of residential intake - the practice of **"thinking exit at entry."** Yet, interviews across Pennsylvania consistently documented a failure to engage in effective pre-discharge planning for youth returning from placement, including the identification of five systemic barriers that prevent such planning. This failure to support returning youth increases rates of school disengagement and drop out, re-institutionalization, and involvement with the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems.

Acknowledging this reality, this Report focuses on the **communication and collaborative practices to support youth returning** to a home community school that take place **at or after discharge from a facility**. School reintegration during this period involves not only timely reenrollment, but also supporting youth in connecting with the school community, making progress towards graduation, and preparing for life's next steps. Multiple involved systems and institutions, variable processes, and limited resources complicate those goals. This report outlines the key **Agencies** and

Processes for each Critical Element as well as **Practice and Policy Recommendations** based on stakeholder interviews.

When youth put in time and effort with school, they deserve to see progress towards graduation. The adults and public systems involved in the lives of this youth population can do better – working together to stabilize and support youth in reaching high school graduation and preparing for adulthood.

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO SCHOOL REINTEGRATION

The most common **barriers** to school reintegration after residential placement, cited across multiple interviews and echoed in years of client practice as well as national research, center around the challenges of:

Lack of Meaningful Collaboration

Professionals from education, social services and/or justice systems, as well as youth and their families, all play a role in when or where youth will attend school after a residential placement. Processes for reenrollment vary widely across institutions and counties, often with little collaboration between or understanding of different roles and responsibilities.

Gaps in Information and Historical Record

Each system, provider, or school keeps records of a youth's time there, but no overall record exists for students who move between districts. Frequently, neither family members nor professionals have a full history of where a youth lived or studied, let alone credits earned or special education needs. Professionals must dedicate substantial amounts of time to gathering past student records, which can cause delays in reenrollment, loss of student credits, and/or a failure to provide adequate supports and services.

Limited Opportunities for Advance Discharge Planning

Decisions about discharge from a residential facility often take place with little warning and immediate effect. The new school may be unknown, because it is dependent on available placement options at the time of discharge. Even when planned, discharge dates rarely align with school calendars, and educational needs are not prioritized during transition.

Excessive Movement Between Placements

Many young people in residential facilities change residences and schools several times as a result of system involvement. Moving between multiple congregate placements makes continuity of learning, credit accumulation, and records transfer exponentially more difficult.

Inadequate Preparation to Transition

Several barriers to a successful educational reintegration arise from the failure to provide quality educational services to youth attending on-grounds schools. Students also struggle to transition from the highly structured and compliance-based setting of an on-grounds school to the expectations of a community school setting.

SIX CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR SCHOOL REINTEGRATION



STUDENT RECORDS with full history and transferable course credits



CREDIT TRANSFER AND RECOVERY to support progress towards graduation



TIMELY ENROLLMENT AND APPROPRIATE PLACEMENT



YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT



SPECIAL EDUCATION planning, delivery, and accommodations



WELCOMING SCHOOL COMMUNITY



INTRODUCTION TO COMMON TERMS

KEY AGENCIES AND ROLES

Education

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are public boards of education that provide administrative control and direction for public elementary and secondary schools. In Pennsylvania, both public school districts and charter schools are considered LEAs. Pennsylvania is home to 500 school district LEAs and approximately 200 charter school LEAs. The size of LEAs or districts varies substantially across the state, which impacts levels of administration and staffing for the elements described in this report.

LEAs are required by federal law to provide supports for youth at high risk for educational disruptions due to school changes and instability as a result of homelessness, foster care, and/or juvenile justice involvement. This includes supporting transportation and efforts to keep the child in the same school, or facilitating any enrollment changes if in the student's best interest. LEAs must have a staff Point of Contact for youth placed in foster care.

Intermediate Units (IUs) are regional education service agencies that oversee special education and provide direct educational services in some settings. The 29 IUs in Pennsylvania serve as a liaison between the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the local schools, including public school districts, charter schools, and private schools.



Residential Providers

Residential Providers, also referred to as **Congregate Care** or **Institutional Providers** are agencies contracted through county systems to house youth in a group setting that operates 365 days per year and provides 24-hour supervision. Some also provide some type of treatment or rehabilitative services. These facilities serve youth through the child welfare, juvenile justice, and/or behavioral health systems. They can include group homes, residential treatment facilities (RTFs), drug and alcohol treatment centers, and secure detention and other juvenile justice facilities. Residential providers may have contracts with, and serve youth from, multiple counties. Their operations are governed by the regulations at 55 Pa. Code § 3800, *et seq.*

On-Ground Schools are educational facilities that operate on the campus of or in conjunction with some residential providers in Pennsylvania. Youth may be court-ordered to attend an on-grounds school while in placement. On-grounds schools are sometimes run by the same provider responsible for the residential setting, and sometimes through a separate entity. On-grounds schools typically sign a contract agreement with the LEA where the facility is located outlining shared responsibilities, especially for special education.

On-grounds schools operate under varied licensure, mostly commonly as a "private academic school," and are not subject to the level of monitoring and accountability of other LEAs in the state. The primary exception to this generalization are the educational programs within the state- or county-operated detention and residential programs for delinquent-involved youth. Education at Pennsylvania's thirteen pre-trial detention centers is provided by the local public school district, and education at the five state-run secure residential facilities is provided through the local Intermediate Units.

Systems

Youth-Serving Systems (Systems) include child welfare (also known as dependency), juvenile justice (also known as delinquency), and/or behavioral health. A percentage of youth in residential placements have or will be involved in two or all three of those systems. Each has separate criteria and process for deciding when a youth will be sent to a residential placement. In most cases, that can only happen after less restrictive options have been ruled out. At discharge, systems staff often give key input into where the youth will go next to live – whether returning to family or other certified caregivers, stepping down to a less restrictive placement, or moving between facilities.

Each county's youth systems employ some form of case/care managers or probation officers to support youth in reaching case or court goals. Education is typically included in "well-being" factors that are an ancillary part of a worker's role, yet best practices and research show that school success is key to a range of positive outcomes including permanency and avoiding further criminal justice involvement. Federal law and State guidance require that child welfare and juvenile justice workers address educational stability and

continuity during every phase of case involvement. This includes collaborative efforts to avoid school changes whenever possible, minimize lost class time due to case activities, monitor attendance, and connect youth to extra supports when needed.

State Agencies

The **PA Department of Human Services (PA DHS)** licenses residential care facilities, and has primary responsibility for investigating allegations of abuse or medical incidents that occur in congregate settings. Within PA DHS, the **Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF)** has primary responsibility for child welfare services. Under OCYF, the **Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services (BJJS)** is responsible for the management, operations, program planning and oversight of all the youth development center/youth forestry camp facilities.

The **Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS)** regulates behavioral health services and placement facilities.

The **Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)** licenses and/or registers public and private schools in the Commonwealth.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND COURT RULES

Policies that impact education decisions for youth sent to residential placements include federal and state regulations for child welfare, juvenile justice, and education. Federal laws dictate that school districts, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems collaborate to reduce educational disruptions as a result of out-of-home placement. More recent State legislation, the result of multiyear advocacy efforts, begins to address common barriers when youth return to a home school district after residential placement.

PA Act 1 of 2022 mandates additional supports for students who experience "educational instability" due to homelessness or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. Educational instability is defined as one or more school changes in a single school year. Act 1 requires "school entities" (a school district, charter school, intermediate unit, or career/technical school) to do the following, effective immediately:

- Identify students eligible for Act 1 support;
- Designate a building-level Point of Contact responsible for ensuring that eligible students receive Act 1 protections;
- Develop policies and procedures to remove barriers to on-time graduation, including applying full or partial credit to all completed course work and waiving specific courses required for graduation or providing alternative courses of study; and
- Ensure full access to school-sponsored activities and extracurricular activities, including waiving fees to participate.

Additional legislation that impacts educational continuity and services for youth in placement includes:

The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, adopted in 1975 and amended as part of ESSA in 2015, defines expectations for eligible children with disabilities to receive a free appropriate public education, with necessary special education and related services. IDEA defines special education rights and due process, including required parent or guardian involvement and timelines for evaluations and individual education programs (IEPs).

The **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (2008)** first defined expectations for child welfare to collaborate with education partners and monitor school progress.

The **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** of 2015 delineates requirements for schools to work with child welfare and juvenile justice staff to minimize school changes for youth in placement, make joint decisions, and share information to support immediate enrollment and records transfer.

PA Juvenile Court Rules 1148 (child welfare) and **148** (juvenile justice) instituted in May 2019 require judicial approval before any school changes due to placement moves. Judicial decisions should be informed by a shared determination of what is in a child's "best interest," made by all relevant stakeholders.



Youth Population Impacted

Over the past decade, jurisdictions across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania have made -and kept- laudable commitments to reduce the number of youth placed in residential settings.¹ Yet a significant number of young people continue to be placed in these institutional facilities, also known as congregate care, through the child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems. Youth with disabilities, youth of color, and youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ are disproportionately likely to become involved with these systems, and to be placed in institutional settings by those systems.²

In 2018, the Pennsylvania juvenile justice system had 7,623 youth admissions to a secure detention facility and 2,965 delinquent placements state-wide.³ During the same year, the state's child welfare system placed approximately 2,400 youth in a congregate setting, around 47% of all dependent-involved youth ages 14 to 21.⁴ Pennsylvania's behavioral health system approves placements and contracts for residential treatment, drug and alcohol, or other facilities. Many of these serve youth involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice systems, with fewer youth placed for independent clinical treatment.

As residential placement numbers across all of these systems have dropped significantly since the mid-2000s, providers and systems report that the young people who are currently sent to placement are those with the most complex and intense needs. National studies document that most youth placed in residential facilities have experienced multiple forms of trauma and those who respond with 'externalized' or challenging behaviors are significantly more likely than their peers to be placed in in congregate rather than family-based settings.⁵ Youth with disabilities are over-represented in the juvenile justice, child welfare, and behavioral health systems and substantially more likely

to be placed in a residential setting by those systems than their non-disabled peers.⁶ Yet, for most young people sent to congregate facilities the experience is more harmful than healing.

Children and teens in residential placement are separated from family and community while facing new risks of unsafe or unsanitary living conditions, harm from staff or peers, educational disruptions, and exacerbations of prior trauma.⁷ These risks increase significantly when a young person experiences multiple transfers between residential programs or boomerangs between community and institutional placements.⁸ Capturing the true scale of youth movement is difficult, since multiple placing systems may be involved and all have separate data tracking, as do different schools and districts.

Youth with disabilities, youth of color, and youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ are disproportionately likely to be placed in institutional settings.

Research paints a disheartening picture of youth facing academic, economic, and social-emotional struggles in the months following discharge from residential placements.⁹ Youth who have experienced congregate placement complete fewer years of school and suffer lower academic achievement than their peers, even compared to system-involved youth placed in less restrictive settings.¹⁰ These students are less likely

than peers to earn a high-school diploma, enroll in a post-secondary educational program, or even participate in school extracurricular activities.¹¹ In the longer-term, youth with a history of congregate care have an increased likelihood of experiencing adult incarceration, unemployment, and homelessness.¹²

Lack of available local alternatives should not be the driving factor for youth going to congregate facilities.

Residential Placement in Pennsylvania

For most young people, the best way to deliver services and support educational progress is in their home school or community. Research and national reform efforts in recent decades have consistently demonstrated that **community-based alternatives** to residential placement not only cost less than sending youth to far-from-home residential facilities, but also result in better outcomes across multiple domains.¹³ In spite of this evidence, advocates for children and youth continue to encounter judges, system professionals, and even parents who believe that sending young people away to congregate care placement is necessary and appropriate. The most common rationale for residential placement is the young person's need for treatment.

In a small number of situations, residential treatment can be effective for youth with intensive behavioral health needs, though only when done safely, thoughtfully, and for the shortest time possible.¹⁴ Reform models like New York City's *Close to Home* initiative have demonstrated that even if residential placement is necessary, services can be provided in neighborhood-based facilities while supporting youth's continued ties to home.¹⁵ Yet within most counties' contracted service continuum, local programs have not expanded on pace with reductions in congregate placement numbers. Nonetheless, **lack of available local alternatives should not be the driving factor for youth going to congregate facilities**, or shuffling between placements that do not meet their needs.

Along with behavioral or treatment needs, **truancy** from a home school is a common factor contributing to residential placement. Judges and others involved with a youth's case may believe that a residential placement with an on-grounds school is a strategy to ensure the youth attends, or other professionals involved assume

the student must attend the on-grounds school.¹⁶ This assumption continues despite state guidance going back decades that defines expectations against "bundling" residential services, i.e. assuming that youth will attend an on-grounds school if the facility has one.¹⁷

Impact of Residential Placement on Education

Thoughts about school continuity tend to come after placement decisions for systems professionals challenged to find appropriate options; education staff must then scramble to catch up. Although federal law requires that child welfare and juvenile justice systems collaborate with schools to minimize any school disruptions as a result of out-of-home placements, distance between residences is a major contributor to school changes, especially for youth who need intensive services that are available in few locations. **With every school move, research shows that youth lose 4-6 months of learning progress.**¹⁸ An analysis of Philadelphia data found that students who change high schools double their chances of dropping out before graduation.¹⁹

Although **Pennsylvania law entitles youth placed in a congregate setting to attend the local community school**, a 2013 report found that 78.6% of children across Pennsylvania did not have access to, or rarely had access to, their public schools while in placement.²⁰ Congregate care facility administrators and staff interviewed for this Report also confirmed that few or no youth placed there attend anything other than the on-grounds school. Causes include school personnel who are unaware of state law provisions requiring immediate enrollment or local school administrators who refuse to enroll.²¹ For juvenile justice placements, community safety is a consideration that impacts local school access, but on-grounds school placement should not be presumed, especially in non-secure settings.²²

With every school move, research shows that youth lose 4-6 months of learning progress.

Several reports released in recent years sound the alarm about the quality of on-grounds schools and recommend improvements to services in Pennsylvania's residential institutions.²³ In Pennsylvania, on-grounds schools at institutions, treatment facilities, and privately

-run juvenile justice facilities typically do not have to meet the same curriculum requirements and academic standards as Pennsylvania public schools.²⁴

Though on-grounds schools may offer a small-group setting and promise behavioral benefits for students, in reality, these entities are **attempting to serve youth who have complex educational needs in educational programs for which there is little accountability.** Further, on-grounds schools tend to emphasize compliance over learning, and students' grades may be more of a reflection of their obedience than their academic progress.

Educational Reintegration after Residential Placement

As long as young people are sent to residential settings, the question of youth returning to their community will need to be addressed. Existing research and best practice models for congregate care consistently recommend **"thinking exit at entry."**²⁵ In addition to benefiting treatment or restorative goals, planning for post-placement from the time of admission to a facility can mitigate barriers when youth return to their community and school after discharge.²⁶ Deliberate and collaborative discharge planning should involve a **multidisciplinary team** of professionals from the congregate care facility and relevant agencies such as juvenile probation, the children and youth agency, and the returning school district, along with the youth and family or other supportive adults.²⁷ Planning should become more detailed as the discharge date nears.

With residential care increasingly intended to serve only as a short-term therapeutic intervention, maintaining and **strengthening youth ties to their home community and school** is an essential function of a residential provider. Staff at on-grounds schools should communicate regularly with a student's district of origin, to facilitate records transfer and participation in all educational meetings including any discharge planning.

Having more **positive activities and relationships during placement** also helps prepare youth to reintegrate with a community school. Students should be able to continue participating in activities at their school of origin when possible, providing a chance to stay connected to their home communities and maintain their already existing support network. In other cases, students can engage in activities in the local public school district where the residential facility is located.

What this Report Contributes

Existing research and publications have already designed comprehensive frameworks for supporting youth reentry to community and school through comprehensive pre-discharge planning.²⁸ Because such pre-discharge planning is rare in Pennsylvania, however, this Report addresses the **barriers and processes that occur at, or shortly following, the time of discharge to set the stage for successful reintegration in a community school, regardless of whether pre-discharge planning has taken place.** Looking at placements across child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health, the Report describes practices that congregate care facilities, systems, and/or receiving school districts can implement **quickly and inexpensively.**

This Report's findings are based on insights and best practices from extensive conversations with individuals from multiple sectors and jurisdictions across Pennsylvania. Recommendations also incorporate recent research literature, along with existing law and policy. After describing common barriers to school reentry, the Report highlights six Critical Elements necessary to youth's successful reintegration. For each Element, the Report provides an overview of the relevant Agencies and Processes. The Report clarifies how those Elements currently operate, while suggesting a blueprint for improvements at the local, county, and state levels.



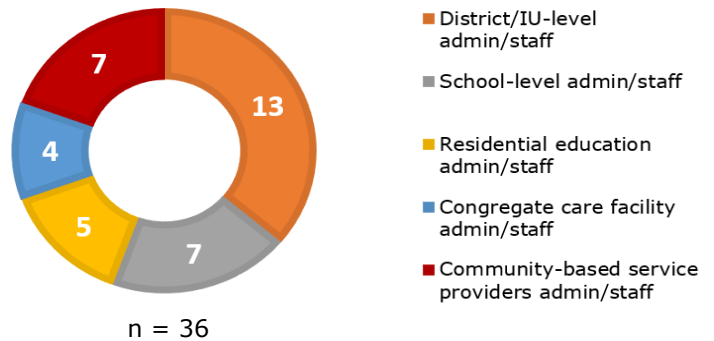
METHODOLOGY

Over the course of two years, *Child Advocates* and Temple IOD conducted in-depth interviews with a diverse mix of stakeholders who have direct experience supporting youth returning to community home schools after placement in a residential facility. The interviews sought to gather multiple perspectives on related challenges and best practices in Pennsylvania. In particular, interviews focused on understanding the experiences of public-school personnel working with students returning from residential placements.

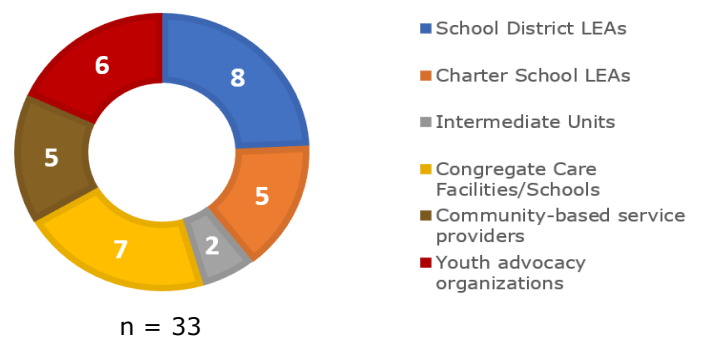
Interviewees included:

- Staff and administrators in public educational settings:
 - School District LEAs
 - Intermediate Units (IU)
 - Public Charter School LEAs
- Staff and administrators at on-grounds schools serving youth placed in residential facilities
- Staff and administrators at congregate care facilities:
 - Child Welfare
 - Behavioral Health
 - State-run secure juvenile facilities
 - Privately-run non-secure juvenile facilities
- System-involved youth and their families
- Community-based service providers
- Advocates for system-involved youth

Professionals Interviewed:



Places Interviewed:



Each participant was asked to:

- ⇒ Describe their process for school reentry when youth return from residential placements;
- ⇒ Assess the effectiveness of current practices in facilitating a successful reentry;
- ⇒ Identify barriers to a successful reentry from their specific perspective or role;
- ⇒ Examine how “best practices” could be adopted by their employer;
- ⇒ Choose a single “magic wand” change to the current practice that, if implemented, would have the largest beneficial effect for youth reintegrating with a community school.

Project partners heard from school professionals representing 8 public school districts, 2 intermediate units, and 5 charter school LEAs, across 6 Pennsylvania counties. The districts were a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. Interviewees provided perspectives on the educational reentry process from their role, including a superintendent, a school psychologist, school principals, directors of special education, directors of student services, school social workers, and transition coordinators.

Child Advocates and Temple IOD compiled and analyzed the interview responses to identify common

themes and innovative recommendations. Findings were then compared to available research literature and publications on educational transitions after residential placement. Six key components to help youth reintegrate with their home community school emerged from this process. These Critical Elements are discussed later in this report, after an overview of barriers experienced by numerous stakeholders across roles and sectors. Recommendations at the end of this Report reflect best practices and policy actions identified by interviewees, including their 'magic wand' solutions.





FINDINGS

Part 1: Barriers to Successful Reintegration

Interviews revealed five primary barriers to a student's successful reintegration to a community school:

BARRIER 1: Lack of Meaningful Collaboration

BARRIER 2: Gaps in Information and Historical Record

BARRIER 3: Limited Opportunities for Advance Discharge Planning

BARRIER 4: Excessive Movement Between Placements

BARRIER 5: Inadequate Preparation for School Reintegration

Barrier 1: Lack of Meaningful Collaboration

“Each participant is completely siloed during reentry. I’d like to figure out a system where they can communicate more with each other so that ultimately we can do what is best for the child.”

-Transition Coordinator
at a charter school LEA

Professionals from education, social services and/or justice systems, as well as youth and their families, all play a role in when or where youth will live and go to school after a residential placement. Processes vary widely across institutions and counties, with few having explicit agreements to support collaboration. Interviewees explained that even when facilities and districts have repeated interactions, there is rarely a formalized or documented process between them. Instead, communications rely on relationships between specific individuals and do not withstand staffing changes in those positions. Nearly every individual interviewed for this report identified the **lack of pre-discharge communication** as a significant impediment to a student’s successful school reentry. Even when discharge planning meetings do occur, the school district and LEA representatives interviewed frequently blamed residential facilities for not inviting them to participate, while congregate staff consistently reported that school personnel are invited but rarely respond to outreach.

A significant challenge to establishing effective communication channels is the **number of players statewide**. Pennsylvania contains 500 public school districts, 70 Career and Technical Centers, and 29 Intermediate Units, plus nearly 200 charter schools that operate as their own local education agency.²⁹ Each of these 750+ entities, with enrollment ranging from fewer than 200 students to more than 140,000, has its own system (or no identified system) for enrolling students who return from residential facilities. Youth may be sent to one of hundreds of congregate care facilities in and outside of Pennsylvania, which may operate their own on-grounds school, contract that service out to a different provider, and/or enroll youth in the local district of residence.

There are **no established statewide guidelines** applicable across systems for who should share what information, convene discharge and school reenrollment planning, or help engage key stakeholders, especially family members. Contact information can be hard to find, as is knowing if a student in a child welfare placement has a designated education decision maker other than a parent or legal guardian. Communication and scheduling between agencies takes time; making sure youth and their family are informed and engaged is not given precedence. Professionals feel pressured not to delay school reenrollment while these processes take place.

“We are constantly dealing with different counties and districts – there’s no opportunity to form relationships because it’s different people in each place. We can never figure out who to contact.”

- On-grounds School Administrator at a secure juvenile justice facility



Barrier 2: Gaps in Information and Historical Record

“Getting the full records is extremely important – they help tell the student’s story. And if you don’t know the story, you repeat mistakes made in the past.”

- Intermediate Unit School Psychologist at a residential facility

Each system, provider, or school involved keeps records of a youth’s time there, but **no overall record exists** for students who move between districts and counties. Frequently, neither professionals nor family members have a full history of where a youth lived or studied, let alone credits earned or special education services needed. Both school and facility staff interviewed for this Report uniformly expressed frustration at the time and effort required to gather prior student records. These professionals must then dedicate substantial amounts of time to deciphering what credits a student earned at another institution, causing delays in reenrollment, loss of student credits, and/or a failure to provide adequate supports and services, including for special education.

Most educational reentry processes address only a student’s immediate educational needs, without identifying trends like high-mobility youth who need additional supports that could prevent further movement. For dependent youth, an attorney, Guardian ad Litem, or court-appointed educational decision maker may have more complete historical knowledge, but they are not always included in planning.

“The records we get are just a paper file. They may not be accurate, and they don’t contain a lot of the helpful information that a conversation with someone who knows the student could convey.”

- Administrator at a small urban charter high school

As professionals review the information available to them, a **reliance on clinical records** with less attention to youth and family perspectives may paint a picture only of a youth’s challenges without sharing personal strengths and aspirations. Conclusions in past psychological or educational assessments can influence current plans, frequently in a negative way that does not reflect the full extent of a youth’s abilities.

Barrier 3: Limited Opportunities for Advance Discharge Planning

“Sometimes staff know the date of an anticipated discharge, sometimes we don’t. When we don’t, there isn’t time to put together any substantial transition plan, especially for education.”

- Transitional Services Coordinator at a secure juvenile justice facility

For youth placed through the delinquent or dependent systems, a judge may make discharge decisions with little warning and immediate effect. Privately-run facilities in the delinquent and dependent systems may also expel students with little notice. Discharges from residential treatment and other behavioral health facilities tend to be planned more in advance, given that the medical insurer authorizes treatment in time-limited increments, though this is not always the case. Discharge dates may also depend on the options for placement available at the time of discharge; if youth are not returning to family, it may not be possible to identify the receiving school prior to discharge. Unexpected discharge dates and uncertainty about future plans cause anxiety and stress for a young person.

A percentage of youth will leave placement without approval, by running away. While away from care, youth’s whereabouts and school status are officially unknown; legal protections resume once the young person returns. Some youth run away repeatedly and may return to the same placement, or be sent to a different location instead. Youth will often move through short-term emergency shelters or detention centers when returning, adding another layer of complications to school continuity.

Barrier 4: Excessive Movement Between Placements

Even when planned, discharge dates rarely align with school calendars. School enrollment is too often considered after other interconnected factors that impact next steps for discharged youth. This puts community schools in the position of being reactive instead of proactive, while also creating challenges for the receiving LEA to place students in classes mid-semester and award credits. Discharges during summer or school breaks can likewise lead to delayed enrollment and other difficulties in reintegration.³⁰ While some professionals interviewed for this report suggested that students should be held in a congregate facility until a natural educational transition point, evidence shows that returning to a community living setting as soon as possible is generally best for youth.³¹

“Discharge planning is not usually planned. It’s based on interactions with judges and [system professionals]. It varies from judge to judge, worker to worker.”

- Director of Operations at a facility for dependent-involved teens



“The problems that returning students face with missing records, missing credits, and need for supports are compounded in many cases, because they often have a history of being at several facilities.”

- Director of Pupil Services at a large suburban school district

Many youth in residential facilities change residences and schools several times as a result of system involvement.³² Moving between congregate placements makes continuity of learning, credit accumulation, and records transfer exponentially more difficult. Educational staff at one juvenile secure correction center reported that most youth placed at the facility had as many as 5-10 prior congregate placements. Though the school’s staff meticulously review any prior student records they can obtain in an attempt to award credits or partial credits from prior placements, that process is exceedingly time-consuming and results in staff having less time to provide other services or supports to the student.

Placement changes themselves, including those to or from congregate care settings, are linked with subsequent behavioral problems in children and adolescents.³³ Such moves further disrupt a youth’s healing and relationships, making learning even more difficult.

“Kids are shuffled around left and right. Half the time, they don’t even know all of the places they’ve been to. So much gets lost in the shuffle. They come and go and we don’t know when they are leaving or when they are coming back.”

- Administrator at a mid-sized urban school district

Barrier 5: Inadequate Preparation for School Reintegration

“Returning students may not have been in public school for a number of years and they don’t get any preparation to be back. In a placement, students aren’t taught the necessary organizational skills to be successful, which sets them up for failure. They’re not used to the academic rigor of public school. So when they go to class and don’t understand a word of it, how many days do we think they’re going to keep going, especially when they can just walk out?”

-High School Social Worker at a mid-sized urban school district

Staff at school districts and LEAs interviewed for this Report routinely reported that youth returning from congregate placements are behind their peers academically and return with transcripts bearing few earned credits in core academic subjects (English, math, history, and science). Prior publications highlight related concerns that stem from a lack of accountability for on-grounds education, due to the way those schools are licensed, and instructional practices that do not serve students well: students attending on-grounds schools

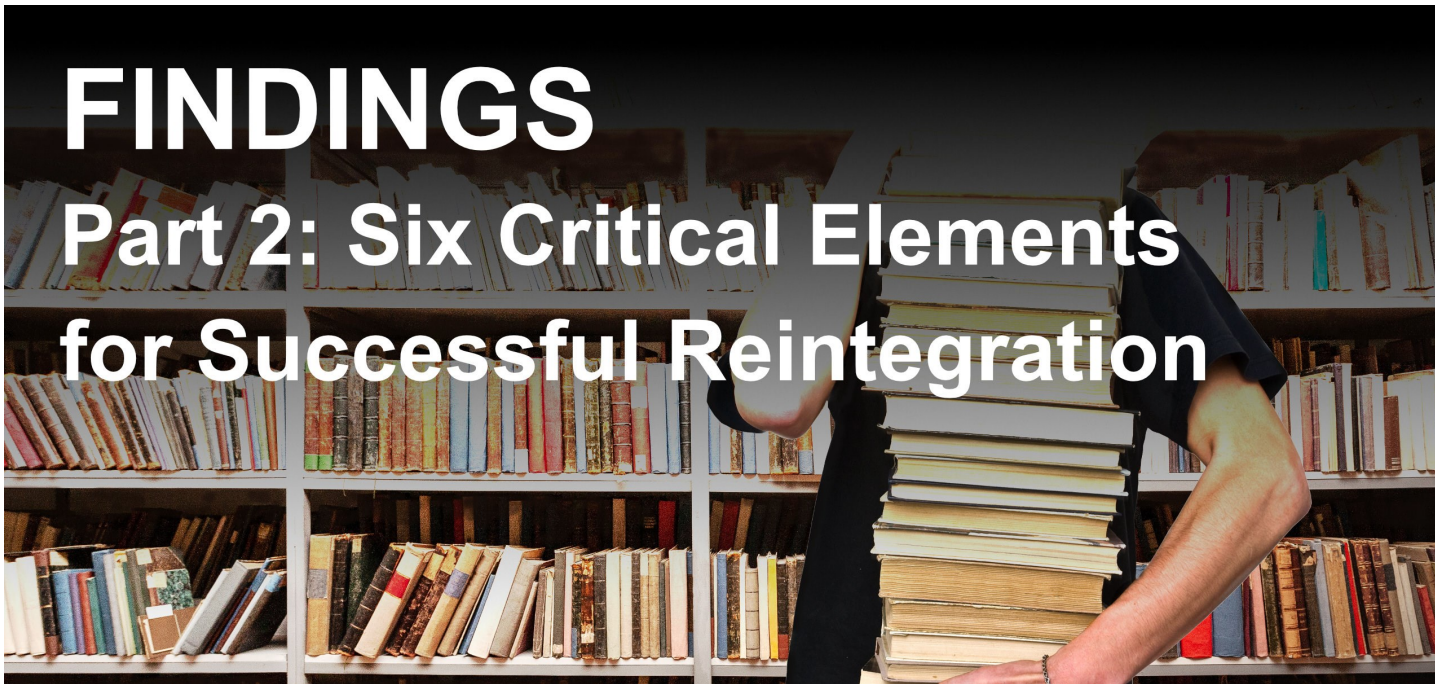
typically are taught in multi-grade classrooms, receive below-grade-level coursework, are enrolled in electives rather than core academic subjects, and receive instruction from uncertified teachers and staff.³⁴

After the highly structured and compliance-based environment in residential facilities and on-grounds schools, staff and administrators from community schools also described seeing students experience a **“culture shock”** when they return to the more rigorous demands of a community school curriculum. On-grounds schools tend to have small classes and minimal academic demands.³⁵ Academic success (good grades) in those settings generally results from following rules and meeting behavioral expectations. A number of school professionals referenced seeing students who do not receive extra support upon return become discouraged, conclude they cannot be successful in school, and drop out.³⁶

“Coming back to [a community] school is a major learning curve for students after [they have been] in a compliance-based setting where educational success usually comes from following the rules — like standing quietly in line. [Now they’re] back to real life and it’s hard.”

- Transition Coordinator at an urban charter school





FINDINGS

Part 2: Six Critical Elements for Successful Reintegration



STUDENT RECORDS with full history and transferable course credits



CREDIT TRANSFER AND RECOVERY to support progress towards graduation



TIMELY ENROLLMENT AND APPROPRIATE PLACEMENT



YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT



SPECIAL EDUCATION planning, delivery, and accommodations



WELCOMING SCHOOL COMMUNITY



“We have to fight and claw to get a transcript of all of the work a student did while they were away. There is no organized process to obtain those records.”

-School Social Worker at a large urban high school

Element 1: Student Records



Accurate and complete educational records are vital to timely school reenrollment and making progress towards graduation. The records most critical to share with the community school are **information on classes taken to date and any special education documents**. For high school students, transcripts of coursework completed are crucial – both at the last school and any others attended. For students with special education needs, records should include current, signed copies of evaluations and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) describing the youth’s necessary supports and services. Other helpful records may include report cards and attendance or behavior reports.

Without access to records, receiving school districts lack essential information to identify an appropriate school placement or comply with federal and state requirements for providing special education services. (See “Timely Enrollment and Appropriate Placement” at 20 and “Special Education” at 23). Schools need to know the student’s current classes, as well as past courses completed and credits awarded, to determine a returning student’s appropriate class roster, credits earned, and grade-level status. (See “Credit Transfer and Progress Toward Graduation” at 27). While federal law forbids schools from denying system-involved students admission due to missing records, delays and lack of information impact class start dates and can lead to students re-taking completed courses, and becoming frustrated over lost credits.

Despite serving as a linchpin for multiple aspects of successful school reentry, **obtaining accurate student records in a timely manner was the most commonly cited challenge identified by interviewees**; over 60% of staff interviewed from LEAs identified it as the biggest problem they encountered with school reentry. Frustrations with delayed, incomplete, and/or hard to decipher school records were echoed across every organization and role that provided input for this Report. Every professional interviewed



reported that obtaining student records was an extremely time-consuming process, which reduces the amount of time they have available to provide other transition supports and services to the student.

Difficulties obtaining student records are compounded when youth are sent to multiple congregate placements. Receiving schools are often unaware whether students have had prior placements, but need to gather this information and then track down records from each identified school. Personnel from school districts and congregate facilities alike attested that obtaining student records from a series of educational placements is significantly more difficult than when the student attended a single facility, and added that records may be completely unavailable after a school or facility the student attended closed.

Key Roles:

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) should have identified staff with responsibility for assisting students returning from placement in their transition. This or another staff member should coordinate student record collection for the LEA and work in partnership with systems, providers, and other school districts to secure the student's most complete academic credit history possible.

Residential Providers operating an on-grounds school where the youth attends are responsible for notifying the receiving LEA of a student discharge and promptly transmitting a transcript of student course work and any assessments completed while there. All providers should pass on any historical records, though this information may be stored with a different department at the facility (e.g. intake or clinical) or may be incomplete.

Systems play an important role by advising facilities and involved schools of any anticipated moves for the youth, in order to initiate records transfer. Decisions on discharge dates and the student's next residence come from the placing system and/or the Court. School records should be part of the system case file, along with some documented history of where the young person has lived and attended school.

Providers, districts, and systems each struggle to identify the correct point of contact at the other setting. LEAs may receive student records separate from -or well after- notification that a youth will be returning to the district. Only the system and/or final placement facility will know when and to which district of residence the student is ultimately discharged. Though they may have helpful information, systems professionals do not always assist return schools with identifying and contacting past placement locations, or with providing any past school records in their possession.

Records from some Pennsylvania schools can be requested and shared electronically, often as the result of past reform efforts related to this persistent challenge. Confusion over who has the right to access records and the process for doing so remains a matter of widespread concern. Educational information has confidentiality protections, though a release can be signed by a parent or affirmed by the system for youth in placement.





PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Residential Providers	<p>Providers operating an on-grounds school should send an interim transcript to any system professionals and the receiving school district, if known, in advance of discharge – ideally at least 30 days before. If the student is eligible for special education, sending a current IEP and evaluation to the next LEA is particularly important to begin identifying an appropriate learning setting and program. Regardless of whether there was advanced planning, at discharge, facilities should send final transcripts to the receiving LEA and relevant systems professionals, and also should give hard copies to youth and their family. Records transferred should contain, at a minimum: all student transcripts and documentation of school credits earned, the student’s current academic schedule, and up-to-date special education documents such as IEPs and evaluation reports.</p>
System Professionals	<p>System professionals play an important role as a liaison between providers, LEAs, the student, and their family. They are a vital source of information about where a student is going and where a student has been, and may be able to share or facilitate the sharing of student records. They are also the primary information-provider to the court system regarding a young person’s school enrollment and status.</p> <p>Systems can increase accountability for record transmission by including compliance monitoring in contracts with residential providers to ensure that academic records are in each youth’s case file and that the record of the youth’s entire school history is complete.</p>
LEAs	<p>LEAs can identify tenacious individuals at each school and assign them the responsibility of collecting all relevant educational records for any student enrolling after residential placement. For example, one district provided training for these key staff on types of congregate care, the systems involved in congregate placement, the need for timely and complete student records, and how to elicit a complete placement history from the student or family. These trained individuals are the initial point of contact for the student and family at reentry, and should stay involved to ensure all records are obtained.</p> <p>LEAs can also seek cooperation from their professional partners in prioritizing transmission of student records. One school district increased its ability to obtain records by meeting directly with their county’s juvenile probation and child welfare agencies. In those meetings, the district explaining the school counselors’ difficulties getting records and assembling a student transcript. The district asked its professional partners to be good stewards of students’ placement histories and educational records, and secured their assistance in ensuring that records were transmitted in a timely way.</p>
All Involved Institutions	<p>All involved institutions benefit from storing student records in a digital format, ideally with all types of youth records in the same electronic system. Although digitizing records increases convenience in sharing information, partners must also be cognizant of security and access when sharing electronic files. Establishing one central online url or email address for other parties to request student records is also helpful, as individual staff contacts may change. Having a designated staff person to manage sending and requesting school records is essential for each partner.</p>



“My idea of utopia is that we know in advance that a student is coming back, so by the time they get here, we already have them enrolled and they know where they will be going to school. That’s particularly the case for students who get special ed.”

-Coordinator of Special Education
and Alternative Services at a
small suburban school district

Rapidly reenrolling a student in school and ensuring the right school setting and an appropriate class roster are immediate concerns of the receiving school, as well as the student and their family. These goals can be in tension, given the need to balance speed with informed decision-making, i.e. not enrolling a student so quickly that no regard is paid to getting the right school setting, nor excessively delaying enrollment while continuing to search for an ideal school setting. Consequences of delayed enrollment include youth being out of school for long periods of time, being marked absent for that period, and falling further behind academically. Students placed in the wrong setting upon their return frequently struggle and are at increased risk of disengaging from school.

Lack of formal cross-system communication channels exacerbate barriers for expeditious enrollment in an appropriate school placement. Schools and districts report not knowing that students are returning until youth present in person at the school or district office. Some districts’ policies instruct students who discharge from placement that they cannot start reenrollment until returning in person.

Uncertain discharge placements and dates for youth complicate school planning. Expectations for notifying the receiving school district of youth discharge rest loosely with providers or system professionals, though neither may have complete information. In some cases, the location the youth is being discharged to may not be known in advance, so that information cannot be provided to the host LEA or the student and their family.



Element 2: Timely Enrollment and Appropriate Placement



Without **advance knowledge** of a student's return, special education administrators talked of sometimes needing weeks or even months to identify an appropriate school placement, unnecessarily delaying a student's return to school. Alternately, a social worker at a mid-sized suburban school district reported that though that district is proud of its policy of reenrolling students by the next school day, that speed resulted in little attention being paid to having an appropriate placement and supportive services, which hindered returning students' success in the long term.

School Districts and LEAs typically have to reenroll and place a student without having all of the information needed to do so thoughtfully. Timely records are key, as is knowing where else the youth has lived and studied. Students ideally will return to a local school attended before placement, although safety concerns, the youth's past experience there, or transportation may pose barriers. Youth often have little voice in these decisions. Rarely are career and technical education (CTE) programs available to returning students, although hands-on vocational programs can increase school engagement.

Key Roles:

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) across the state vary widely in their size, staffing, and funding to facilitate school reentry and meet complex student needs. An LEA may or may not have a formal process for welcoming students returning from a residential placement. But LEAs bear the responsibility of ensuring both a timely enrollment and an appropriate school placement.

Residential Providers are expected to notify both its host LEA and the receiving LEA when a student is discharged, but should not enroll or unenroll any students without proper processes, especially for special education. Residential providers generally have primary responsibility for discharge planning, including coordinating all relevant departments or partners, such as residential, therapeutic, and educational.

Systems are typically best informed about discharge dates and where a youth will live after placement, which can impact school location. Each county has case/care managers or probation officers to support youth with case or court goals like prompt school enrollment. These workers often lack understanding of what school reentry entails or may see it as outside their scope of responsibilities.

Moreover, **Students and their families receive little to no information** about steps they need to take for school reentry. Given that interdisciplinary pre-discharge planning is not common in Pennsylvania, the complicated logistics of reenrollment usually start after discharge. This puts heavy reliance on students and their families to understand and navigate school options and the reentry process. When students cannot rely on strong family support, the challenges of navigating the school return are further exacerbated.

Though students have the right to learn with general education peers, some districts in Pennsylvania routinely steer youth returning from placement into **alternative school settings**, without an individualized assessment. Alternative educational settings can include alternative education for disruptive youth (AEDY), restrictive special education settings, or other alternative placements that use web-based models rather than teacher-led instruction.

Pennsylvania law is clear that a student returning from congregate care, including a delinquency or mental health placement, may not automatically be sent to an alternative education for disruptive youth (AEDY) program.³⁷ If a district is considering an AEDY placement, returning youth have the right to an informal hearing to determine whether the student currently meets the definition of 'disruptive', before being placed in such a restrictive setting.³⁸ There are also limitations on the use of an AEDY Program for students with disabilities.³⁹

Students returning from mental health placements report being directed into self-contained emotional support programs outside of the regular education environment. Though in some instances, youth may benefit from a specialized setting with a high level of support, such a placement should not be reflexive or automatic. For students with an IEP, schools should review special education records and place students accordingly, in the least restrictive environment where the student's needs can be met.⁴⁰



PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS	
All involved institutions	All involved institutions benefit from established communications channels and cross-system collaboration. Publicizing up to date contact information for key staff at facilities and LEAs , as well as reenrollment steps, is helpful.
Systems	Systems can specify policy or contract requirements for providers and/or case workers related to school communication and reenrollment after discharge, including roles to inform and involve youth and families. Systems can also designate central staff responsible for communicating with school partners. Documented working agreements and protocols are important for ensuring practices extend beyond the knowledge and relationships of individual staff.
Residential Providers	Residential Providers need to advise youth and their families, verbally and in writing, when they will be responsible for reenrolling the student in a community school. Providing a hard copy of academic records at discharge to a student and system professionals also supports swift enrollment. Providers operating on-grounds schools should communicate with the receiving school about learning and behavioral support strategies that were successful with the youth, written in records and ideally also through communication during any transition meetings or between cross-system roles.
LEAs	<p>LEAs can hold transition or reintegration meetings to prepare for a student’s return, even if no pre-discharge planning took place. These meetings should include at least one school employee who can serve as an ongoing support to the student. Topics to discuss during the meeting should include an assessment of the youth’s progress towards graduation, proposed course roster, special education supports, and available extra-curricular or leadership opportunities. Some districts described creating a written transition plan for every returning student.</p> <p>LEAs must also be thoughtful in considering the appropriateness of an alternative placement. Early in the reenrollment process, Districts should inform youth and families of available school options, including access to alternative education options, especially for over-age and under-credited youth. When reviewing placement options with the student and student’s family, LEAs should advise whether learning will be online, teacher-led, or some combinations. If an LEA presents a GED program as an alternative, schools must be clear about the difference with a diploma-granting program. LEAs may find ways to allow more flexibility with entry dates for career and technical education programs for returning students.</p>



“[Providing] special ed[ucation] for students coming back is tricky. We get IEPs that were created for a totally different environment and have to implement them in a public school system. But we can’t change anything until we collect data. So sometimes we have to watch the student fail before we can do much to help.”

- Director of Special Education at a large charter high school

A range of disability types make youth eligible for special education services, which bring clearly defined rights and procedural expectations under state and federal law, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.⁴¹ The type and amount of special education supports provided in a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) can significantly impact both their school placement options and their successful reintegration when returning to a community school.

When special education students return to a community school, **immediately receiving appropriate accommodations, modifications, and supports is key.** Youth with disabilities who are not adequately served by the educational system are likely to disengage from school and either drop out or exhibit behaviors that lead to educational push-out.⁴² Yet school districts and other LEAs who receive students after placement must rely on existing special education records, which may not be in compliance with special education laws. Staff from multiple school districts and LEAs cited concerns that records from on-grounds schools often do not accurately reflect a student’s current special education needs. Schools must balance providing too many, not enough, or the wrong supports.

Element 3: Special Education





Some students previously eligible for special education do not receive services while in congregate placement.⁴³ Alternatively, placements with an on-grounds school may significantly increase the intensity of services prescribed, or use a one-size-fits-all approach to the provision of services. These failures to provide the correct level of special education supports are memorialized in records later used by the receiving district to plan. Even if the placement IEP prescribes the correct amount and type of services, **IEPs created for the specialized placement environment are difficult for LEAs to implement in a community school setting.** And even when community school staff suspect that a student needs different supports than the existing IEP provides, LEAs must gather additional data before recommending IEP amendments.

Returning students may also have unique needs that can be hard for school districts to meet. LEAs may

have few placement options that meet the needs of students with complex or overlapping needs, particularly those coming out of behavioral health placement or a placement for youth with disabilities. Finding or creating the right setting can be a lengthy process, delaying school start for days, weeks, or sometimes months. Several interviewees from school districts or LEAs acknowledged a tendency to assume that students returning from a behavioral health facility, or any other facility with a significant therapeutic component, should be placed in separate full-time emotional support settings at reentry. Unnecessarily placing a student in a more restrictive setting can impede that student's ability to re-incorporate into the educational community and achieve a sense of normalcy often lost in placement.

Key Roles:

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are legally obligated to identify and evaluate students who may need special education services. Once a student is identified, LEAs must provide services outlined in the student's IEP, and update both IEPs and evaluations on a prescribed timeline.⁴⁴ When a student is in a residential setting, the LEA in which that residence is located ("host LEA") is responsible for meeting that student's special education needs – even if the student attends an on-grounds school.⁴⁵ Many LEAs work closely with a county-level Intermediate Unit (IU) to address high-level student needs.

When an identified student returns to a community school, the new LEA must implement the current IEP. The receiving school district depends on the student's current IEP and other special education records to identify the best setting and services to meet a youth's individual needs.⁴⁶ Districts have a legal obligation to place students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment that can meet their needs. Districts and LEAs also have a legal obligation to include a student's family or educational decision maker — and the student themselves if over 14 years old — in the process of proposing and implementing special education services.⁴⁷

At the time a student reenrolls, the school district should schedule an IEP meeting within 30 days, so that data can be collected and any necessary changes made as quickly as possible.⁴⁸

Residential Providers who operate on-grounds schools must work with the host LEA to ensure that appropriate special education services are provided and that accurate and up-to-date records of a student's services and progress are maintained. To support reenrollment after discharge, ideally on-ground staff will be in direct contact with the receiving school or LEA to provide more information about the services and accommodations provided while the student was in placement. Employees of the residential provider may not make special education decision or sign special education documents on behalf of a student.⁴⁹

System professionals may help with follow up, ensuring students receive necessary evaluations and services, and providing both current and historical special education records. Many would benefit from learning more about special education rights and available supports. System employees may not make special education decision or sign special education documents on behalf of a student.⁵⁰

A **parent, guardian, or court-appointed education decision maker** must participate in IEP meetings and sign evaluation requests, IEPs, and the Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP) form to give an LEA permission to implement an IEP.



PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS	
All involved institutions	All involved institutions benefit from increased knowledge of special education rights and responsibilities, in order to advocate for students when needed to ensure compliance with protections and entitlements.
On-ground school	On-ground school staff must be mindful that any IEP created in placement may carry over to another setting and need to be replicated there. To support this transition, the writers should include an explicit, detailed description of the setting and supports provided to the student, as well as interventions that were attempted but did not benefit the student.
Host LEAs	Host LEAs can use well-defined post-secondary goals and use of transition services as part of the IEP to support home school reintegration, ⁵¹ both by focusing educational services while a student is in placement and to assist a community school in identifying an appropriate educational placement and curriculum upon student return.
Receiving LEAs	<p>Receiving LEAs should recognize that special education records from on-grounds schools may not present an accurate picture of the student's present needs. Seeking input from the student and parent or educational decision maker about what settings or supports have helped the student do well in the past and the student's current needs is critical.</p> <p>Beyond initial IEP planning, community schools should monitor returning students closely to ensure they are making adequate yearly progress. One charter school automatically schedules an IEP meeting for returning students with disabilities who fail a class for two consecutive quarters. The administrator interviewed stated that for them, such failure indicates that the school is not adequately meeting the student's needs. By adjusting supports then, the school intends to "catch" a student before it is too late to make up the class grade, or the student gives up and disengages.</p>

“IEPs are just cut and pasted when students are in an on-grounds school. They’re the same year after year. You can’t trust them to tell you anything about what the student needs.”

- IU School Psychologist.



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Although community schools rarely manage behavioral health services directly, a student's need for such supports during the school day must be considered as part of the reentry process. Young people involved with dependent, delinquent, and/or behavioral health systems are likely to need behavioral health supports as a result of what led them to become systems-involved initially, and/or as a result of trauma, abuse, or neglect experienced within those systems. As a student adjusts to the change from a highly-regulated environment in placement to less structure and increased demands in their school and community, behavioral health supports can help ease the transition and address coping behaviors that could interrupt learning.⁵²

Available behavioral health services vary greatly depending on the size and resources available in a school district. Interviewees from community schools and service providers reported that even where behavioral health supports are available, many students who would benefit face challenges accessing services. Common barriers to access identified by interviewees include waiting lists, the need to make and wait for an appointment, and medical insurance coverage.

“I would love to have behavioral health services available to our students on demand. That way, they could get help in the moment when they were asking for it. It can prevent situations from escalating.”

-Social worker at mid-sized
suburban high school


As part of their school reintegration process, LEAs interviewed suggested taking the following steps to support the behavioral health needs of their returning students:

- Review behavioral health and/or special education records, and contact any involved behavioral health service provider.
- Ask the student to identify worries, triggers, and times they might need help. This groundwork can assist in identifying needed supports and empowering the student to ask for assistance in the future.
- Include the school psychologist and/or member of the school climate team in the reentry planning process when appropriate.
- Make referrals and service coordination an intentional part of cross-system collaboration at reentry. Follow up to ensure that a student does not experience barriers to accessing services and can find appointment times that do not interrupt classes.
- Employ special education interventions including a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and individualized positive behavior support plan (PBSP), if a student's behavioral needs interfere with learning or disrupt the classroom.
- Explore the possibility of having a behavioral health provider co-located inside the school building for the benefit of all students and their families.



“Students are more focused on what their grades are than what credits they need [to make progress toward graduation]. [When students are in a residential placement], they assume [the on-grounds] school staff are making sure they are taking the classes needed to graduate. When students come home and find out that wasn’t the case, they’re really angry. And they have a right to be.”

- Program Director at a community-based provider of youth reentry services



Element 4: Credit Transfer and Progress Towards Graduation

In a national study detailing academic barriers for system-involved youth, more than 54% of youth surveyed reported **earning fewer credits in placement** than their peers attending community schools.⁵³ This concern is borne out in Pennsylvania by students returning from congregate settings who report that they were not awarded academic credit for the work they completed in an on-grounds school, or that the credits they earned did not count towards subjects required for graduation.⁵⁴ Multiple school-based personnel interviewed expressed concern that information about credit earning while in placement was frequently not communicated to the youth or their family. Interviewees described the disappointment and frustration students displayed upon learning that they were considered to be under-credited in a public school despite having been academically engaged while in placement.

On-grounds schools tend to offer **partial credits**, due to varied entry and exit dates for the placement. A receiving school district, however, may only register full credits and must combine the partial credits a youth has earned, most often counting that combination as an elective rather than a course required for graduation. Mid-semester school changes can also contribute to students not receiving credit for classes they took, both when students leave an on-grounds school or when they return to a community school.⁵⁵ An additional



concern with mid-semester school changes occurs when courses a student was taking at an on-grounds school do not have a public school analog and the student must abandon the prior course and enroll in something different. In such cases, the student is denied the ability to earn a full credit in any course for that marking period.

Once a student is **undercredited**, there are few opportunities to catch up. Identifying appropriate class rosters for youth with missing credits was a recurring challenge mentioned in interviews with community schools, especially given that students need predicate classes before being enrolled in upper-level courses. Credit recovery options are inconsistently available for

students to catch up on missing or partial credits. Community schools also acknowledged that career and technical education or vocational programs are less accessible for returning students, due to application deadlines and the scaffolded nature of those programs.

Another common frustration compounding to the problem of credit transfer, as identified by school staff interviewed, is receiving **transcripts** that are difficult to decipher. Transcripts come in a variety of formats, may count credits in different ways, and generally only cover the time a youth was at one school. It takes time to align those documents with the home district graduation requirements, including which courses meet core academic requirements versus electives.

Key Roles:

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) review existing student transcripts and attempt to assign credits to count towards graduation requirements.

Residential Providers who operate on-grounds schools award credits on their own defined timelines, most of which take into account varying, generally short-term timeframes for a student's time in placement.





PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

<p>On-grounds schools</p>	<p>On-grounds schools should provide short course descriptions when transmitting student records, ideally combined with a sample work product from each class. Several school districts indicated that such information would improve their ability to gage equivalency, align curriculums, award credits, and place the student in an appropriate course of study. Educators in this setting can also take the time regularly to discuss credit earning with students. Multiple interviewees for this Report expressed concern that students have been poorly informed about the importance of earning credits, and of the status of their earned credits. This leads to students being surprised and frustrated when they return to community schools and discover that they are not on a timely path to graduation.</p>
<p>LEAs</p>	<p>LEAs should embrace creative strategies for students to make up missing credits. One school administrator reported that rather than let students “get screwed by the system,” they address missing credits by “breaking the rules.” In consultation with teachers, the school’s principal will award partial credit for a course if a student completes designated projects and assignments based on the topics and skills typically taught in that class. School administrators also suggested allowing students to take placement tests to demonstrate subject mastery and determine grade level, and to award credit for a lower-level prerequisite classes when students can document successful completion of a higher-level course (for example, awarding credit for Spanish I when Spanish II has been completed). Finally, districts and other LEAs should offer opportunities to earn credits outside of the ordinary school day, including computer-based options and sessions during summer breaks. Some of these recommendations will be required of schools by Act 1 of 2022; however, schools can elect to go beyond what the Act requires in an effort to facilitate progress towards graduation when a student has demonstrated competency in the subject matter.</p>
<p>All involved systems</p>	<p>All involved systems working with high school youth could assist with monitoring student’s credit status and advocating for student’s access to needed supports or opportunities to complete missing credits.</p> <p>School options and enrollment processes can be opaque, especially for youth and families. All involved institutions can work to make these processes more transparent, including publicizing steps and options to help families fully engage and allow systems professionals and advocates to more closely follow and assist with the process. As a starting point, all education stakeholders should be informed about how many credits are needed at each high school grade level in their home district, in order to monitor and support youth’s progress at every step of their education and especially when returning from a residential placement.</p>



“To be successful, youth need to be taught to advocate for themselves. This can be as small as empowering them to ask questions in class when they don’t understand something.”

-Director of Education at residential placement facility for dependent- and delinquent- involved teens

Decision-making processes during residential placement and at reenrollment prioritize professional expertise, with few opportunities for youth voice and participation.⁵⁶ Professional opinion overshadows any input and feedback from young people, denying youth agency to advocate for themselves. Youth may be deemed incapable of self-advocacy, based on age and maturity.⁵⁷ Not only does this limit professionals’ full understanding of a youth’s situation, the failure to meaningfully involve youth impacts engagement and success in returning to a home community school. When youth preferences are not taken into account, students may instead “vote with their feet” and attendance problems can arise.

Young people typically receive very little information about how the child welfare or juvenile justice systems work, including what conditions will impact discharge. When adults do not explain to youth why a placement change is happening, or provide advanced notification of a move, a young person faces uncertainty and confusion that can lead to stress and trauma.⁵⁸

Interviews for this project described similar limitations when involving parents or caring adults, making family members feel unwelcome or unimportant even when the provider or school attempts to engage them. Family members are rarely informed about a student’s educational rights or given complete and accurate information to make educational decisions. Staff tend to use language that is inaccessible to parents, such as acronyms and professional jargon. Multiple interviewees reported that collaborative meetings are scheduled at times and locations convenient for professionals, not family members and little consideration is given to family members’ work schedules or access to transportation or technology. As one social worker at a mid-sized school district put it: “Parents are so stretched already. And we don’t make it easy for them.”

Element 5: Youth Participation and Family Involvement





Key Roles:

Systems professionals, residential providers, and LEAs all have some expectations for engaging families and involving youth in education or service planning. This engagement requires time and patience from professionals juggling multiple demands.

PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS	
Systems	<p>Systems can develop guides for youth and their families that provide a plain-language overview of rights and protections, including those related to education.⁵⁹</p> <p>Systems can define more concrete expectations for case managers, probation officers, and residential providers to involve youth and families in discharge planning and decision-making through policies and service contracts. Acknowledging the time and effort required to support meaningful participation, increased expectations should be accompanied by additional resources whenever possible.</p>
LEAs	<p>Schools can offer professional development to staff that provide strategies for teaching students self-advocacy skills, as well as helpful ways to seek their input in decision-making.</p> <p>Schools should also build partnerships with families and ensure they are included as a key part of the student’s working team. This could include teaching parents about behavior management techniques used during the school day to encourage implementation at home and help reinforce expectations. One small, economically disadvantaged district commits to scheduling any meetings at a time and place convenient for the family, even if it is outside of regular school hours or at a location in the community outside of the school.</p> <p>One LEA described offering workshops on available community services for families. To facilitate family participation, the district is trying to identify sources of funding to provide concrete incentives, like food or child care. Another district facilitates parent support groups on a variety of topics, including parents of youth who have delinquent-system involvement.</p>
All involved institutions	<p>All involved institutions can heed lessons learned during COVID-19 shutdowns, when collaborative meetings moved more fully online. Phone conferences can expand options for parent or youth participation, since they do not need to travel to attend them. For any online video meetings, system or school staff should ensure that youth and family members have a working device and functional internet access.</p>



“Depending on how long they have been away, it’s essentially like being a new student here again. They have to make friends, try activities, and find where they fit in here.”

-Director of Pupil Services
at a large suburban school district

In addition to managing the academic aspects of school reentry, schools set the tone for a student’s reintegration. Through interviews for this Report, **three aspects of a welcoming school community** stood out: adult and peer relationships, connections to positive activities and leadership opportunities, and restorative school disciplinary practices.

In each school district, individuals in leadership positions set and enforce standards for welcoming students after residential placements, while also modeling desired staff behaviors. Yet some school administrators and staff shared that reentry can be so chaotic that key support staff may not even know a student is back in the building. Having a designated staff contact when the student first reenters, as required by Act 1 of 2022, can be crucial for initial arrival and facilitate a strong connection to the school community over time.

Youth returning from residential facilities often have limited support networks after being separated from their community of origin, especially youth who moved through multiple congregate placements. Returning students are concerned about their relationships with peers, teachers, and others.⁶⁰ But instead of finding supportive relationships, **youth are frequently stigmatized after placement.** Interviewees from a number of districts and schools reported that whether youth return from a juvenile justice, child welfare, or behavioral health placement, they face stigma from teachers, school staff, and other students.

A school district administrator from a small, under-resourced district acknowledged that school personnel do not give students a “clean slate,” especially after juvenile justice involvement. Staff are more likely to surveil students with delinquent involvement and gossip about them. The administrator noted that students are highly sensitive to this treatment and respond to the low expectations they perceive from staff.⁶¹ Peer stigma also negatively impacts a student’s

Element 6: Welcoming School Community





ability to reconnect with old friends and make new ones. Challenges with establishing a secure peer network and relationships with supportive adults can cause youth to experience low self-esteem, avoidance, and isolation.⁶²

Extracurricular and leadership activities can increase youth engagement with the school environment and help them to build healthy relationships. Yet this powerful tool to support youth reintegration is frequently overlooked or deprioritized in reentry planning. When involved in positive out-of-school time activities, youth are more likely to engage in all aspects of their education.⁶³ Participation in positive activities is associated with better educational outcomes and higher levels of academic attainment.⁶⁴ For some students, participating in extracurricular activities may be the primary motivator for going to school.

As part of collaborative planning for a student's return, school and system partners can ensure that students are connected to positive activities and address any barriers like transportation or permission. All partners will ideally connect youth to additional opportunities and resources via referrals, then follow up to make sure youth get connected. Act 1 of 2022 further entitles youth to participate in any school-sponsored or extracurricular activities for which the student is otherwise qualified, and waive any participation fees for these activities.



Key Roles:

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) designate staff roles and resources at the district and/or school level to support returning students, and approve disciplinary guidelines and student codes of conduct. In addition to counselors or social workers at the school level, districts may have specific staff who will check in with students after they return to the classroom.

Schools may work in close partnership with community agencies to meet student needs, including for behavioral health supports and positive enrichment activities.

Systems staff and judges may also follow up to monitor student progress in school after return, while a case is still open. Caseworkers or probation officers should be part of planning and coordinating supports with the school team and can advocate for the youth if school discipline issues arise.

School disciplinary practices also impact a student's success in reintegrating with a community school. Several districts confirmed that mental health and behavioral issues in their schools are frequently treated as disciplinary or delinquent matters, with youth returning from placement especially likely to encounter this educational "**pushout.**" One administrator complained of that district's "zero tolerance" model, where police are routinely called for student code of conduct infractions, leading to unnecessary increases in juvenile justice involvement for students. Punishing student behaviors, including those related to trauma or other mental health conditions, rather than providing supports, increases the likelihood of youth involvement (or re-involvement) in the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems - a phenomenon referred to as the "**School-to-Prison Pipeline.**"⁶⁵



PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS	
All involved professionals	<p>All involved professionals will benefit from training in trauma-informed and student-centered interventions which help staff at schools and other institutions be more welcoming and aware of the challenges that returning youth may face. Increasing knowledge of the behavioral health, child welfare, and/or juvenile justice systems can provide useful context for school staff to understand the student’s experience.</p>
LEA or school administrators	<p>LEA or school administrations define expectations and allocate resources to support students who return from placements, including prioritizing training for all staff to be welcoming and to reduce stigma around placement. A school administrator at a small suburban district emphasized that every member of school staff is provided tools to welcome returning students, because “it really does take everybody doing this for it to work.” Secretaries at their high school receive training on public speaking and interpersonal skills to help create a welcoming environment. School-wide in-service training emphasizes that “a child doesn’t deserve a life sentence,” that students who were placed through the juvenile justice system have met the Court’s expectations to return to their community and should come back with a blank slate. These students deserve the same treatment as any incoming student, including having a building tour, meeting with the principal, being advised of extra-curricular activities, etc.</p> <p>Administrators at either the district or school level should designate a counselor or other staff chosen by the student to be available as a resource for returning students. A commonly used practice in many schools is scheduling student “check-ins,” which give youth the opportunity to spend a few minutes with a trusted staff person as often as necessary, even multiple times a day.</p> <p>Some school staff interviewed highlighted how their district makes use of existing school resources and programs. Schools utilized school-wide programs such as multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), and social-emotional learning (SEL) programs. One urban charter school described their success with teacher-student groups and peer-to-peer support, which are automatically offered to students returning from residential placement.</p>
School staff	<p>School staff can also support the entire student body in learning social-emotional skills to help reduce peer-to peer stigma. This can include workshops and/or other incentives to encourage relationship-building and empathy. By fostering an environment that embraces young people without stigma and judgment, schools can better contribute to a student’s success.</p>

“Relationships are the key. They make or break a [returning] student’s success.”

- Special education administrator at a small suburban school district.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Interviewees for this Report identified recommendations for broader policy changes that they believe would significantly improve their ability to ensure a student's successful reintegration, but that they could not unilaterally implement. At the outset, it is important to recognize that every barrier to educational reintegration is avoided when young people are not sent to congregate placement in the first place. Developing and funding community-based alternatives in the juvenile justice, child welfare, and behavioral health systems is the most effective means of ensuring that a student's education is not disrupted by a residential placement. In the interim, and in circumstances when residential placement cannot be avoided, the following system-wide improvements would significantly improve a student's prospects for a successful educational reentry.

1 **Create a statewide educational record management system to centralize access to the most vital documents for successful school reentry.**

When asked what one "magic wand" change they would make to the current reentry system, over 25% of interviewees requested a system of electronic student records that would grant them immediate access to the documents vital for enrollment, credit transfer, and ensuring appropriate supports.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) should create an electronic "portfolio" system tied to a student's unique "PAsecureID" number and require use by all public school districts, charter schools, Intermediate Units, Career and Technical Centers, and any other PDE-licensed entity. PDE can offer incentives to other registered schools to also use this centralized record repository. Fundamental records included should be transcripts from all schools attended, a student's current course schedule, up-to-date special education plans and evaluations, and other documents needed for enrollment, such as a birth certificate and immunization records. A student portfolio could also contain vocational certifications, resumes, or other documents to support work and vocational opportunities.

2 **Identify and designate a single agency with the responsibility for educational transition following a residential placement.**

The most commonly cited barrier to successful reintegration by interviewees for this Report was the lack of communication and coordination surrounding the process. Professionals and families alike expressed frustration with the fragmentation of school transition between multiple people and organizations, resulting in gaps in services and supports.

PDE and Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services (PA DHS) must work together to determine which agency will have ultimate responsibility for coordinating a returning student's educational reentry. A primary obligation of the agency would be to provide formal transition coordination services to youth starting from the time they enter a residential placement and continuing for at least 3 months following community reentry. The transition coordinator should serve as a "hub" for all of the relevant systems involved (including child welfare, juvenile justice, behavioral health, and educational), as well as the student and the student's family.

3 Fully implement new legislation that facilitates credit transfer, provides waiver and make-up options, and expands diploma options for returning students.

Act 1, passed by the PA legislature in 2022, seeks to address common barriers and restraints that can impact enrollment, credit accumulation, and graduation requirements for youth returning from placement and other students who change schools more than once a grade year. Act 1's provisions address many factors cited by LEA representatives as perceived limitations of past laws and regulations. While the new law called for implementation effective immediately, districts and schools will benefit from assistance to reach full implementation and PDE must ensure accountability over time. Schools and county systems also need to inform families and students of their rights under Act 1.

PDE should provide clear policy guidance and statewide monitoring to ensure full implementation of provisions designed to facilitate returning students' reentry and progress towards graduation. LEAs and all other educational entities, including private on-grounds schools, will need to be informed of Act 1's provisions and held accountable for enacting local policies and procedures in line with the new requirements. PDE, advocates, and other support entities can help districts and schools share best practices, staff key positions as required, and develop new processes and templates.

Act 1 empowers school entities to be flexible and creative in awarding credits and establishing alternatives to help students with education instability reach on-time graduation. School districts and county systems, community organizations, and advocates should work together to develop and exchange sample policy language and protocols, as well as shared problem solving to increase the speed of full implementation.

The protections provided to eligible Students in Act 1 should also be extended to Students who experience educational instability due to placement in a residential treatment or other behavioral health facility.

4 Require the collection and reporting of relevant data.

LEA professionals interviewed for this report were keenly aware from their own experience that youth returning to their schools from placement have significantly worse educational outcomes than their peers. Interviewees were particularly concerned about the equity implications when the majority of returning students are those with disabilities, those of color, and those who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Pennsylvania policymakers should require disaggregated educational data collection and outcome monitoring for students leaving residential placements through the child welfare, juvenile justice, or behavioral health systems. PDE should require school districts and other LEAs to collect, track, and report data relating to the timeliness of enrollment and school placement setting of youth returning from care. Similarly, PA DHS should require residential facilities that they operate or license to collect, track, and report student outcome data related to education at and in the 12 months following the time of discharge. At discharge, this data should include the number and type of high school credits earned while in placement, reading and math proficiency scores at entry and exit, and any educational or vocational credential earned. In the year following discharge, data collected should include enrollment in public school, post-secondary enrollment, enrollment in GED programs, enrollment in job training programs, and any educational or vocational credentials earned.



ENDNOTES

1. See, e.g.: *2019 State Roundtable Report Congregate Care*, Congregate Care Workgroup of Office of Children & Families in the Courts (2019), accessed at: <https://ocfcpacourts.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2019-CC-WKG-Report-002390.pdf>; *2019 Juvenile Court Annual Report*, Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges Commission (2019), accessed at: <https://www.jcjc.pa.gov/Research-Statistics/Disposition%20Reports/2019%20Juvenile%20Court%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.
2. See, e.g.: *2019 Juvenile Court Annual Report*, pgs. 32-35 (see note 1); *Unsafe and Uneducated: Indifference to Dangers in Pennsylvania's Residential Child Welfare Facilities*, Children's Rights, Education Law Center (2018), pg. 6, accessed at: https://www.childrensrightrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018_Pennsylvania-Residential-Facilities_Childrens-Rights_Education-Law-Center.pdf; *Report and Recommendations*, City of Philadelphia Youth Residential Placement Task Force (2019), pgs. 6-7, accessed at: https://www.phila.gov/hhs/PDF/FINAL%20YRPTF%20report_web_2019.pdf.
3. *2018 Juvenile Court Annual Report*, Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges Commission (2018), pgs. 13, 36, accessed at: <https://www.jcjc.pa.gov/Research-Statistics/Disposition%20Reports/2018%20Juvenile%20Court%20Annual%20Report.pdf>. Delinquent placements comprised 6.6% of the total number of delinquent dispositions that year. *Id.* at 37.
4. It is difficult to determine conclusively the number of Pennsylvania youth sent to residential placement each year through the child welfare system. The Pennsylvania State Congregate Care Workgroup, convened by the PA Office of Children & Families in the Courts, explored several sources of data on this question and noted discrepancies between the way that those sources collect data. *2019 State Roundtable Report Congregate Care*, pg. 6 (see note 1). By measuring the change in point-in-time counts, the Workgroup concluded that dependent-involved youth in Pennsylvania had a congregate placement rate of 15% as of September 30, 2017 (2430 dependent-adjudicated youth were in a congregate placement on that date). *Id.* Because a point-in-time count is not equivalent to the total number of youth sent to a residential placement through the dependent system for the year, the actual number for that year is likely higher. See also, *2018 Pennsylvania Profile: Transition-Age Youth in Foster Care*, The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018, pg. 3, accessed at: https://www.papartnerships.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Pennsylvania_StateProfile.pdf (47% of transition-age youth in care were placed in a group setting).
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6. *Breaking the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Students with Disabilities*, National Council on Disability (2015), accessed at: <https://www.ncd.gov/publications/2015/06182015> (up to 85% of youth who interact with the criminal justice system have a disability that would qualify them for special education services); *Fostering Success in Education: National Fact Sheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care*, Legal Center for Foster Care and Education (2018), accessed at: <http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/OurWork/NationalWorkingGroup.aspx> (between 35.6% and 47.3% of children in foster care receive special education services compared to 16% at the state and national level); *Youth with Disabilities in the Foster Care System: Barriers to Success and Proposed Policy Solutions*, National Council on Disability (2008) accessed at: <https://ncd.gov/publications/2008/02262008>.
7. See, e.g.: *Report and Recommendations*, Philadelphia, pgs. 10-11 (see note 2); *Unsafe and Uneducated*, pg. 6 (see note 2); *Broken Bridges: How Juvenile Placements Cut Off Youth from Communities and Successful Futures*, Juveniles for Justice at the Juvenile Law Center (2018), pgs. 8-21, accessed at: <https://jlc.org/resources/broken-bridges-how-juvenile-placements-cut-youth-communities-and-successful-futures>.
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9. Casey, K. J., Reid, R., Trout, A. L., Hurley, K. D., Chmelka, M. B., & Thompson, R. *The Transition Status of Youth Departing Residential Care*. Child and Youth Care Forum, 39(5), pgs. 323-340 (2010), accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-010-9106-6> (subscription required).
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11. *Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems*, The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012), accessed at: <https://www.aecf.org/resources/addressing-the-unmet-educational-needs>.
12. See, e.g.: *What are the Outcomes for Youth Placed in Congregate Care Settings?*, Casey Family Programs Strong Families Information Packet (2017), pg. 2, accessed at: https://caseyfamilypro-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/media/SF_CC-Outcomes-Resource.pdf; *Transforming Justice: Bringing Pennsylvania's Young People Safely Home from Juvenile Justice Placements*, Juvenile Law Center (2019), pgs. 9-10, accessed at: https://jlc.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2019-10/Transforming_Justice_final.pdf.
13. *Perspectives on Residential and Community-Based Treatment for Youth and Families*, Magellan Health Services, Children's Services Task Force (2008), pgs. 4-7; *Report and Recommendations*, The Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force (2021), accessed at: https://www.pacourts.us/Storage/media/pdfs/20210622/152647-pajuvenilejusticetaskforcereportandrecommendations_final.pdf.
14. *Elements of Effective Practice for Children and Youth Served by Therapeutic Residential Care: Research Brief*, Casey Family Programs (2016), pgs. 15-33; *Perspectives on Residential and Community-Based Treatment for Youth and Families*, pgs. 4-8 (see note 13).
15. See, e.g., *New York's Close to Home Initiative Offers a New Model for Juvenile Justice*, Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018), accessed at: <https://www.aecf.org/blog/report-new-yorks-close-to-home-initiative-offers-a-new-model-for-juvenile>.
16. The default assumption that youth will attend an on-grounds school means that too often, the mechanisms that should facilitate youth staying in their school of origin or accessing a community school instead serve only as a rubber stamp or happen after the fact. Federal law calls for a collaborative Best Interest Determination made between schools and system professionals to warrant any school change due to placement move for youth in the child welfare system. PA Court rules implemented in 2019 specify that a judge must approve any school change for youth in child welfare or juvenile justice. Special education law requires collaboration, parent sign off, and commitment to serving youth in the Least Restrictive Environment with general education peers where possible. (con't)

(con't) Even when collaborative processes do occur, confusion over which adult should participate on behalf of youth means there is no one to advocate for the youth's rights to be in a community school. These are missed opportunities at the front end to protect youth's school stability and credit progress, which should be taken more seriously given widespread concerns about the quality of on-grounds schools in congregate facilities.

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21. *Report and Recommendations*, Philadelphia (see note 2); *Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs Of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems* (see note 11).
22. *Educational Programs for Students in Non-Educational Placements* (see note 17).
23. See, e.g.: *Unsafe and Uneducated* (see note 2); *Report and Recommendations*, Philadelphia (see note 2).
24. *Unsafe and Uneducated*, pg. 22 (see note 2).
25. Miller, A. A., & Therrien, W. J. *Returning Home: Reducing Recidivism for Juvenile Offenders with Disabilities Through Transition Planning* (2018), *Beyond Behavior*, 27(2), 108–115. Accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/107429561876651> (subscription required).
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27. *Transitioning Youth from Residential Treatment to the Community: A Preliminary Investigation*, pgs. 36, 73-86 (see note 26).
28. See, generally: materials at Models for Change, accessed at <http://www.modelsforchange.net/index.html>, including: *Educational Aftercare & Reintegration Toolkit for Juvenile Justice Professionals*, 2nd ed., Education Law Center (2009), and *Building Pennsylvania's Comprehensive Aftercare Model Probation Case Management Essentials for Youth in Placement*, Patricia M. Torbert and National Center for Juvenile Justice (2008). See also: *Returning Home: Reducing Recidivism for Juvenile Offenders with Disabilities Through Transition Planning*, pgs. 108–115 (see note 25); resources compiled by the IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University, accessed at: <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/jj2/cresource/resources/p07/#content>; Feirman J., Levick M., & Mody A., *The School-to-Prison Pipeline . . . and Back: Obstacles and Remedies for the Re-Enrollment of Adjudicated Youth*, 54 *New York Law School Review* 1115 (2010).
29. *2020 State of Education Report*, Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2020). pg 7. Accessed at: <https://publications.psba.org/publications-and-reports-2020-state-of-education/0201117001588172444>.
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38. *Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth* (see note 37). See also 24 P.S. § 19-1901-C(5) for the meaning of "disruptive youth" in the AEDY Program context. An exception to this rule is if the student is currently expelled for a weapons offense, which requires a mandatory one-year expulsion for any student who brings a weapon to school or to a school-sponsored activity. 24 P.S. § 13-1317.2(e.1). In addition, for youth returning only to the School District of Philadelphia, youth returning (con't)

ENDNOTES

- (con't) from a delinquent or adult criminal placement who was adjudged of having committed a crime related to weapon possession, drugs, aggravated assault, sexual assault, or robbery will be assigned to an alternative education program. 24 P.S. § 21-2134, codifying Pa. Legis. Serv. Act 2002-88 ("Act 88").
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 41. Qualifying conditions include visual or hearing impairments, intellectual disability, autism, specific learning disability, or serious emotional disturbance. 34 C.F.R. § 300.8; 22 PA Code § 14.101.
 42. Clark, H. G., & Unruh, D., *Transition Practices for Adjudicated Youth with E/BDs and Related Disabilities*, Behavioral Disorders, 36(1) (2010), pgs. 43-51, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/019874291003600105> (subscription required); Zhang, D., Barrett, D. E., Katsiyannis, A., & Yoon, M., *Juvenile Offenders With and Without Disabilities: Risks and Patterns of Recidivism*, Learning and Individual Differences, 21(1) (2011), pgs. 12–18, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2010.09.006> (subscription required); Bullis, M., Yovanoff, P., Mueller, G., & Havel, E., *Life on the "Outs"—Examination of the Facility-to-Community Transition of Incarcerated Youth*, Exceptional Children, 69(1) (2002), pgs. 7–22, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290206900101> (subscription required). See also *Returning Home: Reducing Recidivism for Juvenile Offenders with Disabilities Through Transition Planning*, pgs. 108–115 (see note 25); Christle, C. A., Jolivet, K., & Nelson, C. M., *Breaking the School to Prison Pipeline: Identifying School Risk and Protective Factors for Youth Delinquency*, Exceptionality, 13(2), (2005), pgs. 69–88, accessed at: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327035ex1302_2 (subscription required).
 43. See, e.g., *Breaking the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Students with Disabilities* (see note 6) (Although up to 85% of youth who interact with the criminal justice system have a disability that would qualify them for special education services, only 37% of these students receive them); *Unsafe and Uneducated* at 23 (see note 2) ("the problems are myriad: from delays in obtaining the child's specialized plan, known as an IEP, to failing to conduct timely evaluations to determine the child's educational needs, to the failure of school staff to modify instruction, to a lack of rigorous progress monitoring. Most egregious, these educational programs commonly fail to follow a child's IEP or provide related services. Inevitably, these failures result in a lack of student progress"). Information gathered in interviews for this Report highlighted these and other concerns, such as on-grounds school failing to invite active participation from the student or the student's parent or educational decision maker.
 44. IEPs expire on an annual basis and a student must be reevaluated every three years. 33 U.S.C § 1414(2)(b). Under Pennsylvania law, a student identified with an intellectual disability must be reevaluated every two years. 22 Pa. Code § 14.124.
 45. *Educational Programs for Students in Non-Educational Placements* (see note 17).
 46. *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and Educational Placement for Students with Individualized Education Programs* (see note 40). See also 20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(5); 34 C.F.R. § 300.114.
 47. 34 C.F.R. § 300.321.
 48. See 34 C.F.R. § 300.323 (e),(f), and (g) for an LEA's obligations when a student eligible for special education transfers school districts.
 49. 34 C.F.R. § 300.30; *Surrogate Parent Guidelines for IDEA-Eligible or Thought-to-Be Eligible Students*, Pennsylvania Department of Education (2014), at 8 (an educational decision maker making special education decisions for a student in a residential setting "cannot be an employee of an agency involved in the education or care of the child."), accessed at: https://www.pattan.net/getmedia/a69b8612-878b-49c0-9832-b09cf9ca8021/Surrogate_Gd_0517.
 50. 34 C.F.R. § 300.30; *Surrogate Parent Guidelines for IDEA-Eligible or Thought-to-Be Eligible Students* at 3 (see note 49) ("[E]ven a judge cannot appoint a person who is employed by an agency involved in the education or care of the child to serve as a surrogate parent under the IDEA. Thus, a judge cannot appoint a child's caseworker to serve as the child's IDEA surrogate parent.").
 51. Transition services are "a coordinated set of activities ... focused on improving the academic and functional achievements of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities," generally considered to include post-secondary education, training, employment, and independent living. 20 U.S.C. § 1401(34); 34 C.F.R. § 300.43(a). Though secondary transition goals are required for students age 14 and up, they may be included even for younger children when the IEP Team agrees. 22 Pa Code 14.131(a)(5).
 52. *Returning Home: Reducing Recidivism for Juvenile Offenders With Disabilities Through Transition Planning*, pgs 108–115 (see note 25), (estimated that 60% to 70% of adjudicated youth have mental health estimated that disorders); Aarons G.A., James, S., Monn, A.R., Raghavan, R., Wells, R.S., Leslie, L.K., *Behavior Problems and Placement Change in a National Child Welfare Sample: A Prospective Study*, Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 49(1) (201), pgs. 70–80, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2009.09.005> (subscription required) (youth removed from homes and placed in congregate care facilities need to learn a new set of behaviors and placements may present new opportunities to relate with caregivers and peers, oftentimes triggering trauma).
 53. *Credit Overdue: How States Can Mitigate Academic Credit Transfer Problems for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System*, Juvenile Law Center, Southern Poverty Law Center, and Education Law Center-PA (2020), at 6, accessed at: https://jlc.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2020-10/Credit%20Overdue_0.pdf.
 54. See generally, *Credit Overdue* (see note 53).
 55. *Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems* (see note 11).
 56. Gharabaghi, K., Anderson-Nathe, B. *The Voice of Young People*. Child & Youth Services, 36(2) (2015), pgs. 95-97, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935x.2015.1072406> (subscription required).

57. Nybell, L. M., *Locating "Youth Voice:" Considering the Contexts of Speaking in Foster Care*. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35 (2013), pgs. 1227–1235, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.04.009> (subscription required).
58. According to a mental health nonprofit working in juvenile justice placements, the duration of incarceration varies and is often contingent on non-penal criteria, such as the completion of school. The uncertainty and stress can cause a cycle of young people reacting and committing assault or behaviors that impact their current sentence, resulting in a revolving door phenomenon. See also, Hyde, J., & Kammerer, N., *Adolescents' Perspectives on Placement Moves and Congregate Settings: Complex and Cumulative Instabilities in Out-of-home care*. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(2) (2009), pgs. 265-273, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.07.019> (subscription required).
59. A good example of such an effort is by the Philadelphia's Youth Residential Placement Taskforce. The Taskforce developed Youth and Family Rights Guides that outline comprehensive rights while youth are in privately-run congregate facilities, and are based on state regulations and City contract requirements. English and Spanish versions available at <https://www.phila.gov/hhs/accomplishments/Pages/Guides.aspx>.
60. January, S.-A.A., Trout, A. L., Huscroft-D'Angelo, J., Duppong Hurley, K. L., & Thompson, R. W. *Perspectives on Factors Impacting Youth's Reentry into Residential Care: An Exploratory Study*, *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27(8) (2018), pgs. 2584-2595, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1093-5> (subscription required).
61. This is also described in the literature. See, e.g.: *Returning Home: Reducing Recidivism for Juvenile Offenders With Disabilities Through Transition Planning*, pgs. 108–115 (see note 25), (stigma can exacerbate students' mental or behavioral health struggles and lead to increased negative behavior).
62. This is also described in the literature. *Perspectives on Factors Impacting Youth's Reentry into Residential Care: An Exploratory Study*, pgs 2584-2595 (see note 59) (youth express reluctance in sharing what residential treatment agency they were returning from because of concerns of others' perceptions and its effect on their reputations); Patel, M., Head, S., Dwyer, J., & Preyde, M., *Youth Transition Home from Residential Mental Health Treatment: Caregivers' Perspective*, *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 36(5) (2018), pgs. 485-494, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-018-0572-2> (subscription required).
63. Farineau, H. M., & McWey, L. M., *The Relationship Between Extracurricular Activities and Delinquency of Adolescents in Foster Care*, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(6) (2011), pgs. 963-968, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.01.002> (subscription required).
64. White, T., Scott, L. D., & Munson, M. R., *Extracurricular Activity Participation and Educational Outcomes Among Older Youth Transitioning from Foster Care*, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 85 (2011), pgs. 1-8, accessed at: [doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.11.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.11.010) (subscription required) (research shows that students who participated in extracurricular activities were two times more likely to graduate from high school with a diploma).
65. Nelson, C.M., Jolivet, K., Leone, P.E., & Mathur, S.R., *Meeting the Needs of At-Risk and Adjudicated Youth with Behavioral Challenges: The Promise of Juvenile Justice*. *Behavioral Disorders*, 36 (2010), pgs. 70-80, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/019874291003600108> (subscription required); Hovey, K. A., Zolkoski, S. M., & Bullock, L. M., *Mental Health and the Juvenile Justice System: Issues Related to Treatment and Rehabilitation*, *World Journal of Education*, 7(3) (2017), pg. 1, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v7n3p1> (subscription required) (juvenile offenders who have untreated mental health issues are at increased risk for recidivism).