



NDTAC TIPSHEET: Effective Transition Back to School During COVID-19

Note: This resource is the first in a series of three NDTAC Tipsheets that aim to address Transition for Justice-Impacted Youth during COVID-19. Please additionally see *Tipsheet #2: Justice Impacted Youth Transitions and Technology Use* and *Tipsheet #3: Justice-Impacted Youth Transitions and IEP Implementation* for additional information.

Planning for Transition

Research supports that the inability to access education is a risk factor that can significantly increase the likelihood of negative outcomes occurring within a youth's life.^{i ii} This relationship is bidirectional, meaning that education is also a key factor in ensuring that youth do not engage in rule breaking behavior, and if they have a history of doing so, that they desist from these behaviors. Planning for the transition of youth from facilities for neglected or delinquent youth to the community can mitigate these harms while failure to plan can perpetuate and worsen preexisting challenges. Planning for a youth's transition should begin from the moment a youth enters a Neglected or Delinquent facility.

A successful transition is comprised of various supports that: (a) improve educational services for youth in local and State institutions so that such children and youth have the opportunity to meet the same challenging State academic content standards that all children in the State are expected to meet; (b) aid in the successful transition from institutionalization back to school; and (c) prevent youth from returning to an institutionalized setting (reduce recidivism). Today, successful transition requires strategies that are also responsive to health and physical safety measures that mitigate the dangers of contracting the coronavirus. Returning to class during COVID-19 also prompts a response to traumatic student experiences, such as students dealing with the loss of loved ones or the stress of increased family economic hardships.

Facilitating a successful transition includes the creation of service delivery or treatment plans upon entry into a Neglected or Delinquent facility, as well as discharge and transition plans when a youth exits a Neglected or Delinquent facility. Transition plans are typically comprehensive in scope and include a range of items such as support for mental health issues; substance abuse; behavioral and social skills development; access to housing; employment or education. Planning may appear different during COVID, as the development and implementation of these strategies may require virtual alternatives to bring stakeholders to the table and address the needs of youth returning to the classroom from Neglected or Delinquent facilities.

Under the purview of the U.S. Department of Education Title I, Part D, strategies to assist Neglected or Delinquent youth in transition can be supported with subpart 1 and subpart 2 funds.

Strategies for Supporting Returning Youth in Education

The likelihood of successful youth reintegration becomes higher when the practices within the school setting are versatile and responsive. That is, strategies should: (a) be able to address youth who are transitioning from a variety of facility types – inclusive of youth returning from long term placement or incarceration and those returning from short-term detention; and (b) address youth who are returning to school with an additional set of legal requirements and conditions (e.g., probation or parole obligations and restrictions).



This tip sheet provides a variety of resources to help States facilitate an effective return of Neglected or Delinquent youth into their communities and schools. Three items States should consider when planning for a successful transition are:

- healthy learning environments,
- trauma-informed approaches, and
- normalizing education

Healthy Learning Environments

The creation of an environment conducive for educational learning is an important factor in successful youth transition. School settings that adhere to COVID-19 health and safety guidelines are crucial for creating a safe student learning environment.ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, transition requires schools to fully comply with COVID-19 health regulations for in-person, hybrid, or online learning.^{iv v vi} Specifically, this includes:

- ensuring that students, families, and staff are provided with masks to wear when physically in the school building/s;
- adherence to social distance guidelines as they evolve over time;
- encouraging handwashing and respiratory etiquette;
- maintaining a clean school that is properly ventilated;
- creating an emergency response plan for a potential outbreak, inclusive of contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine;
- grouping students into cohorts that stay together all day with a core teacher, if possible;
- minimizing movement within the school setting;
- encouraging use of outdoor spaces;
- reminding families and staff to routinely check for symptoms at home; and
- limiting the number of persons who travel in school buses or vehicles while maintaining the same types of rules when in school vehicles (e.g., occupants wear a mask).

In addition to creating an environment that is compliant with health regulations, effective transition plans should proactively prepare to address instances of noncompliance with health regulations among the student body. Students in general may not always follow the rules set forth by a school and reliance on exclusionary discipline as a response can have harmful effects on the lives of students.^{vii viii}

Given that Neglected or Delinquent youth are likely to have been disconnected from school in the community and are also disproportionately on the receiving end of exclusionary practices (like suspension),^{ix} the use of exclusionary discipline on Neglected and Delinquent youth as they return may have a more harmful effect. Therefore, ensuring a healthy learning environment should include a clear plan that supports each student's adherence to the health regulations and additionally incorporates a range of non-exclusionary responses for youth who do not comply with health regulations. Recommendations include: a) maintaining continuous communication of school guidelines to the students and their families prior to and during the school year; b) providing time and forums for students and families to ask questions about guidelines; and c) relying on suspensions or out of school placement only as a last resort.

Trauma-informed Approaches to Transition

Incorporating trauma-informed approaches when interacting and providing education to Neglected or Delinquent youth is essential to an effective strategy considering that: (1) Neglected or Delinquent youth often have experienced traumatic experiences before entering an Neglected or Delinquent facility; and (2)



while in an Neglected or Delinquent facility, youth are also likely to be exposed to traumatic experiences,^x
^{xi} and (3) COVID-19 has added an additional level of trauma for youth and their families.

Plans should embed components recommended for trauma informed instructional models or support used within Neglected or Delinquent settings^{xii xiii xiv} that includes:

- having all school personnel trained to identify and respond to the types and effects of trauma their students carry;
- creating an educational setting that allows for the physical and emotional safeness of students;
- building an infrastructure of support and embedding professionals (e.g., mental health clinicians) that assists students in skill development (e.g., self-regulation and -control, relaxation and coping strategies, conflict resolution, healthy decision-making, and/or self-advocacy);
- facilitating caregiver involvement and support;
- providing resources for more specialized services that may be available outside of the educational setting (e.g., cognitive behavioral treatment); and
- integrating knowledge of trauma informed care into the school's practices and policies that impact students, school personnel, and student's families.

Normalize Quality Education Inside and Out

Effective strategies for transition should prevent students from falling behind in school and help students from the Neglected or Delinquent setting who may have fallen behind academically. The experience of being institutionalized and the ramifications of COVID-19 can disrupt the quality of education youth receive while incarcerated,^{xv} but plans that allow for: a) uninterrupted educational services during facility lockdowns and youth security concerns; and b) access to supportive resources (e.g., support for students who are English language learners and for students with IEPs or 504 plans) can improve the quality of education delivered. Once in the community, States should continue to ensure continued and supportive education.

Altogether, strategies should^{xvi}:

- ensure that assisted learning (ELL, IEP/IDEA, 504 Plans) within the secure and community settings is provided (skip to tip sheet on intersections of special education, juvenile justice, and online learning);
- integrate transition plans with assisted learning objectives and goals. These plans should be cocreated with people who have a stake in the student's future adjustment, created while in the secure setting, account for educational, vocational, and other youth service options once released, and identify the support services youth likely need (e.g., community mental health);
- include a plan for staffing challenges related to COVID-19 (e.g., temperature checks of school personnel may delay class start times or sick staff members may create a shortage in the staff present in a classroom);
- allow for uninterrupted education services during facility emergencies that do not require the halting of school activities when possible; and
- leverage technology to ensure a continuation in education (skip to tip sheet on Technology and Learning).

Across all potential strategies, centering the wellbeing of youth in the transition plan should be prioritized. This includes incorporating actual youth experiences and perspectives in each strategy whenever possible. Techniques for incorporating the student's voice in planning can range from the use of student polls and



surveys, hosting listening or focus groups with students, having student representatives involved in decision-making committees across both the community and Neglected or Delinquent school settings, or meeting with youth and their families to gain buy-in through the cocreation of transition plan goals and objectives.

Additional Resources

Collectively, Title I Part D funding can assist states in their preparation for youth transitioning back to schools within the community. Institutions should be prepared to address additional preexisting challenges exacerbated by COVID-19. Below are additional resources to address:

1. The absence of in-person learning, which can result in an increased disparity in access to education for youth who are from under resourced communities – inclusive of a large representation of racial and ethnic minority youth. Schools should address remote learning challenges (see NDTAC tip sheet on Technology and Learning; and NDTAC presentation on Integrating Technology into Correctional Education Settings).
2. The need to maintain engagement with educators, families, and the school community; transportation considerations; and safe in-person learning practices as schools reopen (see [ED COVID-19 Handbook Volume 1](#)).
3. The continuance of high-quality correctional education year-round (see NDTAC presentation on Applying the Principles of High-Quality Correctional Education During the 2020-21 School Year; NDTAC webinar on Making Education Happen During COVID-19).
4. The transition from secure settings to the community (NDTAC's Supporting Students Transitioning from Secure Care to Community Schools webinar; NDTAC's Transition Toolkit 3.0: Meeting the Educational Needs of Youth Exposed to the Juvenile Justice System; and [ED's Educational Pathways for Youth Transitioning from Juvenile Justice Facilities](#)).

External Resources

- CDC [Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation](#)
- CDC [COVID-19 Racial and Ethnic Disparities](#)
- IRISCENTER Online Module: [Youth with Disabilities in Juvenile Corrections](#)
- National Institute of Corrections. [Trauma Among Youth in the Juvenile Justice System](#)
- National Conference of State Legislatures. [Creating Trauma Informed Care in Juvenile Secure Detention](#)
- Child Trends. [Trauma-Informed Strategies for Supporting Youth in the Juvenile Justice System during COVID-19.](#)
- Council of Juvenile Justice Administrations. [COVID-19 Practice, Policy, & Emergency Protocols in State Juvenile Facilities.](#)
- Council of Juvenile Justice Administrations. [Navigating the Impact of COVID-19 on Juvenile Justice Policy and Practice.](#)
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency and Prevention. [Wellness Implementation Series.](#)



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- ⁱ Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., & Williams, N. T. (2014). [More than a metaphor: The contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline](#). *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 47(4), 546-564.
- ⁱⁱ Rocque, M., & Snellings, Q. (2018). [The new disciplinology: Research, theory, and remaining puzzles on the school-to-prison pipeline](#). *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 59, 3-11.
- ⁱⁱⁱ [U.S. Department of Education COVID-19 Handbook Volume 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools](#).
- ^{iv} [Resources - Office of Elementary and Secondary Education](#)
- ^v [Operating Schools During COVID-19: CDC's Considerations](#)
- ^{vi} CDC [COVID-19 Handbook](#)
- ^{vii} Fabelo, T., Thompson, M. D., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M. P., & Booth, E. A. (2011). [Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement](#). New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center.
- ^{viii} Welsh, R. O., & Little, S. (2018). The school discipline dilemma: A comprehensive review of disparities and alternative approaches. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(5), 752-794.
- ^{ix} Baroni, B., Day, A., Somers, C., Crosby, S., & Pennefather, M. (2020). Use of the Monarch Room as an alternative to suspension in addressing school discipline issues among court-involved youth. *Urban Education*, 55(1), 153-173.
- ^x [Maltreatment of Youth in U.S. Juvenile Corrections Facilities: An Update](#).
- ^{xi} Briggs, E. C., Greeson, J. K., Layne, C. M., Fairbank, J. A., Knoverek, A. M., & Pynoos, R. S. (2012). [Trauma exposure, psychosocial functioning, and treatment needs of youth in residential care: Preliminary findings from the NCTSN Core Data Set](#). *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 5(1), 1-15.
- ^{xii} [Trauma-informed strategies for supporting children and youth in the child welfare system during COVID-19](#)
- ^{xiii} [Youth Needs at Intake into Trauma-Informed Group Homes and Response to Services: An Examination of Trauma Exposure, Symptoms, and Clinical Impression - Tyler - 2019 - American Journal of Community Psychology - Wiley Online Library](#)
- ^{xiv} [Ten Things Every Juvenile Court Judge Should Know About Trauma and Delinquency](#)
- ^{xv} Buchanan, M., Castro, E. D., Kushner, M., & Krohn, M. D. (2020). [It's F** ing Chaos: COVID-19's Impact on Juvenile Delinquency and Juvenile Justice](#). *American journal of criminal justice*, 45(4), 578-600.
- ^{xvi} [Meeting the Educational Needs of Students with Disabilities in Short-Term Detention](#)