

## Transition Planning for Youth with Disabilities: From Incarceration to the Community

The goal of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Department of Education is to provide quality instruction to meet students' academic and career goals to enhance their reentry into their home communities. Two Juvenile Correctional Centers (JCCs) serve students committed to DJJ. Detention centers, located throughout Virginia, serve students during DJJ processing prior to placement in one of the JCCs and for step-down programming. Between entry and discharge, students receive a variety of services to meet their educational and transition needs and to prevent recidivism.

### Transition Related Services Provided by DJJ

Approximately 45% of students involved with DJJ have disabilities. Special education services provided by DJJ must follow federal and state education regulations. During a student's time with DJJ, they will receive services from Transition Specialists to assist them as they pursue goals toward successful adult outcomes. Transition Specialists assist students with building a portfolio that they take with them upon their release. Their portfolio may include a resume, industry certifications, transition assessments, letters of recommendation, transcripts, placement tests, and other information relevant to their post-school goals. While community-based work experiences are limited for most students at DJJ, some students do participate in work experiences available on DJJ campuses, including work in the cafeteria, dorms, and grounds and maintenance department.

Students receiving special education services who have completed graduation requirements with a Modified Diploma, Applied Studies Diploma, or General Education Development (GED®) are able to continue special education services at DJJ. They may continue to work towards a Standard Diploma and/or they may enroll in post-graduate classes. Students who have met graduation requirements prior to their release from DJJ have the opportunity to engage in DJJ's post-graduate program. This program includes career training opportunities, college coursework, and classes designed to increase self-awareness. Post-graduate career training opportunities are varied in scope and include programs in which students might earn industry certification or college credit.

The Community Placement Program (CPP) and Detention Re-entry program are transitional components of the DJJ release program for select students. Candidates for CPP or Detention Re-entry move from JCCs to detention centers within, or as close as possible to, the school divisions they will attend after returning home. The school system where the detention center is located assumes the educational responsibilities for the student. Students participating in a CPP program may be granted furloughs to attend job interviews, family therapy, and home visits.

## Planning Appropriate Services for Students Returning to their Community

Students who have not yet graduated with a Standard or Advanced Standard Diploma and those earning a Modified Standard Diploma, Applied Studies Diploma, or GED who wish to continue receiving services through their local school division may continue to do so following their release from DJJ. For students recently released from DJJ, establishing a re-entry IEP team that includes school and community members is paramount for students' transition back into their homes, communities, and public schools. The Re-Entry Specialist and case workers coordinate with the local school division, probation officer, Department of Social Services, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), and/or the Community Services Board to make sure community services are appropriate and in place. In many ways, the transition for a student between DJJ and home is similar to and interwoven with the student's transition to adult options. Both must be carefully planned from the start of re-entry and include a collaborative group focused on the student's success in future endeavors.

### Tips for Success

Students with disabilities who have been incarcerated deserve every effort to improve their postsecondary outcomes. The expectation to obtain gainful employment and postsecondary outcomes should be no different from other students. A few helpful points include:

- Incorporate effective self-advocacy and self-determination skills training as part of the student's educational experiences.
- Be aware of all terms of the student's probation and work closely with probation/parole officers regarding restrictions that may relate to work situations or environments.
- Work closely with DARS and DJJ personnel when planning for the student's transition to postsecondary education and training.
- Understand treatment needs of the student and assist in maintaining and/or accessing pertinent services through funding sources available to public schools and within the community.

### Additional Resources

Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's Department of Education [djj.virginia.gov/pages/admin/education.htm](http://djj.virginia.gov/pages/admin/education.htm)

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