Introduction

Nearly 10 years ago, increases in the number of juvenile justice offenders in Washington State, coupled with high rates of recidivism, indicated the need for effective reentry programs to help youth transition from institutional settings to their homes, schools, and communities. Washington State administrators took note of the importance of transitional services during this time. In 2004, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), with funding from Title I, Part D (Part D), began a pilot transition program managed by transition specialists in many detention centers across the State. Initially, transition specialists offered a range of services, from brief checkins with school and work placements to more intensive contacts with youth, their family members, and probation officers to develop transition plans. In the fall of 2006, OSPI expanded transition services by allocating Part D grants to three school districts in the State’s three largest counties: King, Pierce, and Spokane. The districts hired Education Advocates (EAs) to work with youth transitioning from regional Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration facilities. The EAs assisted youth in transitioning back into the school system, entering community vocational programs, or pursuing General Education Development program (GED) options. In the fall of 2008, OSPI further expanded the transition service to reach multiple geographical areas across the State and widen the scope of transition services for youth in more communities.

The program was expanded strategically based on a review of the data across Washington State concerning the number of youth in detention, as well as the high school dropout rate. The review shed light on the need for transition, intervention, and prevention services to be expanded at the community level and in middle schools. Clear needs were identified across various areas, including academics, substance abuse, and mental health, which called for the design of reentry programs that were more comprehensive and multifaceted. The need for comprehensive services in facilities and schools was clear. Given this, Washington State began a relationship with its nine regional Education Service Districts to serve the at-risk population coming out of detention centers, and middle- and high-school youth at risk of entering the juvenile justice system.

Program Objectives and Student Eligibility

The program is funded through Part D, Subparts 1 and 2. Subpart 1 is the State Agency Program, which provides supplemental supports for youth in State-operated institutions. Subpart 2 is the Local Agency Program; its funds support school district programs that collaborate with locally operated correctional facilities and programs for youth who are neglected, delinquent, or at risk. Objectives for the expanded EA program include increasing support and case management for youth transitioning out of detention centers; helping youth overcome barriers to return successfully to school or work; and better facilitating school coordination activities for youth returning to or reengaging in school.

Youth are eligible for these services if they are between 5 and 21 years of age and meet any of the following criteria:

- They are involved in the juvenile justice system and considered at moderate to high risk of reoffending.
- They are school-based youth at risk of dropping out of school, reoffending, or showing signs of disengagement from school.
- They are served by community-based programs and at risk of not staying engaged in vocational or community programs, or need additional support to complete a high school diploma or GED.

What Do Education Advocates Do?

Youth face multiple challenges at both the systemic and individual levels when reintegrating into their communities and schools. System-level challenges include a lack of up-to-date and complete educational and personal history documentation for these youth. Individual challenges to successful reintegration include the disruption of their education due to confinement; the stigma associated with delinquency, arrest, and conviction; marginalization; and the social difficulties of adjustment. These challenges call for a coordinated, collaborative, and multifaceted intervention. EAs are tasked with facilitating this process using a multitiered public health model. EAs’ efforts are focused on prevention, intervention, and transition. This model enables the effective management of student caseloads by identifying three tiers of services distinguished by their intensity and students’ needs. Tier 1 consists of youth at lowest risk, who require the least monitoring and support. Youth receiving Tier 2 services and supports require a moderate amount of case management (e.g., one visit a month), because they are deemed to be at low or moderate risk of reoffending, are able to make positive decisions, and have engaged family members. Tier 3 youth receive more intensive case management; they are usually contacted once or twice a week. Youth remain in Tier 3 for a minimum of 30 days to a maximum of 90 days.

EA services are central to Washington State’s improvement efforts. EAs help incarcerated youth transitioning from juvenile justice secure facilities to reenter the community successfully. EAs identify vocational and employment opportunities or reengage youth with school.

EA Voices:

“What I try to do is celebrate each and every small success I see along the way….I celebrate anything I can find no matter how small it seems.”
Caseloads consist of 20–25 youths. EA services include:

- Assessing students’ risk, needs, and strengths
- Providing case management, counseling, coaching, and group support to help youth acquire improved coping skills, develop healthy relationships, and succeed in school
- Providing homework assistance
- Providing postsecondary and employment navigation
- Developing and monitoring individualized Student Success Plans, with specific goals to achieve personal growth outcomes
- Linking students and parents to schools and community services
- Monitoring behavioral cues, school attendance and grades, probation compliance, and participation in community programs

To tailor services provided to youth, EAs use education data from the beginning of students’ entry into services to exiting. Upon referral to reentry services, information about a student’s criminal history, risk of offending, interpersonal skills, history of behavioral health concerns, and current academic status is gathered. When students are referred to the middle school and high school programs, a variety of information is collected to assess their risk of dropping out. Some schools use a Dropout Early Warning Intervention System (http://www.cgcpframework.org/?page_id=1326) that monitors failing academic grades, number of credits accumulated toward graduation, and attendance records (among other indicators), and then screens and identifies students at the greatest risk of dropping out, becoming disengaged in school, and in need of services. Once students are screened, a child study team composed of teachers and staff meets to discuss students who show signs of being at risk of disengaging or dropping out. To triage the students, the team looks for persistently low grades, failing grades across multiple courses, falling behind in course work, being held back one grade, and lack of educational engagement. If necessary, students are referred to EAs. Once students are referred to EAs, further information and data are gathered using an intake survey, which includes questions about demographics, school history, a history of juvenile justice involvement, and other pertinent histories. Mining these data enables EAs to develop a clear picture of students’ needs and desires so they can develop appropriate individualized goals.

Once information is gathered during the referral and intake process, a plan for reaching students’ goals can be developed. The intake processes help to develop a comprehensive plan focused on youths’ strengths, needs, and contextual factors (e.g., family, school, employment). EAs and students jointly develop short- and long-term goals. Other adults, such as family and school personnel, also are involved in these conversations. Short-term goals are specific and achievable actions that move students closer to their long-term goals. There is a dual focus on academic and vocational goals. Long-term goals typically focus on earning credits, sustaining and improving acceptable school attendance, graduation, and employment. Once goals are identified, a plan of action is developed. The plan of action is meant to identify specific steps to take and interventions to put in place to accomplish the identified goals. EAs meet with youth as often as needed until they are stable, decreasing contact as youth progress. Ongoing case management may continue on a voluntary basis until the youth is 21 years of age or no longer on probation.

Outcomes and Data Use

To monitor progress, the program uses a variety of measures that are aligned with the outcomes promoted by the Part D statute. These include high school credits earned; earning a high school diploma or completing the GED certificate; returning to and staying engaged in school; enrolling in postsecondary school; enrolling in job training programs; obtaining employment; and, for youth enrolled for 90 days or more, demonstrating academic grade-level improvements in reading and math. For example, Figure 1 shows the percentage of youth enrolling in postsecondary education after receiving services. There is a gradual increase from 2009–10 to 2011–12; 1 percent in 2009–10, 2 percent in 2010–11, and 7 percent in 2011–12.

**Figure 1. Youth Enrollment in Postsecondary Education**

EAs use State-level data to assess and monitor students’ progress. For example, the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System provides longitudinal education data. Student data include demographics, enrollment information, schedules, grades, and program participation.

Plans to collect more data are underway. Washington is beginning to assess Statewide data on recidivism for youth returning to detention. To improve accuracy of recidivism rates, plans have been initiated to coordinate with the Office of the Courts’ youth assessment, the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS), which also collects information on students.

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