

**Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force**  
**Education Stakeholder Roundtables**  
**September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

On September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force hosted roundtable discussions with 33 education stakeholders. The meeting was facilitated by Task Force members Matthew Stem, deputy secretary for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), and Joe Werner, school social worker at Pennridge School District.

➤ ***Strengths of the Juvenile Justice System:***

- **Educational services in residential placement can help youth who are academically behind:** Some roundtable participants said that residential placement allows for educational resources to be focused on youth who are academically behind. Several participants suggested that placement providers offer year-round schooling for these children, like one Philadelphia-area provider is currently doing.

➤ ***Areas in Need of Improvement:***

- **Out-of-home placement disrupts a youth's education:** Participants noted that placement is disruptive for youth and that, as one stated, “[youth] receive an entirely different education when they go to an on-ground school.” A stakeholder said that youth in out-of-home placement “don’t receive the same supports that they need in a regular school.” One participant noted that the state is “not assessing these programs” or “assessing if youth are growing while they’re in placement.” Another participant shared that the state should raise the education standards for youth who are in out-of-home placement.
- **Youth have difficulty when returning to their community school from out-of-home placement:** Participants said improvements need to be made so that youth can be “successfully reintegrate[d]...back into the community” and that stakeholders “aren’t exacerbating recidivism.” One participant shared that “getting youth back into the school is a really big challenge...trust with the system is broken, trust with the schools is broken...we might not find these kids again for months or years and their educational level is way off.” Participants also shared that there were specific challenges when transferring education credits from placement facilities to community schools.
- **State-level oversight and accountability is needed for educational services in out-of-home placement facilities:** Many participants said the state needs to provide more oversight over the education system in out-of-home placement facilities. One participant shared that “to a large extent, PDE has not taken a proactive role in terms of oversight or policies and procedures of state facilities and has left that to the home school district or the provider itself...this has led to a range of educational experiences for young people.” Participants suggested standardization among forms, policies, and practices. Stakeholders also said that accountability metrics would go a long way in ensuring that youth receive a quality education when in placement. This includes embedding education provisions within the juvenile justice code and not just the

dependency statutes. “Why do educational protection provisions apply to [child welfare system-involved] youth, but not juvenile justice youth?” one participant asked, adding, “we should apply educational stability to everyone.”

- **Need for more collaboration between the education and juvenile justice system:** Roundtable participants noted that there was a lack of collaboration between the education and juvenile justice system, making it difficult to ensure effective handoffs between schools and juvenile justice stakeholders. Furthermore, one participant noted there is an “extreme need for integration between systems and that is perhaps something this Task Force needs to focus on.” Another respondent said that, “often we think about children in systems in silos, they’re a JPO’s kid, they’re a schools kid, there a behavioral health’s kid. How do we think holistically at the whole child level instead of separating them out into the different systems they’re a part of?”

➤ **Notable quotes:**

- **On racial disparities:**
  - “We live in a state that has routinely underfunded public schools, particularly for black, brown, and immigrant children.”
  - “The disparities we see in the juvenile justice system aren’t happening in the system. They’re happening in our schools, in first and second grade suspensions.”
- **On the need for oversight, accountability, and collaboration:**
  - “Let’s double down, let’s invest, it’s worth it for these kids. Let’s do things that work earlier so we’re not paying it out. The prison system is the most expensive system there is. There needs to be quite a bit of intervention/prevention efforts done in schools.”
  - “Anecdotally, when we talk with youth who are either in the system or are trying to access resources, one of the biggest complaints is the lack of cohesion across systems. It’s so confusing for youth.”
  - “We don’t see a lot of symmetry across providers with being able to get information about our kids. Everyone seems to do their own thing, individually, but it’s all for the same child. Schools might issue their supports, but they’re not in touch with the child welfare provider.”
- **On education quality:**
  - “They’re not building skills that will make them successful when they come back into the community. We really need to be focused on making sure that they’re receiving the education that they need, that they are legally required to receive.”
  - “The juvenile justice goals are nowhere to be found in policy, they’re not in the public welfare code. How to get resources, how to get funding—it’s very difficult to get from a policy perspective. If you’re a provider trying to contract with counties, you’re having conversations with counties about dependency placements and then trying to have conversations about juvenile justice, and you’re having two different conversations.”