

Educating D.C.'s Young People

How D.C.'s juvenile justice system helps young people get the schooling they need

Education is a critical way to help young people leave delinquency behind and get on the right track.

Research and experience have shown the critical role schooling plays in helping young people prepare to join the workforce, to play a positive role in their families and neighborhoods, and help them leave juvenile crime behind. A study showed that a 5 percent increase in male graduation rates would save the country \$5 billion in crime and incarceration costs^[1], and another showed that places where more young people graduate from high school more often see less crime.^[2]



In the past, D.C.'s juvenile justice system was not addressing young people's educational needs.

The average student committed to the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) is 16 years old, has completed a fraction of the school credits they would need to graduate, and their reading, writing and math skills are at a 4th or 5th grade level. Half of the young people in the juvenile justice system have special education needs. Despite these deep educational needs *before DYRS instituted its reforms in 2005, school attendance for youth at Oak Hill was actually under 50 percent – an appalling situation*—and the system kept no data on whether or not these young people were returning to school upon release. When on community supervision, the system did not focus enough on educating D.C. youth.

Today, D.C. and DYRS are helping young people get an education.

While the system still has a lot of work to do to make sure young people are getting the schooling they need, there have been enormous improvements in how DYRS helps young people get an education.

Smaller class sizes:

At New Beginnings, students learn in small classrooms with 8 to 10 classmates, with an emphasis on meeting the young person's individual academic needs. For most young people, there is 1 teacher for 6 students, with a smaller student-to-teacher ratio for students with special needs.



Helping kids to return to school when released:

One of the biggest challenges young people in the juvenile justice system face is transitioning back into school when they are released. As part of the See Forever partnership, the Maya Angelou Academy operates a transitional school in the community that former New Beginnings youth can attend after they are released. *Now, young people leaving New Beginnings have a transition plan that includes connection to school or work, and other educational and vocational services, upon their release.* Every young person who graduates from the D.C. Model Unit at New Beginnings has a student advocate who helps them get connected and stay connected to school upon release.



Community supervision geared towards educating young people:

When young people leave custody, evening reporting centers and mentoring services have been structured to help educate kids. Today, juvenile counselors work with young people while they are on supervision with a focus of helping young people get back into school, and stay in school.



D.C. is showing steady progress in helping young people achieve educational success.

Since DYRS was created and the Maya Angelou Academy was launched in 2007, the city has made steady progress in helping young people get an education, stay in school, and achieve more than they did in the past.

Increased school attendance:

While more than half of all young people locked up at Oak Hill under the old system were not attending school, today, most young people at New Beginnings are consistently attending school.

Increased academic achievement:

While attending the academy, the average student gains 1.2 years of improvement^[3] in reading and math skills. Before attending the academy, 26 percent of these young people completed their complement of classes. Now, the average student in the academy passes 86 percent of their classes and credits.

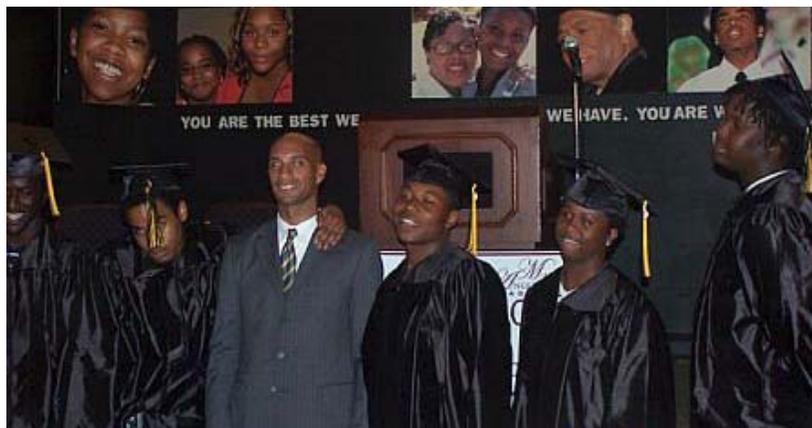


Increased connection to schooling upon release:

While the Youth Services Administration (the predecessor agency to DYRS) collected no information on whether young people got back into school upon release; today, about 6 out of 10 young people who went through DYRS were attending school six months after their release. Young people’s long term connection to school has improved 15 percent in the last year.

College attendance:

Thanks to the work of DYRS, the Maya Angelou Academy and DCPS, there are 19 young people committed to DYRS attending college this year.



More young people engaged in the arts, physical education, and community service learning activities:

While the system is geared towards teaching young people the basic skills they will need to navigate school, get a job, and stay out of trouble, young people in the juvenile justice system are now engaged in the kind of enriching programs all parents want for their kids – which we also know will reduce the likelihood that young people will re-offend. In the past 5 years, young people under the supervision of DYRS have acted in Shakespearean plays and trained for triathlons.



Mission: The mission of DYRS is to improve public safety and give court-involved youth the opportunity to become more productive citizens by building on the strengths of youth and their families in the least restrictive, most homelike environment consistent with public safety.

[1] Alliance for Excellent Education. 2006. *Saving Futures, Saving Dollars: The Impact of Education on Crime Reduction and Earnings*. Washington, D.C.

[2] Educational and Public Safety. Washington, D.C.: The Justice Policy Institute (2007).

[3] Based on an annualized figure of the young person's Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement.