



Harvard Model Congress

Boston 2024

EDUCATION WITHIN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM UPDATE

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This briefing update aims to provide an overview of the current state of education for juvenile justice-involved youth as of 2023, with a focus on legislative developments, changes at the state and federal level, and party and candidate platforms as the 2024 Presidential Election nears.

The RISE from Trauma Act introduced by Sen. Durbin (D-IL) remains in the initial stages of the legislative process, having been referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions in the Senate. Since its initial proposal, notable support has risen with Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), and Ben Lujan (D-NM) endorsing the act as cosponsors (S.1426, 2023). The Transition to Success Mentoring Act has not garnered any additional cosponsors since its introduction in January (S.182, 2023).

Although there has not been much legislative change at the federal level, states have been addressing the issue to varying degrees. It is important to remember that each state's policies regarding their juvenile justice systems vary widely, and there is no uniform program or standard of regulation. In California, Governor Gavin Newsom reauthorized \$15 million in funding to provide post-secondary education to incarcerated youth. Additionally, in what the Youth Law Center is calling a “nationally historic” investment, Newsom approved \$80 million for county court and community school operations (Loudenback, 2023). Some of the goals outlined for this funding include annual reporting of data regarding justice-involved youth and workgroups to analyze how best to accommodate and work with students with disabilities (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, 2023).

The U.S. Justice Department has also taken the lead on federal funding initiatives, announcing that it will award more than \$4.4 billion to support state, local, and tribal public safety and community justice activities, with \$192 million specifically for juvenile justice reform. The more than 3,700 grants are intended to help with the reduction of “violence, crime, and recidivism” (Office of Public Affairs, 2023). While the grants have

not been too narrowly defined yet, one goal is to help justice-involved youth transition more easily back into their communities. One application of this funding could be to provide or improve education in detention facilities, as studies have shown schooling allows for easier re-integration and decreases likelihood of recidivism – two key goals of the grants (OJJDP, 2019).

A key concern in the discussion about education in the juvenile justice system is the lack of data on such youth, as it creates an inability to precisely assess the situation. A new report published in November by the San Francisco-based Youth Law Center highlights some key statistics:

- In California, the statewide public school graduation rate for the 2021-2022 school year was 87%, while graduation rates for juvenile court schools ranged from 0% to 66.7%, with an overall rate of 31.8%. (The Youth Law Center, 2023).
- Almost one fifth of all youth serving time in county facilities were marked as “chronically absent,” where chronically absent is defined as missing 10% or more of all school days (Loudenback, 2023).
- Even in the highest performing juvenile court school, most students (51.85%) failed to meet California English Language Arts standards, and 84.62% failed to meet the mathematics standards (The Youth Law Center, 2023).

Many of the political party platforms discussed in the initial briefing have remained the same, with many Republican candidates favoring more tough-on-crime methods, while Democrats lean towards more rehabilitative reform. Regarding the 2024 presidential platforms, President Joe Biden’s stance aligns with the need for improvement in juvenile detention facilities. He is calling for increased funding for mental and social services, recognizing the importance of adequately trained staff to address the trauma experienced by youth in these facilities. His Democratic opponent Marianne Williamson has emphasized rehabilitation over punitive measures and has proposed investments in after-school programs for crime prevention. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has provided limited details on his approach, with not much beyond heavy support for law enforcement. Former President Donald Trump has supported rehabilitation for non-violent crimes and notably demonstrated this with the enactment of the First Step Act during his presidency, which increased job training to help lower recidivism rates (Pereira, 2023).

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