



Making connections. Informing solutions.

University of New Haven

Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee

May 15, 2025

2:00PM – 3:30PM

Legislative Office Building, Room 1E

Zoom Option available

Agenda

Welcome and Introductions

Rep. Toni Walker/Undersecretary Daniel Karpowitz

Overview of Meeting & Announcements

Brittany LaMarr, University of New Haven, TYJI

CCA Report: Missed Cues & Lost Opportunities

Sarah Eagan, Executive Director, CCA; Attorney Marisa Halm; Dr. Andrea Spencer

DCF-JJEU Presentation

**Dr. Glen Worthy, Education Administrator, DCF-JJEU; John Tarka, Assistant Superintendent, DCF-JJEU;
Tina Mitchell, Assistant Superintendent, DCF-JJEU**

2025 JJPOC Strategic Plan

Brittany LaMarr, TYJI



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CCA Report: Missed Cues & Lost Opportunities



Fighting for the legal rights of Connecticut's most vulnerable children

Connecticut Youth with Disabilities in the Justice System

**Missed Cues and Lost Opportunities: Briefing for
the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight
Committee (JJPOC)**

Presented by

**The Center for Children's Advocacy, with support
from Dr. Andrea Spencer and Attorney Marisa Halm**

CCA's Work with Justice Involved Youth

“Know your Rights training”

Speak Up! Youth Project— meeting with detained and incarcerated youth

Individual legal representation of incarcerated and re-entering youth

Individual legal representation of children with disabilities, and children in the child welfare system

Report Purpose

Examine school
and justice system
responses to 10
incarcerated youth
with disabilities

Identified (missed)
opportunities for
early support

Develop specific
recommendations
for systemic reform

CCA Report. Methodology

- Review educational, developmental and social histories for 10 incarcerated young adults in DOC custody.
- All youth had received educational advocacy from CCA.
- Each participant provided consent for their involvement.
- Youth Interviews
- Records reviews conducted by Dr. Andrea Spencer, Phd.—Faculty St. Josephs
- IEPs reviewed dated from 2015 to 2022, as available per youth.

CCA Report

“I am almost 21 years old, and I have spent 8 years of my life locked up, starting when I was 12. I really hope that what you are doing with this report can change things for the kids who come after me.”

- Report Participant

Incarcerated youth at MYI

All of the youth who participated in CCA's Report are Black, Latino, or Multiracial males

All youth were incarcerated before age 18 in adult facility

Youth records revealed a variety of disabilities: ADHD, learning disorders, autism, schizophrenia, PTSD

All youth were from major urban centers

CCA Report. Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Violence. 100% of youth self reported exposure to violence in their childhood

- One youth witnessed the shooting death of a close friend.
- One youth was a gunshot victim.
- Two youth reported being a victim of child abuse, verbal and physical.
- Two youth reported witnessing domestic violence.
- Six youth reported witnessing/impact of community violence and death/death of family members

CCA Report. Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Multiple youth reported previous injuries, surgeries (gun shot, dog attack, altercations)

One youth reported history of homelessness

Two youth reported a history of multiple psychiatric hospitalizations

One youth reported a history of multiple foster care placements.

Two youth reported child abuse

Six youth had an incarcerated parent

Family economic challenges; parental separation; parental disability; immigration concerns; parental m/h and s/a challenges.

Anthony's Story

Anthony had Birth to Three services due to a developmental disability but did not receive special education services upon entering school

His father was incarcerated when he was a baby and Anthony was close with his mother. He witnessed his mother victimized by interpersonal violence.

As he entered school, Anthony exhibited behavioral outbursts. He was retained in the first grade. No referral for a special education evaluation took place.

By middle school he was placed in an alternative program, where his struggles continued and he became further dis-engaged.

He was incarcerated at MYI by age 16. His mother and legal advocate helped get Anthony identified for special education services due to a language-based disorder.

Anthony reported his goals and aspirations. He wants to work with his hands and learn a skilled trade.

Missed Cues. Youth Education records

- 8/10 education records indicate no documentation of ACEs in early childhood.
- Most youth (7/10) IEPs did not indicate a confirmed psychiatric or clinical psychological evaluation and diagnosis (consistent with research findings regarding clinical diagnosis for minority youth).

Lost opportunities from an early age.

1. The majority of youth did not meet academic goals from **early elementary grades** but were not referred for special education and evaluation timely.
2. The median age at the time of youth's referral for special education was 13.5, with a range of age 3 to age 18.
3. 6/10 youth were successfully referred for special education by their legal advocate, and in one case, DCF. **Most referrals were initiated *after* youth's incarceration.**
4. **Youth described increasing levels of disengagement from school** in relation to academic difficulties and increasing feelings of anxiety and isolation/not belonging/academic failure began to seem inescapable.

It all got worse in middle school..." Participant 3

"I never felt like I belonged in school..." Participant 8.

Jayden's story

Jayden reported not feeling safe in his neighborhood and reported including being mugged when he was 12. He didn't feel safe walking to school so sometimes he didn't go.

Jayden reported school getting extremely hard in middle school, and he felt overwhelmed

Jayden reported multiple traumatic injuries to his head (two car accidents and being kicked in the head).

He was referred for special education in high school, but because he was "in and out of jail/detention" the referral did not get completed until he was incarcerated.

Jayden eventually received a diploma, and at the time of the conclusion of this Report was taking a college course. He aspired to be a mentor for kids like himself one day.

(Jayden is now re-incarcerated in adult prison)

Youth Educational Records

- 8/10 youth's records indicated attentional concerns (ADHD/OHI/"Distractibility")
- All youth below grade level in reading
- 4/10 records indicate grade retention. One youth was retained 3 times. One youth was promoted by exception in 9th grade

Missed Cues/Language Impairment

- Multiple youth's records indicate language impairment– strongly correlated with development of “problem” behavior, particularly as children get older.
- Lack of language-related assessments in youth's records, with only a single exception in this group.
- Deficits in pragmatic language have been linked to behavior problems, mostly commonly hyperactivity and lack of prosocial behavior.

Lost Opportunities/Discipline and Incarceration

- **8/10 youth received multiple suspensions and/or expulsion from school.**
- 8/10 youth were either placed in an in-district alternative school or an “out placement,” due to behavior challenges.
- ***4/10 youth were incarcerated for the first time before 9th grade.***

Leo's Story. CCA Report

Leo grew up with an incarcerated father.

His mother had many personal struggles that led to legal and child protection system involvement.

Leo had trouble focusing from an early age and was a late reader. He was retained in elementary school.

In 7th grade Leo was expelled for a full year due to an altercation with a peer in the school cafeteria. Records do not indicate that he received schooling during this time.

Leo repeated 7th grade but wound up on a downward trajectory.

Leo stopped going to school until he was sent to detention.

He was given an educational advocate and attorney. Leo was ultimately identified for special education due to a reading disability in what should have been his third year of high school.

His teachers described him as “diligent,” and “engaged,” “respectful,” and wanting to do well. Leo was able to complete high school while incarcerated. At the time of this report, Leo remained incarcerated, with a goal of becoming a barber and a good father upon release. Leo is now living in the community.

Lost Opportunities/Inadequate education in Justice System

- Youth records reflected minimal special education service hours
- Transition serves were very limited, typically one hour per month
- Median IEP service hours/week for the ten youth were 2.75 hours, with a range of 1.5 hours to 5.5 hours
- Most youth, 6/10, had no LEA representation at PPTs

Recommendations. Qualitative Oversight of Self-Contained and Alternative Settings

LEA Reporting on Education in Self Contained/Alternative/Secure settings.

- LEAs must have effective monitoring of quality of self-contained and alternative programs, including their individual contracts with private special education programs.

CSDE Enforcement.

- CSDE should strengthen oversight of the timely delivery of comprehensive special education evaluations of children to ensure assessment of trauma/ACES and language disorders by qualified staff, particularly in the face of persistent academic failure, emerging problem behavior, and chronic absenteeism.

CSDE Enforcement.

- implementation of research-based and evidence-based positive behavioral support interventions
- qualitative oversight for all programs where children spend less than 50% of their time with non-disabled peers (e.g., self-contained settings, alternative schools, private special education schools, including **secure settings**)
- Progress monitoring/corrective action (publicly available) for programs with high rates of school-based arrests, suspensions, restraint/seclusion

Secure Settings.

- Ensure JJEU can initiate special education referrals; Require reports re Child Find; Evaluations; Special Education Hours; Related Service Delivery; Transition Services.

Recommendations. Prevention/Prevention/Prevention

Professional Development.

- Facilitate professional development on relationship between language-based disorders and externalizing and problem behavior, often overlooked in boys.
- Training on impact of ACES and trauma on cognitive abilities, including executive functioning.

Reform use of Exclusionary Discipline.

- Phase out suspension and expulsion in elementary school, oversee implementation of research-based interventions, and ensure social work supports and trauma-responsive supports in elementary programs.

Expand Access to Educational Advocacy

- Expand Educational Success model to include JRB
- Increase funding for peer support for families who have a child with a disability (e.g. FAVOR)



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JJPOC 2025 Operations

Upcoming Timeline:

Vote on / Adopt 2025-2029 Strategic Plan in May

JJPOC Orientation Manual sent out to Members in July

JJPOC Member In-Person Summit in September

Next Meeting – June 26, 2025