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National Report Reveals Harmful Academic Credit Transfer Policies and Practices for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System

A new report from Juvenile Law Center, Southern Poverty Law Center and Education Law Center-PA shows how such policies hurt children in the system and prevent educational attainment

Philadelphia, PA (October 8, 2020): Today, Juvenile Law Center, Southern Poverty Law Center, and Education Law Center-PA released the report ***Credit Overdue: How States Can Mitigate Academic Credit Transfer Problems for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System***. The report details the problems facing tens of thousands of youth on any given day in our country when it comes to their educational experiences in juvenile justice facilities. While these facilities provide classes to prevent young people from falling behind in their schoolwork, many discover that when they return to school they will not receive full academic credit for their completed coursework, that there is no record of their credits, or that their credits will not count toward graduation.

“Young people, disproportionately youth of color, are too often pushed out of their schools and into the justice system due to harsh discipline practices and lack of supports,” said Regional Policy Analyst for the Southern Poverty Law Center Katherine Dunn. “These young people work to continue their education while in the juvenile justice system, but too often when they leave the system and return to their community schools, they are told that they can’t receive academic credit for their work. This results in devastating education consequences that put graduation and opportunity further out of reach. This injustice must be corrected, first and foremost, by eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline.”

This problem exists on a national scale, despite expanded mandates in recent years under the Every Student Succeeds Act and the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act, federal laws requiring states to have procedures for timely assessment and transfer of credits.

“By failing to address this fixable problem, we have placed additional obstacles in the way of youth in the juvenile justice system who desperately want to graduate,” said Maura McInerney, Legal Director at the Education Law Center. “We have closed doors instead of opened them. This report explains what state legislators and advocates can do to change this narrative and expand lifelong opportunities for youth.”

A national survey of 208 professionals from 135 counties across 34 states and the District of Columbia, conducted by researchers in the Juvenile Justice Research and Reform Lab at Drexel University, confirmed that youth across the country frequently don't receive credit for the work they complete:

- Only 9% of survey respondents said youth always earn credit for all their coursework in detention facilities, which are short-term centers that primarily hold youth waiting for their court dispositions.
- Only 17% of respondents reported that youth always earn credit for all work completed in longer-term juvenile justice placement facilities post-adjudication.
- Roughly a quarter of survey respondents (27%) reported that classes in these facilities are not aligned with school or district standards.
- A quarter of respondents also noted that many facilities relegate students to GED classes rather than coursework toward a high school diploma.
- 31% of survey respondents noted that youth do not receive academic credits because records are lost.

The report includes recommendations for state legislatures to correct this problem and help youth in the system achieve better educational outcomes.

“This report should be a call to action for advocates and policy makers around the country to pass legislation and implement policies promoting education success for youth involved in the juvenile justice system,” said Nadia Mozaffar, Senior Attorney at Juvenile Law Center. “States must ensure these students have access to quality education and supports throughout their juvenile justice involvement and as they return to their communities and schools.”

The authors of the report are available for questions and comments.

Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems. Founded in 1975, Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the country. We fight for youth through litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of amicus (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, consulting, and strategic communications. Widely published and internationally recognized as leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center has substantially shaped the development of law and policy on behalf of youth. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and practices affecting youth advance racial and economic equity and are rooted in research, consistent with children's unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values. For more information about Juvenile Law Center's work, visit www.JLC.org.

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements, and advance the human rights of all people. For more information, visit www.splcenter.org.

The Education Law Center-PA (ELC) is a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, community engagement, and policy advocacy, ELC advances the rights of underserved children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness. Learn more: www.elc-pa.org.

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