

**MYTH: Confined youth easily return to school after release from juvenile confinement.**

**FACT: The majority of youth involved in the juvenile justice system have strong aspirations to continue their education, yet face many barriers that reduce their access to education upon reentry.**

According to the latest OJJDP Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (December 2010), more than two-thirds of youth in custody report that they have aspirations of higher education. Research consistently shows that school attendance is a strong protective factor against delinquency; youth who are engaged in school are much less likely to commit crimes in the short and long-terms.

Despite the strong association between school truancy, dropouts, and delinquency, reenrollment in school for youth exiting residential confinement is often challenging. In fact, while more than half of confined youth have not completed the eighth grade, the majority -- 66% -- do not return to school after release.

There are multiple challenges involved in this issue. For instance, states lack a comprehensive mechanism to assess and address the learning needs of youth reentering the school system. The process of reenrolling in school is often complicated and lengthy, resulting in a difficult burden for youth to face alone. Youth often face challenges having their educational records and credits transferred from juvenile justice educational facilities to their home schools upon reentry. And some schools place obstacles to reenrollment for formerly incarcerated youth because these youth are considered difficult to manage. In fact, some states have enacted laws that create obstacles for youth attempting to re-enroll in school upon reentry.

Evidence-based practice suggests that successful youth reentry programs and policies must be comprehensive in scope. An educational approach based upon a “think exit at entry” philosophy, which is student-driven and addresses individual strengths and weaknesses of juvenile justice-involved youth, must be a part of a comprehensive reentry plan whose goal is to prevent recidivism and help youth establish a self-sustaining, law-abiding life.

Ideally, comprehensive reentry plans start when youth enter a justice facility; they include the time that youth are in juvenile

justice facilities, as well as the transitional period when youth leave; and they end in a follow-up phase to ensure that youth have the resources and support they need to successfully rejoin their communities, families, and schools.

In sum, the majority of youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice system are motivated to continue their education upon reentry. Significant barriers remain, however, that prevent these youth from achieving their educational aspirations and potential. A comprehensive, community-based approach is needed to facilitate youth reentry into education, and will help to narrow the gap between the goals that these youth possess and the realities that they encounter.

The U.S. Department of Education recently released an updated transition [toolkit](#) to help State and local administrators, teachers, and service providers deliver high-quality transition services for youth moving into, through, and out of education programs within the juvenile justice system.

**For More Information:**

- [Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education](#) (RAND)
- [Correctional Education in Juvenile Justice Facilities: Guidance Package](#) (ED)
- [Reentry Education Toolkit](#) (ED)
- [Transition Toolkit 3.0: Meeting the Educational Needs of Youth Exposed to the Juvenile Justice System](#) (ED)
- [You Got This— Educational Pathways for Youth in Transition](#) (ED)
- [Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems](#)

**What is a REENTRY MYTH BUSTER?**

This Myth Buster is one in a series of fact sheets primarily intended to clarify federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. Each year, more than 600,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons. Another 11.4 million cycle through local jails. When reentry fails, the social and economic costs are high -- more crime, more victims, more family distress, and more pressure on already-strained state and municipal budgets.

Because reentry intersects with health and housing, education and employment, family, faith, and community well-being, many federal agencies are focusing on initiatives for the reentry population. Under the auspices of the Cabinet-level interagency Reentry Council, federal agencies are working together to enhance community safety and well-being, assist those returning from prison and jail in becoming productive citizens, and save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration.

For more information about the Reentry Council, go to: <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/firc/>