

# **New Jersey Education and Juvenile Justice System Partners Collaborating to Support Positive Outcomes for Our Shared Youth**

**An Overview of the Work of the  
New Jersey Council on Juvenile  
Justice System Improvement's  
School/Justice Partnership Subcommittee**

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**APRIL 2018**

## Introduction: Genesis of School/Justice Partnership in New Jersey

### *JDAI Proves Collaboration Yields Success.*

Since 2004, the Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) and the Judiciary have partnered to lead the implementation of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) in New Jersey. JDAI is a nationally recognized systems-change initiative founded on the philosophy that all youth involved in the juvenile justice system should have opportunities to develop into healthy, productive adults as a result of policies, practices, and programs that maximize their chances for personal transformation, protect their legal rights, reduce their likelihood of unnecessary or inappropriate incarceration, and minimize the risks they pose to their communities.

Through JDAI, the dangerous detention overcrowding that persisted for years in New Jersey has been eliminated. The number of youth admitted to pre-trial secure lock-up has been reduced by more than 70%, all at a time when juvenile crime continues to decline and the success rate of community-based detention alternatives runs high. As a result of this success, while JDAI is active in more than 300 local jurisdictions across 30 states, New Jersey is the only state to be named a "Model Site" for JDAI.

JDAI has earned the support of government at both the state and local level and exemplifies the best of interagency and intergovernmental collaboration. Importantly, while JDAI focuses first on the detention component of juvenile justice – a worthy ambition in its own right – it is based on the notion that the policies, practices, and skills required to change detention will have a transformative effect on other components of the system. It is the charge of the New Jersey Council on Juvenile Justice System Improvement (Council), whose members are jointly appointed by the JJC Executive Director and the Administrative Director of the New Jersey Courts, to both oversee the statewide implementation of JDAI, and to use a data-driven approach to examine the entire youth justice system in New Jersey systematically, and to in turn make changes that improve outcomes for kids, families, and communities. County Councils on Juvenile Justice System Improvement mirror the work of the state Council in each local JDAI site.

### *Establishing a School/Justice Partnership.*

One aspect of the Council's work is confronting "cross-cutting" issues that may be affecting multiple jurisdictions through the formation of subcommittees. Several JDAI counties had been

working to strengthen partnerships between the juvenile justice and education systems, and to collaborate and creatively problem-solve issues related to where these two systems meet. Given the multi-site interest in this particular area, in 2015, the Council, in partnership with the New Jersey State Board of Education and the New Jersey Department of Education, convened a new subcommittee – the School/Justice Partnership (Partnership) – to support localities in their efforts and to consider statewide implications.

The Partnership meets regularly and includes representatives from a variety of areas, including: educators, community and family advocacy groups, lawyers, judges, probation, law enforcement, and several other state and local juvenile justice, youth serving, and educational entities. [See Addendum 1] The Partnership is co-chaired by the Honorable Eugene Iadanza (Ret.), (former Judge, Monmouth County) and Immediate Former State Board of Education President, Mark Biedron.

At the Partnership's first meeting, goals were established that would catapult this work forward across many areas. The goals and specific initiatives implemented to achieve each goal are outlined in this paper and support the notion that no single system – not the juvenile justice nor the education system – is exclusively responsible for improvement. Instead, all systems have a role to play; interagency communication, collaboration, and leadership is vital to fostering better outcomes for youth, families, and communities throughout New Jersey.

## School/Justice Partnership Goals

### 1 | Understanding School-Based Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System & Developing Solutions to Address Issues Identified.

#### *School Discipline and Traditional Responses to Student Misconduct.*

A heavy reliance on traditional responses to disciplinary issues – such as suspensions, expulsions, and even referrals to law enforcement – can actually lead to worse student outcomes instead of making things better. School is an important protective factor against delinquency. Removing students from the positive school environment when they are exhibiting minor acting-out behavior can start a cycle that leads to further negative behavior. Typically, these types of punitive approaches further weaken what are often already tenuous attachments to school and cause kids to fall further behind. When

coupled with the research about the negative impact that juvenile justice system involvement has on kids, it becomes evident that there has to be a better way if we are committed to improving outcomes for youth.

Moreover, we know that for kids, the certainty and swiftness of accountability measures are more important than the severity of those measures in terms of the impact such measures have on future transgressions. However, referral to the juvenile justice system for minor offenses does not typically yield a certain nor a swift response. Because Prosecutors' Offices and the Courts deal with very serious crimes, often the types of offenses referred by schools are handled with modest consequences that could have been administered by the school itself. And, typically the timeline for the justice system to respond and administer the consequence is 30, 60, or even 90 days after the behavior occurred.

One central goal of the Partnership was to therefore understand, through a data-driven process, the scope and nature of school-based referrals to the juvenile justice system and develop and implement solutions to address any issues identified. The Partnership wanted to determine whether incidents referred by schools to the justice system in New Jersey were indeed minor, and therefore potentially resolvable through other avenues, or whether the data demonstrated that the justice system seemed like the best response to the behavior.

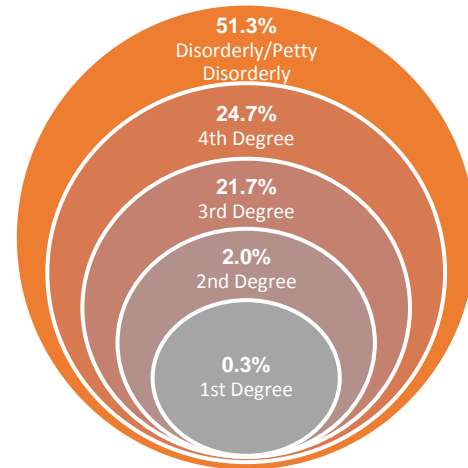
### ***Using Data to Understand the Problem and Drive Change.***

A cohort of eight New Jersey counties participated in a 13-month data collection effort that documented each time a school referred an incident to law enforcement resulting in a formal delinquency complaint filed in Family Court. Over the 13-months, there were 977 such "school-generated" delinquency complaints, which comprised 11.0% of all juvenile delinquency complaints filed with the Family Court during the same timeframe. Looking closely at the degree of the most serious charge on the school-generated complaints, slightly more than half (51.3%) were for low-level, disorderly and petty disorderly (i.e., misdemeanors) offenses. Only a very small percentage were referrals for very serious offenses (2.3%, 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> degree combined). [Figure 1.]

The review of the data made clear to the Partnership that the availability of data regarding school-generated complaints is critical to informing ongoing system improvement and to monitoring the impact of any strategies implemented. In December 2017, the New Jersey Judiciary approved a request to modify the juvenile delinquency complaint form to include a

question regarding whether the incident was school-based. This change will facilitate the statewide collection of data regarding school-generated delinquency complaints into the future.

*Figure 1: Degree of Most Serious Charge for School-Generated Juvenile Delinquency Complaints*



### ***Developing Solutions and Reshaping School Discipline.***

The initial data analysis advanced discussion among the Partnership to find greater common ground on improving responses to kids who engage in negative behavior. The Partnership believes there are strategies that ensure school environments are safe, supportive, and conducive to teaching and learning, while simultaneously minimizing the likelihood that a child will end up in the juvenile justice system. A description of some of the solutions advanced or supported by the Partnership follows.

### **Uniform State Memorandum of Agreement Between Education and Law Enforcement Officials**

Established in New Jersey in 1988, the purpose of the Uniform State Memorandum of Agreement Between Education and Law Enforcement Officials (MOA) is to establish effective cooperation between education and law enforcement to ensure a safe educational environment. The annual adoption and implementation of the MOA is required by all public school districts, charter schools and renaissance school projects, jointure commissions, education services commissions, and approved private schools for students with disabilities.

Amendments to the MOA are considered by the State Education/Law Enforcement Workgroup which is comprised of representatives from the New Jersey Department of Education, the Office of the Attorney

General, and related professional organizations. In an effort to bring awareness to some of the school-generated delinquency complaint data collected by the Partnership to drive change, a small workgroup of the Partnership convened to develop formal recommendations regarding proposed changes to the MOA. Most notably, the following recommendations were proposed to the State Education/Law Enforcement Workgroup on behalf of the Partnership:

- The MOA should be re-organized in a more user-friendly format for both educators and law enforcement to more easily navigate its use.
- The MOA should contain consistent language and terminology as it relates to school-based offenses for clarity.
- The MOA should provide more specific information on mandatory vs. non-mandatory referrals to law enforcement, clarifying when educators *must* notify law enforcement and *how* law enforcement should respond, and when educators *need not* notify law enforcement, in order to reduce reliance on formal delinquency complaints as a response to minor behavioral transgressions.
- The MOA should promote meaningful dialogue and ongoing two-way collaboration between schools and law enforcement to best support students.

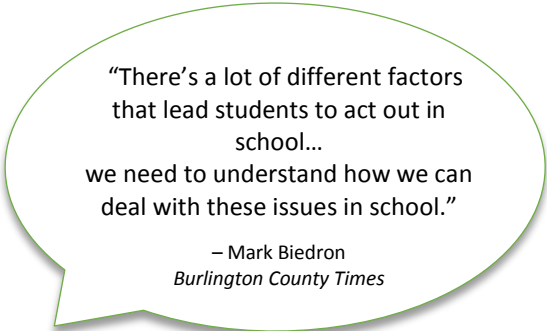
The Partnership is encouraged that its recommendations were welcomed and considered by the workgroup and is hopeful that the revised MOA will be released, and thorough training for both educators and law enforcement completed, by the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year.

#### Understanding and Promoting Promising Approaches and Best Practices in Non-Traditional School Discipline

Through collaboration with the Department of Education, a request for information was distributed to all school districts to better understand approaches that New Jersey schools have implemented in lieu of out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or referral to law enforcement when intervening with youth who exhibit problematic behavior. While limited responses were received, the information that was provided was helpful to the Partnership in further identifying promising school-based interventions that could be promoted and elevated for statewide implementation.

Some of the resources and programs described by respondents and Partnership members include:

- *Creating partnerships to access existing community resources* that engage the school, the child, and the family, such as the Family Crisis Intervention Unit (FCIU), Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS), the Care Management Organization (CMO), or the Family Support Organization (FSO). These partnerships provide an incredible opportunity to: help families manage negative behaviors in the first place; help police in their efforts to assist families when a referral to law enforcement is made; and help schools provide appropriate interventions short of suspension, expulsion, or referral to law enforcement for youth whose behavior signals a need for services.
- *Restorative Justice Programs* that provide the space for students, teachers, families, and schools to resolve conflict and address school safety. When implemented in schools, students are offered the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions without being pushed out of school; students can also be offered leadership opportunities in restorative justice programs.
- *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* are schoolwide systems of support that currently exist in many schools across New Jersey. Several schools reported that they partnered with Rutgers University to implement this continuum of support within the school.



The Partnership acknowledges that the debate about how schools should respond to student misconduct is not new and nowhere close to over, but there is a grave need for locally-developed approaches to promote positive school climates and equitable discipline practices. Moreover, it is imperative that locally-tailored approaches and promising practices be grounded in research and driven by data instead of being based on indiscriminate zero tolerance policies or ad-hoc approaches to discipline.



## 2

### Implementing Strategies that Streamline the School Reentry Process for Youth Returning from Out-of-Home Placement.

#### *Using Data to Understand the Problem and Drive Change.*

In deciding on a target population for data analysis, the Partnership decided to track youth leaving Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) placement and returning to the community for school. Each youth's school enrollment status was tracked at 5-days following release and again at 30-days after release. In the first one-year data analysis, it was revealed that at the 5-day mark, just 32.8% of youth were enrolled in school, though that figure increased substantially by the 30-day mark, where 79.1% of youth were successfully enrolled. The JJC was committed to leading change where possible, and in an effort to increase the percentage of youth enrolled in school within 5-days of release, streamlined the school reentry process through the JJC's Office of Juvenile Parole and Transitional Services (JPATS).

#### *Developing Solutions to Support Kids Re-enrolling in School.*

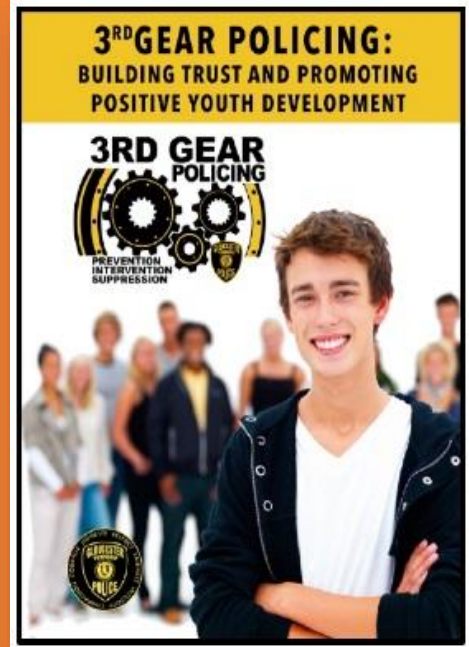
##### Streamlining the Process for Children Returning to School from the JJC

Within the Office of JPATS, several practice changes were implemented to enhance the timely process of re-enrolling youth in school.

- **10 Days Prior to a Youth's Release:** JPATS will contact the parent/guardian to confirm the youth's release date and remind the parent/guardian to engage the school for enrollment purposes.
- **5 Days Prior to a Youth's Release:** JPATS will confirm that the parent/guardian engaged the school and document the outcome of the parent/guardian's attempt to engage the school. If the school has not been engaged, JPATS will schedule a date to appear at the school with the parent/guardian and document both the date and the outcome of the meeting with the school.
- **1 Day After a Youth's Release:** JPATS will verify that the youth attended the school as scheduled.
- JPATS will partner with the Youth Advocate Program, an agency that the JJC contracted with to support youth in the reentry process, to assist with enrollment when necessary.



### In the Spotlight: Creating Partnerships



The Gloucester Township Police Department is a leader in forging strong partnerships between the school community and law enforcement that builds trust and positive youth development through its 3<sup>rd</sup> Gear Policing model. The Gloucester Township Police Department believes that police officers are often in a unique position to identify young people and families who need assistance, learn of the adverse experiences that children have been exposed to, and assist in providing appropriate protective measures to children and their families to help them succeed. Additionally, Project Pause is the Department's suspension reduction program whereby any student who has committed an offense that results in suspension from school can reduce the number of suspension days through program participation. The program focuses on youth pausing and taking control of their thinking to better understand how easily a bad decision becomes worse, and to use skills and strategies from the program to thwart future negative behavior.

After the practice changes were implemented by JPATS, data collection continued in order to assess the impact of the changes, and to continue to evaluate ongoing barriers. Comparing the pre-data

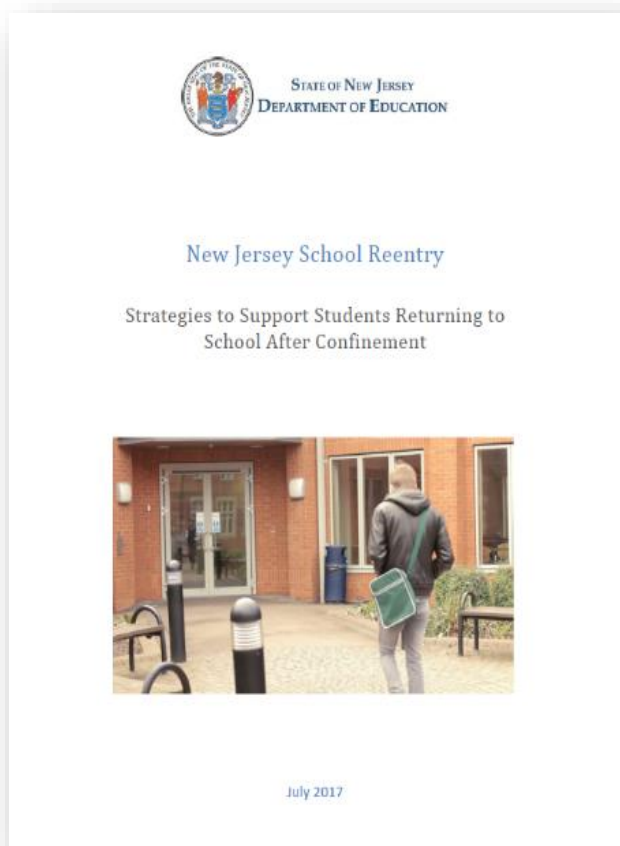
to the post-data revealed that the percentage of youth enrolled at the 5-day mark increased from 32.8% to 47.2%. The Partnership recognizes that steps forward to achieve this goal have been made, though there continues to be room for improvement.

### Reentry Support Toolkit for School Districts

Additionally, the Partnership, in collaboration with the Department of Education, developed and disseminated across the state a reentry support toolkit – “*Strategies to Support Students Returning to School After Confinement.*” [Figure 2] The document provides school districts with information that covers smooth transitions, appropriate placement, therapeutic support, multi-system collaboration with an identified transition coordinator, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress.

Moving forward, the Partnership will support the use of this toolkit in a meaningful, intentional way by working with specific school districts and joining together stakeholders to develop and implement a model protocol based on the guiding principles found in the toolkit.

*Figure 2: Strategies to Support Students Returning to School After Confinement*



### Providing Children with the Tools They Need to Succeed – Student Portfolios

A small workgroup of the Partnership has convened to identify what additional resources could be made available to children to ensure their successful reentry back into school following out-of-home placement. As a result, the JJC is working to ensure that youth leaving JJC custody have in their possession a “student portfolio” – a collection of important educational documents, work products, and significant achievements. The contents of the portfolio will demonstrate each youth’s academic and vocational progress, talents, and skills. This will help the youth when transitioning back into school, when applying to college or vocational/technical schools, or when searching for a job. The contents of the portfolio include:

- Written statement regarding academic interests and accomplishments; career interests and goals, work experience, Structured Learning Experiences, and related training; and special skills and talents
- Résumé
- Copies of Academic Transcripts, Diploma/GED, and SAT/ACT Scores (if applicable)
- Copies of Awards, Certifications, and/or Achievements (honor roll, Student of the Year, training certificates, etc.)
- Writing sample (for example, an academic project or essay from class or a creative writing piece)
- Documents that showcase hobbies, skills, talents (art, music, poetry, etc.)
- Letters of recommendations or commendations (from teachers/instructors, community service supervisors, work site supervisors, mentors, instructors, etc.)
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) & Other Application Information for College and Trade Schools

Each youth will be provided with one hardcopy of their portfolio in a binder or folder and one electronic copy of their portfolio on a USB drive. The Partnership believes that this effort will ensure youth are better supported in their transition back into the school community, post-secondary education, or employment upon returning home.

# 3

## Creating Opportunities to Strengthen & Sustain Partnership Between the Education & Juvenile Justice Systems.

### ***Ongoing State- and Local-Level Partnership and Collaboration.***

Certainly, the formation of the Partnership was a significant event in terms of elevating and promoting the importance of cross-system collaboration between the juvenile justice and education systems, but of equal importance is the continued growth of this partnership. Fostering a system of shared and coordinated responsibility on the part of child-serving agencies is one way to improve the educational success and overall well-being of youth. When stakeholders understand the dynamics of partnerships and maintain a focus on mutual benefits, partnerships grow stronger, benefits increase, and the institutional lines between partners become less obvious.

An ongoing goal of the Partnership continues to be identifying opportunities that strengthen the collaboration between the education and juvenile justice systems. To that end, the Partnership has found several opportunities to push forward the dialogue on cross-system issues and share information.

In 2015, a collaborative forum was held with nearly 300 members of the law enforcement, education, and court communities to identify ways we can work together to prevent school discipline issues from landing youth in the juvenile justice system. The forum included a panel made up of members of the educational and juvenile justice systems who discussed solutions that should be advanced in New Jersey, and after the panel presentations, attendees met in county-based groups to develop plans to follow-up with the solutions identified at the forum.

Additionally, topical presentations to various system partners have been held or are planned through the Partnership:

- February 2016 – State Board of Education: *“Recommendations for the DOE/BOE Strategic Plan”*
- November 2017 – Executive County Superintendents: *“New Jersey Department of Education and Juvenile Justice Commission Partnership to Support Our Shared Youth”*

- January 2018 – State Board of Education: *“Education/Justice Partnership to Support Our Shared Youth”*
- April 2018 – New Jersey School Boards Association, Opioid Conference to Address Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment: *“Education/Justice Partnership to Support Our Shared Youth”*
- October 2018 (planned) – New Jersey School Board’s Association Conference.
- November 2018 (planned) – New Jersey Educator’s Association Annual Conference.

### **Moving Forward**

The collaborative journey of the Partnership has not always been easy, with obstacles emerging along the way; however, it is guided by dedicated stakeholders who care deeply about results and who work every day to do better by children, families, and communities in New Jersey. The ongoing work ahead of the Partnership will be challenging and complex, requiring careful consideration of sometimes competing factors – so it goes without saying that continued partnership is critical.

So how do we keep our students safe while seeking school-based responses to misconduct? How do we transition school cultures into environments of support while addressing specialized needs often exhibited by our most challenged students? How do we continue to ensure the timely enrollment of children in school who are coming from out-of-home placement, given the multi-system barriers that exist? These are complex questions with no easy answers. We do know, however, that the answers, lie in the best of our collective thinking and commitment to the work, because our children deserve nothing less.

State-level system collaboration paves a path forward for local school/justice/community partnerships to take hold and to transform results for schools and communities – to make them positive, supportive places where all children can thrive and achieve.

The Partnership encourages the sharing of this summary document in a way that will aid in promoting and elevating the importance of this collaborative work and the strategies taking shape to support all of our youth in reaching their fullest potential.

**ADDENDUM 1.**  
**NEW JERSEY COUNCIL ON JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT**  
***School/Justice Partnership***

*Membership*  
(Effective 2018)

<b>PARTNERSHIP MEMBER</b>	<b>TITLE / AGENCY</b>
<b>1. Mark Biedron</b> (Co-Chair)	<i>Immediate Past President</i> New Jersey State Board of Education
<b>2. Hon. Eugene Iadanza, J.S.C. (Ret.)</b> (Co-Chair)	<i>Juvenile Judge (Ret.)</i> Monmouth County Superior Court
<b>3. Kelly Allen</b>	<i>Manager</i> Office of Student Support Services New Jersey Department of Education
<b>4. Lisa Angelini</b>	<i>Manager</i> Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning New Jersey Department of Education
<b>5. Joanne Butler</b>	<i>Partner and Representative of School Board Attorney</i> Schenck, Price, Smith & King, LLP
<b>6. Marie Blistan</b>	<i>President</i> New Jersey Educator's Association
<b>7. Deidra Carvin</b>	<i>Assistant Family Division Manager</i> Hudson County Superior Court
<b>8. Ben Castillo</b>	<i>Director</i> Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning New Jersey Department of Education
<b>9. Mary Coogan</b>	<i>Assistant Director</i> Advocates for Children of New Jersey
<b>10. Nancy Curry</b>	<i>Director</i> Office of Student Support Services New Jersey Department of Education
<b>11. Doris Darling</b>	<i>Director</i> Office of Local Programs and Services New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission
<b>12. Vincent R. De Lucia</b>	<i>Educator in Residence</i> New Jersey School Boards Association
<b>13. Joanne Dietrich</b>	<i>Assistant Director</i> Family Practice Division Administrative Office of the Courts
<b>14. Chief Harry Earle</b>	<i>Chief of Police</i> Gloucester Township Police Department



<b>15. Megan Forney</b>	<i>Research and Reform Specialist</i> Atlantic/Cape May/Burlington New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission
<b>16. Hon. F. Lee Forrester, J.S.C. (Ret.)</b>	<i>Juvenile Judge (Ret.)</i> Mercer County Superior Court
<b>17. Chuck Goldstein</b>	<i>Chief Executive Officer</i> CGS Family Partnership Inc.
<b>18. Tremaine Harrison</b>	<i>Director</i> Office of Education New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission
<b>19. Sol Heckelman</b>	<i>School Psychologist (Ret.)</i> Middlesex County
<b>20. Erica Hein</b>	<i>Research and Reform Specialist</i> Middlesex/Warren New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission
<b>21. Joelle Kenney</b>	<i>Manager</i> JDAI and System Reform Unit New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission
<b>22. Christopher L.C. Kuberiet</b>	<i>First Assistant Prosecutor</i> Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office
<b>23. Greg Lambard</b>	<i>Chief of Probation</i> Burlington County
<b>24. Jennifer LeBaron, Ph.D.</b>	<i>Deputy Executive Director</i> Office of Policy, Research, and Planning New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission <i>Co-Chair, New Jersey Council on Juvenile Justice System Improvement</i>
<b>25. Edwin Lee</b>	<i>Director</i> Office of Juvenile Parole and Transitional Services New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission
<b>26. Lisa Lledoux</b>	<i>Assistant Prosecutor</i> Hudson County Prosecutor's Office
<b>27. Kim Maloney</b>	<i>Liaison to Juvenile Justice</i> Supervisor, Specialized Residential Treatment Unit Children's System of Care, DCF
<b>28. Peter Mancusi</b>	<i>Assistant Director</i> Division of Children's System of Care
<b>29. Yasmin Hernandez-Manno</b>	<i>Executive County Superintendent</i> Mercer/Middlesex County
<b>30. Mary McKillip</b>	<i>Data Collection and Evaluation Coordinator</i> Office of Student Support Services New Jersey Department of Education

<b>31. Robert Mercado</b>	<i>Regional Parole Supervisor</i> Office of Juvenile Parole and Transitional Services New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission
<b>32. Retha Onitiri</b>	<i>Youth Decarceration Campaign Manager</i> New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
<b>33. Shirley Robinson</b>	<i>Juvenile Team Leader</i> Atlantic County Superior Court
<b>34. Danielle Romano</b>	<i>Research and Reform Specialist</i> Monmouth/Ocean New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission
<b>35. David Tang</b>	<i>Chief</i> Family Practice Division Administrative Office of the Courts
<b>36. Courtnie Thomas</b>	<i>Research and Reform Specialist</i> Hudson/Sussex/Passaic New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission
<b>37. Rocco Tomazic</b>	<i>Superintendent</i> Borough of Freehold Public Schools
<b>38. Juan Torres</b>	<i>Interim Executive County Superintendent</i> Hunterdon/Union County
<b>39. Hon. Deborah Venezia</b>	<i>Presiding Judge</i> Family Division Middlesex County Superior Court
<b>40. Seth Victor</b>	<i>Assistant Deputy Public Defender</i> Office of the Public Defender Bergen County
<b>41. Shelby Voorhees</b>	<i>Youth Services Commission Administrator</i> Ocean County
<b>42. Kevin Walker</b>	<i>Deputy Public Defender</i> Office of the Public Defender Burlington County