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## ISSUE BRIEF:

# Professional Development

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## **About the National Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Neglected or Delinquent Children and Youth**

The mission of the National Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Neglected or Delinquent Children and Youth (NDTAC) is to improve education programming for youth who are neglected or delinquent (N or D). NDTAC's legislative mandates are to develop a uniform evaluation model for State education agency (SEA) Title I, Part D, Subpart 1, programs; to provide technical assistance to States in order to increase their capacity for data collection and their ability to use those data to improve educational programming for youth who are neglected or delinquent; and to serve as a facilitator among different organizations, agencies, and interest groups that work with youth in neglect or delinquent facilities. For additional information on NDTAC, visit the Center's Web site at <http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/>.

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## NDTAC Professional Development Brief

Beginning in 2017, NDTAC will publish a series of briefs that focus on the professional development needs and interests of Neglected and Delinquent State coordinators, correctional educators, and providers of Title I, Part D (Part D) programs and services. The briefs will highlight key considerations for planning, designing, and delivering professional development for individuals working in Part D and correctional education programs. The goal of the briefs is to raise awareness and understanding of how professional development can enhance the quality of Part D services, build capacity for staff charged with addressing the needs of youth who find themselves in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and improve outcomes for this population of youth.

In this, our first professional development brief, we set forth the overarching considerations that should be kept in mind when conceptualizing professional development for educators working with neglected or delinquent youth (N or D). The brief begins by defining professional development and demonstrating why it is a critical support for educators and practitioners working in juvenile correctional settings. Next, we present the unique characteristics of the N or D population and highlight how having additional professional development could enable juvenile justice center staff to better understand and respond to the population's needs. The brief concludes with a summary of ideas for professional development suggested by coordinators. This section also includes a description of some practices currently being implemented in the field.

Subsequent briefs will explore other areas for professional development, including but not limited to the administration and management of Federal programs, accountability and student achievement, transition planning, interagency coordination, and information sharing. As official guidance on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) becomes available, the briefs will examine the implications of the new law on professional development for Part D programs and service providers.

## Importance of Professional Development

### Defining Professional Development

Professional development is an activity or series of interactions intended to increase individuals' knowledge and skills, improve their practice, and contribute to their professional growth (Minor, Desimone, Lee, & Hochberg, 2016). By participating in professional development, practitioners learn about new research and emerging best practices (Mizell, 2010). Participation in professional development can take many forms. Formal or structured professional development may include attending conferences and workshops, completing continuing education courses, or earning specialized certificates. Informal professional development may include reading a book, participating in a Webinar, or working collaboratively with colleagues to pilot a new practice. The length, duration, and format of professional development opportunities often vary based on the amount and type of content being presented (Zaslow, Tout, Halle, Whittaker, & Lavelle, 2010).

Among educators, effective professional development (1) increases practitioners' knowledge and skills and/or changes their attitudes and beliefs; (2) leads to the use of new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs to improve instruction and/or an approach to pedagogy; and (3) results in improved learning outcomes for their students (Desimone, 2011). Some assert there is no single, definitive list of best practices for professional development (Guskey, 2009). However, professional development programs that are fragmented and/or those that address a variety of unrelated topics tend to have less impact on professional practice (Korthagen, 2004).

Educators are best served by professional development that engages them in concrete tasks that are connected to their classroom practices (Capps, Crawford, & Constas, 2012). Researchers recommend providing professional development that allows for collaboration and peer-to-peer interaction. Effective professional development will intentionally expose participants to a thoughtfully sequenced series of learning experiences over an extended period of time (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). In some instances, practitioners may need to complete introductory courses to acquire basic information

and gain exposure to concepts, terms, and practices. Introductory courses can be followed by more customized, inquiry-driven experiences that provide ongoing support as teachers work to implement new practices (Capps, Crawford, and Constas, 2012)

Professional development should be designed as a continuous process in which learning experiences are conceptualized as ongoing and improvements in practice are expected to be cumulative (Mizell, 2010; Ruddy & Prusinski, 2012). When professional development is planned as an ongoing process, practitioners are provided with multiple opportunities to internalize what they have experienced and to apply what they have learned. Some research suggests that activities such as being mentored or coached have more impact on practice than attending workshops (Penuel et al., 2007). Ongoing and continuous implementation of new practices is more likely to bring about improvements in educator effectiveness, especially when there is a culture of learning in the school (Gibson & Brooks, 2012)

### Professional Development and Educator Effectiveness in Juvenile Justice Settings

In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) released *Guiding Principles for Providing High-Quality Education in Juvenile Justice Secure Care Settings*. This report expands on prior guidance from ED and DOJ and presents five guiding principles for providing high-quality education in juvenile justice secure care settings. The third guiding principle emphasizes the importance of recruiting, employing, and retaining "qualified education staff with skills relevant to juvenile justice settings who can positively impact long-term student outcomes through demonstrated abilities to create and sustain effective teaching and learning environments." Within this principle, the report recommends that educators in juvenile justice programs: (1) hold valid education credentials and have relevant technical expertise, (2) develop the skills necessary to respond to the unique needs of the students they work with, and (3) assess their performance based on accepted State standards for highly effective instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). One way educators and practitioners working in juvenile justice centers can operationalize the third guiding principle is by planning and engaging in high-quality professional development.

The ED/DOJ report indicates, “teachers should be consulted about the content and types of professional development opportunities they feel would be of greatest assistance given the needs of the students they serve” (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This is an important caveat to planning professional development because youth in correctional facilities have a more diverse range of educational, psychological, and social-emotional needs than students in general education settings (Mathur, Clark, & Schoenfeld, 2009). Professional development offerings should be sufficiently diversified to ensure that educators teaching in correctional facilities can meet the specific educational, social, and emotional needs of the youth with whom they work. The content delivered through professional development should be based on the specific knowledge and skills educators feel they need to improve their practice and better respond to the totality of students’ needs (Gibson & Brooks, 2012; Minor et al., 2016; Penuel et al., 2007).

Teachers in juvenile justice settings may also benefit from professional development that helps them develop skill in creating a positive learning environment in the context of a secure facility (Mathur et al., 2009). For example, educators working with adjudicated youth could participate in professional development that unpacks how the facility-wide climate influences the processes of teaching and learning (Lamperes, 1994; Thapa Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013). Alternately, they could seek out professional development on best practices for creating positive teaching and learning environments in secure settings (Cox, Visker, & Hartman, 2001). A third option would be participating in professional development that focuses on approaches for customizing effective instructional strategies to work in a juvenile justice environment (Mathur et al., 2009). The implications of failing to help educators develop these competencies are noted in the ED/DOJ report, which indicates, “The lack of professional development opportunities specific to teaching in secure care settings may also be a barrier to retaining quality educational staff who may struggle to address the behavioral and academic needs of their students in an environment that is initially foreign to them—or at least very different from previous teaching settings.” Fortunately, the field has seen increased movement toward the use of positive, treatment-centered approaches in juvenile justice facilities (Nelson, Jolivet, Leone, & Mathur, 2010).

Finally, the ED/DOJ report indicates that educators in juvenile justice settings would benefit from opportunities to attend professional activities outside the facility, including those led by local school districts. Recognizing that not every practice will work equally well in all contexts (Guskey, 2009), educators in juvenile justice session may find it beneficial to participate in district-led professional development that focuses on instructional strategies such as (1) differentiating instruction (Dixon Yessel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014), (2) inclusion supports for special education students (Reglin, Royster, & Losike-Sedimo, 2014), and/or (3) ensuring alignment between instruction and content standards (Capps et al., 2012). Practitioners in juvenile justice settings may also find it beneficial to participate in district-led professional learning communities (Thessin & Starr, 2011) that provide them with opportunities to engage in learning communities that include educators who work in different settings. These peer group-oriented sessions could focus on exploring how different instructional practices can be used in different settings. They could likewise focus on emerging behavior management practices and/or culturally responsive techniques that can be applied in different settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The effect of participation in externally led professional development on the practice of educators working in correctional settings will be enhanced when it is part of an overarching organizational effort (Ruddy & Prusinski, 2012).

### Neglected and Delinquent State Coordinators See Value in Professional Development

Interviews conducted with a small group of N or D coordinators revealed that professional development is an emerging area of interest in their professional community. Despite differences in how professional development programs are designed and implemented across States, coordinators agreed that high-quality professional development is needed to ensure educators in juvenile justice settings can respond to the needs of the N or D population. Coordinators highlighted the importance of educators in juvenile justice settings being able to work with students who (1) have a history of poor academic achievement, (2) have high rates of mental health issues, and (3) are more likely to have experienced traumatic events or episodes that result in trauma that may impact the youth into adulthood.

Coordinators agreed that knowledge of effective instructional practices is necessary but not sufficient to be successful with N or D students. They highlighted the importance of being familiar with relevant best practices from disciplines such as psychology, juvenile justice, and family engagement in order to respond effectively to the student population’s needs. Several coordinators noted that professionals with backgrounds in criminal justice tend to have more experience with the behaviors that system-involved youth display. They indicated that this experience often times enables them to be more effective when managing difficult situations.

“Educators working in juvenile justice settings need a platform to share best practices.”

**N or D coordinator**

Coordinators saw value in moving toward a more comprehensive, cohesive approach to planning professional development for individuals working in Part D programs. Ideas for implementing more comprehensive professional development programs included (1) developing a series of courses that help educators recognize the needs of the whole child and (2) providing courses that incorporate best practices from other disciplines into instructional strategies. Some coordinators recommended that educators in correctional facilities should receive the same types of professional development provided to educators who work in traditional settings. This would include having an opportunity to participate in professional development that included coaching, job-embedded training, peer-to-peer learning, and professional learning communities focused on developing and sharing lesson plans.

Some States have begun to create these kinds of comprehensive approaches to professional development. Coordinators indicated there is both interest and opportunity for increased collaboration for professional development with the local school district. In one State, the principal of a State-run school serving N or D youth coordinates joint professional development experiences that bring together staff from multiple educational settings. The purpose of these joint professional development sessions is to ensure educators working in facilities have opportunities to learn



the instructional practices being implemented by teachers in the local school districts. Shared professional development creates continuity of instructional experiences for youth, which is intended to make it easier for them to experience a more seamless transition experience when they return to the general education setting. The joint professional development experiences also give teachers from the local school districts an opportunity to become familiar with the facility and its teachers.

Coordinators' ideas for creating a more cohesive approach to professional development centered on the use of facility-wide trainings. They expressed generalized support for increased use of facility-wide professional development that brings together educators, counselors, social workers, administrators, youth engagement specialists, and security staff and provides common opportunities to learn new practices and engage in collaborative problem-solving. Coordinators indicated that facility-wide professional development could (1) improve the collective capacity of facility staff to address students' needs and (2) increase the consistency of student-staff interactions. They suggested training the entire staff on skills and practices that foster the creation of a positive and healthy climate for the teaching-learning process to take place. They noted the value of facility-wide trainings that help establish the definitive set of strategies and language adults will use to manage student behaviors. Several coordinators indicated this would be beneficial because N or D students thrive in environments characterized by consistency as well as in situations where they can predict the responses their behaviors will elicit from adults.

Coordinators reported experiencing similar challenges with respect to defining professional development programs for Part D practitioners. They indicated that resource limitations are a primary challenge and described multiple dimensions of this constraint. First, set-asides for professional development are often small and insufficient to cover the totality of professional development needs within and across facilities. Second, staff in correctional facilities often have difficulty securing the release time they need to be able to participate in professional development. Third, there is an absence of forums and professional learning communities that address the specific needs and interests of educators working in juvenile justice centers. Taken together, these resource limitations constrain opportunities for educators working with

N or D students to engage in professional development activities.

## Characteristics of the Neglected and Delinquent Population

### Demographics

Students who participate in N or D programs have characteristics that differentiate them from the students in traditional education settings. Based on nationally reported data for the 2013–14 school year (NDTAC, 2015), students participating in N or D programs were:

- **Disproportionately male.** Male students account for 84 percent of the population served by Subpart 1 and 73 percent of the population served by Subpart 2.
- **Disproportionately minority.** Minority students account for 66 percent of the population served by Subpart 1 and 67 percent of the population served by Subpart 2.
- **Disproportionately eligible for special education services.** A significant portion of participating students qualify for special education services. Students with disabilities account for 32.3 percent of the population served by Subpart 1 and 30.5 percent of the population served by Subpart 2.

The demographic composition of the N or D population suggests that the population would be best served by school cultures that are supportive and encouraging to minority males. School cultures that are encouraging to minority males use accelerated learning strategies and provide positive role models. They also actively support students in exploring postsecondary options and/or vocational pathways. Finally, they foster a sense of collective responsibility and publicly celebrate achievements (James, 2011). Educators in juvenile justice settings may benefit from additional professional development to become familiar with and skilled in creating this type of school culture.

Given the overrepresentation of special education students among N or D students, the population would be best served by educators who are able to identify and respond to the needs of students with disabilities. Educators working with system-involved youth could benefit from expertise in developing academic interventions that support

academic weaknesses related to oral and written communication, language processing and memory, and capacity to process nonverbal cues, as these are some of the most commonly reported educational concerns for youth who are system-involved (Mallet, 2014). They could likewise benefit from knowledge and skill related to the development of behavioral interventions that help students control their impulses and identify and self-manage their emotional responses. Given the high rates of comorbidity for learning and behavioral disabilities among system-involved youth, educators could also benefit from knowing how to design coordinated interventions that respond to both learning and behavioral needs (Gagnon & Barber, 2010).

### Mental Health

Mental health conditions can contribute to significant deviations in how youth typically learn, behave, and/or handle their emotions (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Mental health conditions create distress and interfere with an individual's capacity to successfully complete daily activities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Research shows that students participating in N or D programs have disproportionately high rates of mental health issues (Grisso, 2008). A large percentage of adjudicated youth have significant psychiatric disorders with many meeting diagnostic criteria for one or more psychiatric disorders (Teplin, Abram, McClelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002). In addition, mental illness is often comorbid with substance abuse (Sheidow, Mccart, Zajac, & Davis, 2012). Common challenges associated with substance abuse include decreased ability to make rational decisions, increased risk of health issues, declining memory, and motor skills impairment (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2010).

The incidence of depression among adjudicated youth is higher than that of the general population (National Council of State Legislatures, 2007). Youth with externalizing mood disorders, which can include depression, have an increased risk of demonstrating anger and hostility (Grisso, 2008). Increased risk of demonstrating anger and hostility can be problematic for youth in juvenile justice settings as exhibiting this behavior is likely to violate the facility's behavioral norms and rules.

Despite the high rates of mental health issues reported among N or D students, the possibility exists that some system-involved youth have unidentified mental health issues (Izquierdo, Healy,

Rinderle, & Matthews 2005). Only half of mental illnesses are diagnosed by age 14, and 75 percent are diagnosed by age 24 (National Institutes of Mental Health, 2005). Practitioners who observe the external manifestation of a potential mental health condition, such as anger and hostility, can take action to refer an undiagnosed student for mental health screening. Because undiagnosed youth with internalizing disorders, such as anxiety, may be less likely to act out, their mental health conditions may not be identified or diagnosed as often or as quickly (Undheim, Lydersen, & Kayed, 2016). Mental health issues that are undiagnosed will go untreated. This is problematic because untreated mental health conditions are likely to worsen or lead to more involved diagnoses over time (Erickson, 2012).

The high rates of mental illness among the N or D population suggests that the population would be best served by educators and practitioners who have a working knowledge of various mental health conditions, including behaviors that may be manifested in the classroom that are directly related to their diagnosis. Of critical importance is ensuring practitioners can identify potential symptoms of mental illness and refer students for screening in a timely fashion (Izquierdo, Healy, Rinderle, & Matthews 2005). Practitioners working in Part D programs could also benefit from understanding how manifestations of mental health conditions can change over an individual's lifecycle (Anderson & Kiehl, 2014). Other options for professional development include trainings that help educators recognize how manifestations of mental health issues can differ among males and females and which gender-specific interventions are most effective (Molen et al., 2013).

With such a high prevalence of a mental health diagnoses among N or D students, educators and related system personnel may benefit from professional development that enables them to provide the necessary cognitive and behavioral supports. These supports could include helping students reduce their stress level during a crisis and utilize nonaggressive problemsolving practices (Grisso, 2008). They could also include teaching social skills, helping students build self-confidence, and therapeutic techniques that correct cognitive biases and distortions (Flory, Vance, Birlerson, & Luk, 2002).

It is important to note the impact that mental health conditions can have on family systems.

When one member of a family has a mental illness, they may behave and communicate in ways that create stress for other family members (Kerig & Alexander, 2012). This stress may prevent the development of productive family relationships and result in negative interpersonal interactions among family members (Kerig & Alexander, 2012). Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT) is a family-based treatment that has demonstrated positive effectiveness when used with system-involved youth (Liddle, 2014). Practitioners in juvenile justice settings may benefit from learning more about how this family-centered treatment is designed. They may likewise benefit from participating in professional development that helps them identify students who could benefit and ultimately be referred for this type of service. Functional family therapy, which involves the creation of a customized intervention plan based on individual family members' needs, also has demonstrated effectiveness with N or D youth (Baglivio, Jackowski, Greenwald, & Wolff, 2014; White, Frick, Lawing, & Bauer 2013). Practitioners may benefit from professional development that helps them understand the techniques used in functional family therapy as it may help them develop supportive strategies for helping students improve communication, reduce negativity, and increase motivation (Sexton & Alexander, 2000).

### Exposure to Trauma

System-connected youth are nearly twice as likely to have experienced trauma (Ford & Blaustein, 2013). Common examples of trauma experienced in youth include the disruption of the normal parent-child relationship, strained family relationships (Ryan, Williams, & Courtney, 2013) and/or being removed from one's home (Burrell, 2013). Trauma can also include the experience of physical and/or verbal abuse by parents, which is more likely among parents struggling with addictions (Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello, & Angold, 2006). It can also include a direct encounter with a dangerous event or witnessing the suffering or endangerment of another person (Buffington, Dierkhising, & Marsh 2010).

The experience of trauma can create a myriad of difficulties for youth and has a strong positive correlation with delinquency (Ryan, Williams, & Courtney, 2013). From an emotional perspective, trauma creates a sense of rejection and generates anxiety and feelings of low self-worth (Buffington, Dierkhising, & Marsh, 2010). Behavioral problems

include a predisposition to utilize aggression or force with others (Wiig, Widom, & Tuell, 2003). Interpersonal difficulties resulting from trauma can include an inability to relate to peers and adopting an oppositional attitude with adult authority figures (Ford & Blaustein, 2013). Taken together, the experience of trauma can compromise youths' capacity to develop healthy social and emotional bonds, which may further inhibit their ongoing development and emotional growth.

“Child traumatic stress occurs when children and adolescents are exposed to traumatic events or traumatic situations, and when this exposure overwhelms their ability to cope with what they have experienced.”

### National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Given the high likelihood that system-involved youth have experienced trauma, the population would be best served by educators and practitioners who have an understanding of the behaviors these youth demonstrate. For example, trauma-impacted youth often exist in a state of hypervigilance and are more likely to exhibit defensive and/or aggressive responses (Buffington et al., 2010). The propensity to demonstrate this response may be increased if youth perceive practitioners in juvenile justice settings as potential threats (Ford & Blaustein, 2013). Professional development that raises awareness about these concerns can help practitioners understand the difference between types of aggressive responses that may be displayed by youth who have been impacted by trauma. Practitioners who can more accurately assess students' responses will be in a better position to provide appropriate support.

The high incidence of experiencing trauma among N or D students suggests staff working with this population would benefit from being familiar with trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy techniques. There are a variety of evidence-based treatment programs that have been shown to have positive effects with trauma-impacted youth (Buffington et al., 2010). Practitioners can use cognitive-behavioral interventions to help students challenge faulty cognitions, theories,



and attributions (Kerig & Alexander, 2012). Research also suggests that interventions that reduce hopelessness also help students strengthen prosocial connections, improve decisionmaking and develop increased capacity to use adaptive coping behaviors (Duke, Borowsky, Pettingell & McMorris, 2011). Training in trauma awareness can also help practitioners more accurately perceive and interpret trauma-related behaviors and interpersonal dynamics (Kerig & Alexander, 2012). It may also be helpful to have a youth advocate or similarly trained professional on staff (Kramer et al., 2015). Efforts to develop increased knowledge and experience with trauma-informed care can help practitioners in juvenile justice settings better respond to students' needs.

## Poverty

Families living in poverty have limited access to financial resources (Austin et al., 2004; Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledford, 2010). Limited access to financial resources may result in insufficient access to other types of supports, services, and resources (Rekker et al., 2015). Families living in poverty often encounter difficulties accessing and navigating government assistance programs and, consequently, receive inadequate health and social services (Austin et al., 2004). Families who live in poverty are more likely to be subject to poor educational systems, community violence, and unemployment (Austin et al., 2004; Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). They also tend to be more likely to experience social isolation have less diversified social networks and fewer social supports (Putnam, 2015). Families living in poor communities are exposed to a variety of stressors that become risk factors for other conditions (Anakwenze & Zuberi, 2013).

Research indicates there is a positive correlation between living in poverty and the tendency among youth to exhibit behavioral problems (Lucero, Barrett, & Jensen, 2015) and engage in delinquent behavior (Jarjoura, Triplett, & Brinker, 2002; Rekker et al., 2015). Nearly three-quarters of youth entering juvenile courts come from families of poverty (Birkhead, 2012). Youth living in poverty tend to be in poorer physical health and have higher incidences of mental health and substance abuse issues (Anakwenze & Zuberi, 2013; Wolfe, 2011). They are also at increased risk both for being overweight and demonstrating poor academic performance (Engle & Black, 2008).

Given the overrepresentation of children of poverty in the juvenile justice system, educators working with N or D students would benefit from developing a deeper understanding of how the experience of poverty can impact youth's overall development, learning, and behavior patterns (Bright & Johnson-Reid, 2015). Educators could benefit from professional development that helps them identify the impacts that living in poverty may have on their students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Research suggests educators working with students who have experienced poverty can help students mitigate their tendency to focus on current challenges and help them develop skills that support future planning (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). Given the complex interaction of poverty with various dimensions of students' functioning, educators working in juvenile justice facilities should also consider professional development that enables them to employ a systems-level perspective when designing supports for students (Stone & Zibulsky, 2014). These types of system level supports could focus on strategies for responding to the myriad of challenges associated with poverty outlined above.

## Academic Difficulties

Systems-involved youth tend to have lower grades and lower standardized achievement scores and are more likely to be retained (Stone & Zibulsky, 2014). In addition, incarcerated youth have been found to have more truancies, grade retentions, and suspensions than the general population (Baltodano, Harris, & Rutherford, 2005). Socioeconomic factors, disabilities, mental health diagnoses, and school histories characterized by suspensions and dropping out are some possible reasons for poor academic achievement among youth (Leone & Weinberg, 2012).

Because system-involved youth are more likely to have limited experiences and success in academic environments, they could benefit from working with educators who are familiar with best practices for creating highly engaging learning activities. Educators working with N or D youth might benefit from professional development that builds their competence in designing and implementing strategies to increase student motivation strategies, persistence, and self-regulation of effort (Stone & Zibulsky, 2014). Given that students are more likely to experience academic success if they can identify with the learning experience, educators working with N or D youth may need to implement

strategies that help students better incorporate academic success into their personal identity (Matthews, 2014). This could include professional development around strategies for designing instructional activities that elicit high levels of student engagement (Benner, Kutash, Nelson, & Fisher, 2013) and allow for self-directed learning.

Research suggests that struggling students and students with learning disabilities benefit from individualized instruction and extended opportunities to practice new skills (Reglin, Royster, & Losike-Sedimo, 2014). It also suggests they may also benefit from learning activities that provide scaffolding and supports that enable them to engage in the content, even if they are not reading on grade level. Educators working in juvenile justice settings may benefit from professional development that enable them to individualize their instructional practice to meet students' specific academic needs. They may also benefit from professional development that (1) supports the use of evidence-based academic interventions that support the development of literacy skills (Leone & Weinberg, 2012) and (2) efficient strategies for assessing learning and monitoring the impact of their instruction (Reglin et al., 2014). Finally, educators may want to consider the benefit of professional development on strategies to help students develop noncognitive skills related to effort and persistence, given recent findings that suggest they have positive correlations with improved academic and mental health outcomes (Stone & Zibulsky, 2014).

## Examples From the Field

This section presents a list of professional development ideas that emerged during conversations with coordinators. The list is presented as a starting point for conceptualizing future components that could be included in professional development offerings. State coordinators may consider reviewing this list with Part D service providers in order to identify common areas of interests among facilities, State agencies, and other subgrantees.

*“You have to get to know your facilities. You have to look at their data. You have to get out and visit them. That’s how you can determine what professional development is needed.”*

**N or D coordinator**

Suggested topics to include in future professional development offerings include:

1. **Using program evaluation results to drive and improve service delivery.** Part D requires all recipients to conduct a three-year program evaluation. Once completed, evaluation reports are available to State coordinators, program staff, administrators, and teachers. For teachers and administrators, evaluation reports can provide insights into how services were delivered and the overall outcomes associated with their professional practice. Coordinators suggested professional development on using evaluation reports could help practitioners identify factors that contributed to trends in student outcomes.
2. **Using previous and current achievement data to identify students' individual instructional needs.** Because N or D youth often transition into and out of facilities, educators working in these settings need to be able to quickly review students' achievement data and identify their specific individual instructional needs. After conducting an initial review of students' records and previous achievement, teachers can administer a standardized academic assessment to establish a current baseline for academic skills. In one State, three steps in the intake process for new students involve (1) a review of achievement records, (2) the administration of an academic screener, and (3) a search in the State-wide special education database. Once these steps are completed, the intake coordinator conducts an interview with the student and begins to set short- and long-term academic achievement goals. Coordinators suggested professional development should also include how to formalize learning goals into individualized learning plans.
3. **Using effective instructional practices to improve the quality of instruction and increase student engagement.** Because most students who are N or D have histories of poor academic performance, educators in these settings need to be skilled in implementing instructional practices that promote student engagement and maintain high levels of student interest. Teachers also need to be able to differentiate their instruction and provide appropriate supports and accommodations to students with learning disabilities. In addition to training on relevant instructional practices, coordinators also suggested that professional development that promotes collaborative lesson planning and team teaching could enhance the quality of instruction and increase student engagement.
4. **Using motivational strategies.** Because youth who are N or D are likely to have experienced academic difficulties, they may need additional supports to fully engage in the process of teaching and learning. Educators would benefit from knowledge of approaches to teaching and learning that provide students with a sense of control over their own learning, incentivize taking on additional responsibility for learning, and harness student interests. Coordinators indicated that students tend to respond well to approaches that provide them with explicit opportunities to make decisions about their academic and vocational course selections, noting the importance of allowing students to develop a sense of self-directed ownership of their learning. One State is leveraging its career training programs to motivate students to earn high school diplomas. In this program, students complete courses of study in a career-training program of their choice. As they complete the courses in the career program and earn the vocational certificates, they simultaneously make progress toward their diploma.
5. **Developing domain expertise in areas outside of education.** Because students who are N or D have a variety of social and emotional issues that impact their functioning, educators in these settings would benefit from exposure to best practices in juvenile justice and psychology. In addition to teaching, educators need to be able to execute security-related protocols while simultaneously helping students develop coping skills and manage stress. Coordinators suggested this type of professional development will help educators respond more effectively to system-involved youth who are more likely to act out and/or resort to violent behavior.
6. **Providing trauma-informed care.** Given the high percentage of N or D youth who have experienced trauma, educators working in juvenile justice settings need to be skilled at providing trauma-informed approaches in the classroom. Teachers need to be able to identify when a student is acting out due to traumatic experiences and be able to apply appropriate interventions. One State has developed online courses that help educators and others working in facilities understand the impact of trauma on the brain and learning. These courses also help practitioners identify students' triggers and develop effective responses and help practitioners establish a caring climate where students can feel safe and at ease.
7. **Promoting family engagement and support.** Parents may need additional supports to understand and respond to the combination of academic, emotional, social, and behavioral challenges that their children often present. Practitioners working with Part D programs need to have the skills necessary to engage and support parents and families of system-involved youth. They must be able to establish effective relationships with parents, encourage their participation in facility events, and share strategies for supporting students' academic learning. Coordinators indicated professional development on how to create effective relationships with parents would be beneficial given that parental support is critical for successful student transition.
8. **Creating networks of support to facilitate transition.** Given the temporary nature of students' placement in juvenile justice centers, practitioners working in Part D programs need to be able to design and execute effective transition plans. One State coordinator described effective transition plans as those that create a network of supports that help students "launch and land." Coordinators recommended professional development on how to create networks of support and facilitate students' transition by (1) connecting families to relevant supports and services, (2) identifying community-based resources, and (3) clearly articulating services will be coordinated and information will be shared.
9. **Creating professional learning communities.** Educators who work in secure settings have limited interactions with peers and few opportunities to collaborate and share best practices. By creating a professional learning community that includes practitioners within and external to the juvenile justice center, educators will have access to an expanded network of professionals. Members of this professional community can share information, support, and advice. They can also work collaboratively to create a



repository of resources that respond directly to their issues, challenges, and interests.

In addition to sharing these specific suggestions, State coordinators also suggested that practitioners working with N or D students should be surveyed to identify the specific professional development areas that are most relevant to them. Several coordinators expressed optimism that more expansive professional development opportunities could help educators and other professionals feel more supported in their roles and better able to respond to the challenges they encounter in their workplace. They also indicated that ongoing professional development would help build practitioners' capacity to respond to the diverse needs of their students.

## Conclusion

This brief has presented the key considerations that would be helpful to keep in mind when planning professional development for practitioners working

with youth who are N or D. Professional development plays a critical function in terms of fostering the professional growth and effectiveness of educators and other practitioners. Professional development should be carefully designed and planned based on the needs of practitioners and the youth with whom they work. While there are a variety of modalities for providing professional development, practitioners may be best served by those opportunities that allow for ongoing and continuous learning. Thoughtful approaches to planning professional development can enhance practitioners' capacity to provide high-quality education in juvenile justice and secure care settings.

There are several important characteristics of the population of children and youth who are recognized as N or D that should be considered when planning professional development. Minority males are disproportionately represented among system-involved youth. System-involved youth tend to be poor, have higher rates of mental health issues,

and be more likely to have experienced trauma. The majority of students in juvenile justice settings have experienced academic difficulties, either due to learning disabilities or gaps in academic skills. Educators and practitioners working with this population would benefit from professional development that builds their capacity to understand and respond to the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of their students. The specific needs and interests of practitioners working with youth who are N or D should be used to determine the appropriate areas of focus for comprehensive and cohesive professional development plans.

This brief has identified several practices, topics, and treatment options that are aligned with the unique needs of youth who are system-involved and could be considered as areas for inclusion in a State-wide professional development plan. Practical examples and ideas from the field for conceptualizing future professional development efforts have also been included.

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