CHAPIN HALL
CENTER FOR CHILDREN
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Educating Chicago's Court-Involved Youth: Mission and Policy in Conflict

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2005

Chapin Hall
Exploratory Study

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was supported by a much-appreciated grant to the author from Chapin Hall Center for Children's Research Development and Dissemination Fund. The author also wishes to thank the individuals interviewed for this project for taking the time to talk about their programs and their work. Thanks also are due to Clark Peters for his patience in answering my many questions about the operation of the Juvenile Justice Division of the Cook County Juvenile Court. Finally, much gratitude goes to Anne Clary, without whose astute editing this paper would have been much the inferior product. Any errors or omissions are solely those of the author.

CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Page

INTRODUCTION

The connection between education, delinquency, and involvement with the juvenile justice system has long been an active area of research. Much work has been done linking delinquency or recidivism with youths' academic achievement, school bonding, dropout behavior, or attitudes toward school.[1] A more recently emerging area of work focuses on community reentry following incarceration. Research in this area explores outcomes beyond recidivism to include adjustment in a broad range of life domains, including education.[2] Because school is "a master social status" that plays a key role in youth development, successful school participation and completion is critical if youthful offenders are to become productive adults (Sullivan, 2004). Altschuler and Brash (2004) observe, however, that severe educational deficits among these youth and zero tolerance policies at school combine to "make it difficult, if not impossible, to admit or readmit juvenile offenders."

Several thousand youth come under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Justice Division of the Cook County Juvenile Court every year (Peters et al., 2002). Many of these young people are still under compulsory school age, and virtually all have yet to complete high school.[3] Chapin

[1] Over the past 30 or so years, there have been numerous studies in this vein. Some of the more recent work includes Chung et al., 2002; Cottle, Lee and Heilbrun, 2001; Heilbrun at al., 2000; Hoffman, 2002; , Huizinga et al., 2000; Jarjoura, 1993; Myner et al., 1998; Tremblay, 1992; and Voelkl, Welte, and Wieczorek, 1999. Maguin and Loeber (1996) provide an excellent and thorough review and analysis of research on the association between academic performance and delinquency. Tanner, Davies, and O'Grady (1999) explore the effect of delinquent behavior and contact with the juvenile justice system on educational achievement. Also see Smith (2000) for a review of this literature and a discussion of its conceptual and methodological limitations.

[2] See for example Altschuler and Brash, 2004; Spencer and Jones-Walker, 2004; Steinberg et al., 2004; and Sullivan, 2004.

[3] The Juvenile Justice Division of the Cook County Juvenile Court primarily serves youth under 17 years of age; nearly all youth 17 and over are transferred to the adult criminal justice system.

Hall researchers have wondered how many of them will continue in—or if previously inactive, return to—school following court processing. As a preliminary step in developing a more extensive research project in this area, we wanted to understand better the mechanisms for educating these youth, the programmatic options and how they work, and the policy context within which schools and students operate. We also wanted to identify specific barriers youth may face in continuing or resuming their education. The present study was undertaken to provide that background and to generate a set of questions for future work. Accordingly, the research questions guiding the present project include the following:

- What are the mechanisms—policy and programmatic—for educating court-involved youth in Chicago and how do they operate? Which subgroups of youth (by age, sex, disability, record of offending, etc.) tend to use which options?
- How many court-involved youth in Chicago do or do not continue their education, either in the regular public schools or through alternative programs?
- What barriers, if any, do court-involved youth face in continuing in or returning to school?

The study focused on publicly operated or publicly funded options that are available at no cost, or very low cost, to students and families; the study did not explore private options that would be out of reach economically for most of the Chicago families whose children find themselves in juvenile court. Finally, the study focused on youth who are not incarcerated—that is, those on probation, under court supervision, or on parole following release from a juvenile corrections facility.[4] In other words, the research looked at youth in the community.

[4] During the research interviews, I used the term "court involved" to refer to the primary group of youth under study. This term is broader than the term "delinquent" insofar as it includes youth for whom an adjudication of delinquency is not made, but who nonetheless are placed under court supervision and assigned to a probation officer for follow up. However, where appropriate, I also asked informants about youth whose *delinquent behavior*, regardless of whether or not it brought them to court, might come to the attention of school authorities. I used the terms "arrested" or "juvenile offender" to distinguish those young people from youth processed by the juvenile court (although the latter, of course, also have offended and been arrested at some point). This paper will, for the most part, follow the same conventions of terminology as were observed in the interviews when referring to subgroups of youth. Deviations, if necessary, will be noted and explained.

Method

Data were gathered from interviews with expert informants affiliated with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), private alternative school programs, the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department, and others with knowledge of the educational system, the juvenile justice system, or both. Conversations with colleagues who have experience with the juvenile justice system in Chicago identified several informants for the first interviews, and through these individuals, additional key informants were identified. Twenty individuals were interviewed for this study; fourteen were interviewed in person in sessions lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, and the other six were interviewed over the phone. Most of the interviews, including all those conducted in person, were completed November 2003 and April 2004. A few follow-up interviews were conducted in late spring and summer 2004. All in-person interviews were recorded, and interview notes were analyzed using atlas.ti qualitative analysis software.[5] In addition to interviews, research papers, policy reports, and literature from educational programs were reviewed. (Details on the study method are in Appendix A.)

How Two Early Findings Shaped the Development of the Project

Before embarking on a description of the educational options available to court-involved youth in Chicago, it may be helpful to the reader to know a little about how two early and important findings shaped the scope of the project as it moved forward. First, I learned that

[5] Verbatim quotes from interviews are used throughout this paper, and their professional affiliations will be given. However, in order to preserve the anonymity of those with unique affiliations, the paper will use a broad, three-category classification scheme: Individuals working exclusively with court-involved youth will be identified with the label "Program for court-involved youth." Individuals working with both court-involved and non-involved youth will be identified as affiliated either with the "Chicago Public Schools" or "Private alternative school." The categories overlap to the degree that some Chicago Public Schools personnel, as well as individuals affiliated with other organizations, work exclusively with court-involved students. However, having direct experience with the court-involved population is an important status for the purpose of this paper, and the author believes it is important to indicate informants who speak from this particular area of expertise.

Chicago has only a few small educational programs under public auspices that are intended specifically for court-involved youth. None of these programs grants the high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Rather, they target court-involved dropouts who are very far behind in school and work to get them ready to enter either the regular public schools, one of the alternative schools for dropouts, or a GED or vocational program. What this means is that at some point, court-involved youth must make their way in the same educational system as do non-court-involved youth. For the purpose of the present project, the implication was that I needed to understand how the entire Chicago educational system, not just a few specialized programs, responded to court-involved youth.

The second important early finding was that the regular public schools—the schools most people think of when they think of public schools, the ones most of us attended—may be unlikely destinations for many court-involved youth. This finding surfaced in two ways. One was that educators working with this population opined that, for a number of reasons, the regular public schools were not a good fit for the needs of youthful offenders. But more often, informants inside and outside of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) opined that court-involved youth were unwelcome at the regular public schools and that the schools found ways to exclude them. Although the project always had the intention of examining school system policies, this area of inquiry took on added importance. It also became important to explore what alternatives existed to the regular schools and what was their capacity and willingness to serve the court-involved population.

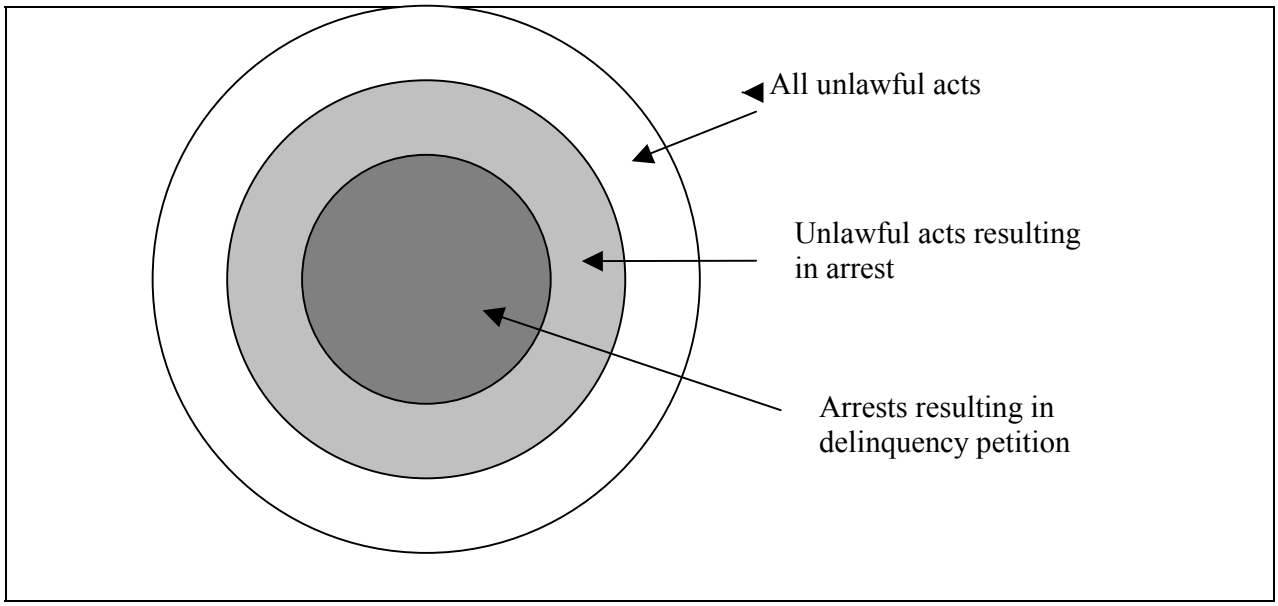
The project therefore became an exploration of the geography of the educational system in Chicago and how its policies and practices may affect court-involved youth, rather than a description of programs and policies specifically geared toward that population. As a result, the

research—and this paper—necessarily incorporated a broader scope than the project initially contemplated. Lest the reader become lost, I will begin with an explanation of precisely which youth are under discussion and how offending and court involvement may affect where a youth can attend school. I also will sketch a map of those schools he or she might find available, including an extended discussion of the handful of programs specifically targeting court-involved youth. Next, the paper takes up closely the matter of court-involved youths' access to the regular public schools. Third, I will describe several types of educational alternatives to the regular public schools and their availability to court-involved youth. I conclude with a discussion of the findings and suggestions for future research in this area.

COURT INVOLVEMENT AND SCHOOL OPTIONS

It may be useful to begin by considering how subgroups of youth are distinguished within law enforcement and juvenile justice before moving on to how these youth are understood by the educational system. Figure 1 presents a much-simplified illustration of the relationship between offending, arrest, and winding up in juvenile court.

Figure 1. Offending, Arrest, and Going to Court



The outer circle represents all unlawful behavior committed by juveniles in Chicago. [6] Many of these acts will be undetected by authorities, but even if detected, may not result in formal arrest. The middle circle represents the subset of youthful offenses that do result in arrest. Some arrested youth will receive what is known as a "station adjustment," a formal or informal processing by the police, and be released. But if the offense is serious or if lesser sanctions are deemed unlikely to be effective, the police will refer the matter to the Cook County State's Attorney's office, which will screen the case, and if the evidence is sufficient, will file a delinquency petition (Peters et al., 2002). The petition is the youth's ticket to juvenile court. The small center circle represents this subset of youth. The term "court-involved," as used in this paper, refers to this group, excluding those who are released without sanction.[7]

[6] The sizes of the circles are not meant to suggest the proportions of each group of youth; they simply represent the relationship among populations of youth who offend, are arrested, and who go to court.

[7] As a practical matter, the number of youth who are released without sanction probably is quite small. After 1996, the Cook County State's Attorney's office has tended to screen out cases unlikely to result in conviction. In addition, a youth may already be on probation from an earlier charge, or may have other, stronger charges pending in court, which may lead court personnel not to pursue conviction on the weaker charges.

The Intersection of Juvenile Justice and Education

How do juvenile justice and law enforcement statuses affect the array of school options available to court-involved youth and other youthful offenders? A prerequisite for offending to affect a youth's educational opportunities is that the school discover the behavior. Table 1 lists circumstances under which arrest or court involvement may be discovered by the school and possibly affect a youth's school options.

Table 1. Circumstances under which arrest or court involvement might affect school options

- Arrest on school grounds or at school-sponsored activity – off-campus arrests may or may not become known to school officials
- Detained or incarcerated – School absence noted
- Detained – Detention center school notifies youth's prior school upon release
- Transfer from transitional program for youth on parole or probation
- On probation – Probation officer visits school
- Youth voluntarily informs school personnel

Certainly being arrested on school grounds or at a school activity is likely to become known to the school principal. Regardless of whether the youth winds up in front of a judge, unlawful behavior at school may be grounds for expulsion. The Uniform Discipline Code (UDC) adopted by the Chicago Board of Education and used by the Chicago Public Schools (including charter schools), provides for expulsion as a sanction for a broad range of illegal activity and specifies that the Chicago Police Department be notified of such misconduct.

Although state statute and Chicago Board of Education policy allow for the transfer of arrest information from the Chicago Police Department to the schools—and the UDC can be

applied to off-campus as well as on-campus infractions—it appears that schools typically are not notified about arrests occurring off school grounds. A reciprocal records agreement between the Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Police Department provides for the latter to notify CPS' Office of Safety and Security of the arrest of students charged with certain crimes regardless of where they occur, and under the agreement, these records can be forwarded to the school principal.[8] However, informants suggest that because of the large volume of student arrests, those occurring off school grounds typically are not entered into the CPS data system or reported to the schools.

If an arrest leads to involvement with the juvenile court, there are several ways the student's school might discover that involvement. The absence of students who are detained or incarcerated may be noticed by the school. Youth held at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (CCJTDC) attend the Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative High School, a public high school operated by CPS and located in the same building as the detention center. Upon the student's release, Jefferson staff contacts the school he or she was attending at the time of arrest and notifies them of the youth's enrollment at the school—a clear signal that the youth had been detained by the court. Transferring into a school from one of the transitional education programs that serve youth on parole or probation could alert the school to a youth's juvenile court involvement, as could a school visit by a youth's probation officer. Finally, informants affiliated with private alternative schools noted that their students voluntarily inform them of court involvement, although one opined that that scenario was unlikely to happen in the regular public schools:

[8] Offenses for which records may be shared with school officials include the unlawful use of weapons, violation of the Illinois Controlled Substances Act or the Cannabis Control Act, and forcible felonies (Juvenile Court Act of 1987, 705 ILCS 405/1-7). The reciprocal records agreement, adopted 17 December 1997, may be found in the Chicago Public Schools Policy Manual, section 705.1.

> Unless it happens to be something major, you know, the kids will not tell. . . . You know the teachers in the public schools, in the high schools, are sometimes afraid of those students. . . . And they, the students, would feel that it would be detrimental, and it would not be in their best interests, so they would keep it quiet if they can. *(Private alternative school)*

However, even if schools discover involvement with the court, the student's educational opportunities may not be altered on the basis of that involvement alone, because the Chicago Public Schools do not base their policies on juvenile justice statuses. A key point is that CPS responds primarily to *education-related* categories for classifying students' behavior—dropout, truant, disruptive, expelled, academically low-performing. These behaviors may co-occur with offending and going to court, or court involvement may be perceived by school officials as a signal that problematic school behaviors are likely to emerge. But, aside from funding or operating a few small programs especially designed for court-involved youth, CPS does not otherwise use court involvement as an official criterion for determining where a student may attend school. However, CPS does have schools and programmatic interventions that address educational statuses, such as schools for dropouts and expelled students, procedures that address truancy, and policies designed to track students' academic achievement and intervene when achievement is substandard.

To the degree that court-involved students are also students who get expelled, drop out, have low test scores, or are chronically truant, they—along with non-court-involved students—will be subject to these policies. Informants for this study also discussed the connections between offending or court involvement and school behaviors such as dropping out, being truant, or being expelled.

> [W]e see kids as young as 12 years of age who have not been in school in a couple of years. And so on any day, I would say that 50 percent of the students here have technically dropped out of school or are chronically and habitually truant. *(Program for court-involved youth)*

> So actually, expulsion is another way of dropping out. It's another avenue for dropping out for some of our kids. And then if they haven't had any relationship with the juvenile justice system, they'll probably get one at that point. *(Chicago Public Schools)*

The mechanisms— policies, programs, and practices—for delivering educational services in the Chicago Public Schools are organized around education-related behaviors and statuses. These mechanisms, and how they are applied, shape where all students—court-involved or not—may attend school. A meaningful exploration of educational options available to court-involved youth therefore must account for generic education policy and practice, and include in its scope schools used by youth who are not involved with the court or law enforcement.

Schools Used by Court-Involved Youth

Interviews with individuals working with court-involved youth identified five primary school destinations for these young people. The five do not represent all possible options, but they surfaced more often than did other educational settings.[9] Only one type of setting, the transitional programs, target court-involved youth. The other four—the regular public schools, the Alternative/Safe schools, dropout retrieval schools, and GED programs—are used by court-involved and non-involved students.

[9] These five do not represent all of the types of school programs operated by the Chicago Public Schools or by private vendors under contract to CPS. Because CPS does not officially restrict enrollment on the basis of youths' court involvement, such students may attend any of a number of types of schools. For example, a court-involved female who happened to be pregnant might attend a Pregnant Parenting Teens program; a youth on probation who needs just a few additional credits to graduate might enroll in a CPS evening school; a 15-year-old offender who lacks the eighth grade diploma could attend one of the Academic Prep Centers. Vocational programs also received a few mentions, as did therapeutic settings, but the project focused primarily on academic programs that provide a high school education or its equivalent.

Transitional Programs for Court-Involved Youth

The term "transitional" is not an official designation, although it well describes the handful of small programs whose aim is to prepare dropout youth on parole or probation for transition to a more traditional diploma- or certificate-granting program.[10] CPS operates four such programs; a fifth is operated by the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department.[11] Aside from schools located on the campuses of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (CCJTDC), the Cook County Jail, and Illinois Department of Corrections juvenile facilities, the transitional programs are the primary publicly operated educational programs that specifically target youth who have been involved with the juvenile justice system. Each is briefly profiled in Table 2.

All of the programs that specifically target court-involved youth are intended to prepare their students to enter other educational environments. In interviews, four environments surfaced as the major destinations for court-involved youth. They include the regular public schools, the Alternative/Safe schools, dropout retrieval schools, and GED programs. Table 3 summarizes key features of each of these types of schools.

[10] The short-term programs for youth on parole or probation, which will be referred to as "transitional" programs in this report, should not be confused with the Academic Preparatory Centers (APC) which are designed to help students repeating the eighth grade to obtain the elementary school diploma and transition to high school. The APCs formerly were called "transition centers," and the term is still used by some educators.

[11] The location within the CPS hierarchy of programs for court-involved youth has changed twice in the past 2 years. Prior to the 2003-2004 school year, the Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative High School, which enrolls youth detained at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, had three of the transitional programs under its administrative control as satellite campuses: Healy North, Healy South, and the Center Factory. As of the 2003-2004 school year, the transitional programs, plus Project Bridge, which was implemented in December 2003, were folded into the Alternative Learning Communities (ALC) department, a division of the Office of Specialized Services. The Jefferson school was placed under an Area Instructional Officer. The organizational arrangements changed again in the 2004-2005 school year, when all four of CPS' programs for court-involved youth moved from ALC to a newly created CPS department, the Department of Drop-Out Recovery and Prevention, which falls under the Office of High School Programs.

Table 2. Transitional Educational Programs for Court-Involved Youth

Program Name	Operated by	Capacity	Students Targeted	Program Length	Curriculum	Credits Granted?
Healy North Alternative High School	Chicago Public Schools	25-30 [1]	• 16-20 years old • 2 or more years behind grade level • IDOC/juvenile justice involvement	Typically 6 months to 1 year	• Core academics • Up to 2/hrs. day may be spent in supplementary services	Yes
Healy South Alternative High School	Chicago Public Schools	75-80 [1]	• 16-20 years old • 2 or more years behind grade level • IDOC/juvenile justice involvement	Typically 6 months to 1 year	• Core academics • Up to 2/hrs. day may be spent in supplementary services	Yes
Center Factory Alternative High School	Chicago Public Schools	20-25 [1]	• 16-20 years old • 2 or more years behind grade level • IDOC/juvenile justice involvement	Typically 6 months to 1 year	• Core academics • Vocational training • Up to 2/hrs. day may be spent in supplementary services	Yes
Project Bridge	Chicago Public Schools	100/year	• 16-17 years old • 0-5 high school credits • formerly detained or incarcerated	10 weeks	• Literacy, creative arts, life/vocational skills, transitional support • Every student assigned a mentor	No
Jumpstart	Cook County Juvenile Probation	Approx. 140/year	• 16-20 years old • on probation • dropped out of school • few high school credits	10 weeks classroom; 10 weeks follow-up	• Core academics • Life/vocational skills, art therapy, conflict resolution	No

1 – Indicates enrollment capacity at any given time; number of students served during course of one year will be greater.

Table 3. Educational Options Used by Court-Involved/Non-Court-Involved Youth

School Type	Target Students	Capacity/Enrollment per Year	Getting in	Diploma/Certificate
Regular public schools	Ages 5 to 21 Reside in Chicago	434,419 [1]	Self/family referral	8th, 12th grade diploma
Alternative/Safe schools	6th – 12th grade Expelled from CPS	Approximately 295 [2]	Only by CPS referral following expulsion or pending expulsion if an emergency placement	8th, 12th grade diplomas earned during enrollment show as being from regular school
Dropout retrieval • Youth Connection Charter School • LINC schools	Dropouts Ages 16-21	• YCCS: 2200 seats with 978 on waiting list [4] • LINC: 500 seats	• Self/family-referral • YCCS schools have entrance requirements	12th grade alternative school diploma
City Colleges GED [3]	Prefer adults age 18 or over; will accept 16-17 year olds	Approximately 5000 16-17 year olds [5]	Self/family-referral	GED

1 – Total enrollment the Chicago Public Schools as of September 2003; includes Alternative/Safe and dropout retrieval schools.
2 – Reflects number enrolled and in attendance on 26 April 2004. The number of students expelled as of 31 January 2004 was 762.
3 – City Colleges of Chicago has the largest capacity; however some private programs also offer GED preparation.
4 – Enrollment cap for 2004-2005 school year; waiting list as of 13 December 2004.
5 – The 5000 students reflect the number of youth under 18 served during the previous year, not the City Colleges' "capacity" per se. It should be noted that the City Colleges' GED program is part of their Adult Education program and is geared toward students age 18 and over.

The Regular Public Schools

The term *regular public schools* refers to the elementary and high schools that we ordinarily refer to as *public schools*. In this paper, the term includes schools operated directly by the Chicago Public Schools and charter schools under CPS.[12] They serve children and youth who are residents of Chicago, between 5 and 21 years of age, who desire an education, but lack the high school diploma. Instruction is offered for kindergarten through twelfth grade. The regular public schools were described by one informant as the "default" school for any youth, including those involved with juvenile court. That is, unless a youth has been expelled, referred by CPS to a therapeutic or specialized school, such as those for students with severe disabilities, or voluntarily enrolled in a private school, he or she will attend a regular public school.

Alternative/Safe Schools

There are seven Alternative/Safe schools; two are elementary schools, and five are high schools.[13] Often referred to simply as *safe schools,* these enroll students in grades 6 through 12 who have been expelled from the Chicago Public Schools.[14] The safe schools are operated by private vendors under contract to the Chicago Board of Education. Special education services in the safe schools remain the responsibility of CPS and are provided by itinerant teachers who are employed by CPS.

Because most of the types of misconduct for which students can be expelled consist of unlawful acts, it is reasonable to assume that a fair proportion of expelled students have been

[12] However, the charter school for dropouts, the Youth Connection Charter School, is not a regular public school.

[13] These figures were obtained from informants. However, a document on the CPS website, "CPS at a Glance" indicates that there were only six safe schools as of September 2003; the discrepancy is unexplained.

[14] It is not entirely clear whether students below sixth grade can be expelled. One well-placed informant said that they cannot be expelled. The CPS Uniform Discipline Code for both the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years is unclear; it makes reference to expelled students "in the sixth grade or above" being eligible for the SMART program, an expulsion alternative, but does not state clearly whether younger students are subject to expulsion. *Catalyst,* however, in its December 2004 issue, states that CPS assistant general counsel Andrea Horton says that a "handful" of younger students who brought firearms to school have been expelled (Finkel, 2004).

involved with the court. Although two informants suggested that the Safe Schools were used routinely by court-involved students, particularly those under 16, personnel closely involved with these schools state that they do not know how many of their students are court-involved. [15]

Dropout Retrieval Schools

These alternative high schools enroll students who have formally dropped out of the regular public schools, but who desire to resume their educations and earn a high school diploma. Informants estimate that a significant proportion of court-involved youth are or will become dropouts, which makes these schools important as a potential destination for this population. At the time of the research, the main dropout program was the Youth Connection Charter School, a 22-site school operated by private vendors under contract to the charter organization, which holds the charter under CPS. The school enrolls students 16 to 21 years of age who have officially dropped out of the Chicago Public Schools. The average length of enrollment is about 18 months, and the vendor schools typically require that entering students read at least at the middle school level.[16]

[15] CPS students facing expulsion for nonviolent misconduct, particularly drug-related violations, may be offered the option of attending the Saturday Morning Alternative Reach-out and Teach program (SMART), a 9-week program that meets, as the name suggests, on Saturday mornings. Implemented in 1998, SMART is an expulsion alternative; students continue to attend their regular public schools while participating in the program. Because many of the students in SMART committed drug offenses, the program offers drug counseling; it also offers classes in gang prevention and requires students to engage in 20 hours of community services. Students who are recommended for expulsion and referred to SMART, but decline the offer to attend the program, or who fail to comply with SMART requirements, are expelled from CPS. During the 2002-2003 school year, there were 887 referrals to the SMART program; approximately 400 students participated in the program.

[16] At the start of the 2004-2005 school year, CPS opened an additional dropout program targeting youth who have zero to five high school credits, Learning in New Communities, or LINC. Because LINC began operations after the fieldwork for the present study closed, this report will not cover the LINC program.

GED Programs

Several informants suggested that large numbers of court-involved youth enroll in GED programs. One stated that the court often orders dropouts to obtain the GED as a condition of probation; others opined that GED programs might be the best option for youth who, for a variety of reasons, are unlikely to return to a diploma-granting high school program. The Chicago Public Schools do not currently operate GED programs. The Chicago City Colleges are the largest provider of GED programs in Chicago, although there are also a handful of smaller private programs, including one operated by the Safer Foundation, a nonprofit organization that specializes in working with adult and juvenile ex-offenders.

Who Goes Where?

Table 4 summarizes which youth are eligible to attend which of the above five types of schools, based on age and enrollment status. Inspection of the table makes it clear that youth under compulsory school age have fewer options than do older youth. Youth under 16, the age of compulsory schooling at the time of data collection for this study, were able to attend only the regular schools, or if expelled, the safe schools. [17]

[17] At the time of the study, the statewide compulsory school age was 16. Since that time, the Illinois General Assembly raised the age to 17 (Public Act 93-803, effective 23 July 2004). It is not yet clear how this change will affect eligibility to programs intended for students who have dropped out of school.

Table 4. School Options for Youth by Age and Enrollment Status

	Under 16	16 & Over
If expelled:	Alternative/Safe school	Alternative/Safe school
If dropped out:	None – no dropout programs for students of compulsory school age	Transitional program Dropout retrieval school GED preparation Regular public school
Else (the "default" school):	Regular public school	Regular public school

Youth who are at least 16 years old, like their younger counterparts, may attend the regular schools, or if expelled, the safe schools. But because these youth are old enough to legally drop out of school, they also are eligible for those options geared toward serving students who cannot or prefer not to return to a traditional high school program. Dropouts may elect to attend one of the dropout retrieval schools or a GED program. If they are very far behind in school, they may be referred to one of the transitional programs designed for court-involved youth as a way of preparing them to enroll in a diploma- or certificate-granting program. Although these students may be eligible to return to the regular public schools, as a practical matter it can be very difficult for them to do so, and that issue will be taken up later in this paper.

The table shows which students are eligible to attend particular types of schools; it does not suggest students' movements among schools or the likelihood that a given student will attend any particular school. As Tables 2 and 3 make clear, the programs and schools other than the regular public schools have limited capacity or impose eligibility requirements that exclude some students. The implication is clear: If significant numbers of court-involved students are not

enrolled in the regular public schools, their alternatives are limited. Therefore, the question of school access and availability—determined by eligibility requirements, capacity, and practice—becomes critical.

COURT-INVOLVED YOUTH AND SCHOOL AVAILABILITY

The brief program descriptions given above for each of the five types of schools outline which students are technically eligible to attend them. This section of the report considers the availability of each of these five types of schools to court-involved youth—first, I will discuss the transitional programs that target these young people, and following that, the other four types of schools, all of which serve both court-involved and non-involved youth. The focus is primarily on the options offered by CPS—the regular public schools, the Alternative/Safe schools, and the dropout retrieval schools—and concludes with a brief consideration of GED programs. In general, it was easier to gauge schools' expressed willingness and capacity to enroll youth who have gotten into trouble with the law than it was to determine exactly how many of the schools' students were so involved because, aside from the transitional programs, schools generally do not keep track of students' court status, even if they are aware of it.

From Courtroom to Classroom

Given that many court-involved youth were inactive in schools at the time of their arrest, court involvement represents an opportunity to re-engage youth in school. Before turning to the schools court-involved youth may attend, it may be useful to consider how the educational and juvenile justice systems go about linking youth to educational settings.

Youth who are detained prior to trial at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center attend the detention center school, the Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School, which is

operated by the Chicago Public Schools. Personnel from the CPS education corrections office review the records of all detained youth who are at least 16 years of age and may refer some of them to the transitional programs; this review is the mechanism by which the majority of transitional program students are identified. There is no similar review and referral process for detainees under 16.

Only a small number of detained youth will enter the transitional programs; court and CPS personnel expect the others to attend a diploma- or certificate-granting program. However, the Jefferson school is not staffed to make school referrals and perform follow up; its staff generally are not even notified of the disposition of the child's case beyond whether he or she has been released from detention. At the time of release, the role of staff at Jefferson school is mainly confined to offering information about the youth's progress at Jefferson to the youth's parents and/or the receiving school. According to staff, receiving schools only infrequently request this information.[18]

Regardless of whether or not they were detained prior to trial, nearly all youth who are not sentenced to incarceration will be placed on probation or under court supervision.[19] Conditions for probation typically include the requirement that youth attend school, particularly if they are under age 16. Probation officers from the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department "determine and facilitate" compliance with the court order and may act as ombudsmen at the school, working to ensure that needed services are offered and used. These individuals receive in-service training in educational issues; they also may avail themselves of

[18] School staff indicate that in the past they sent the records automatically, but that they stopped doing so because the receiving schools often simply returned them.

[19] Court supervision occurs when the court does not make a final adjudication, but nonetheless places the youth under the supervision of the probation department. Fewer than 10 percent of the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department's caseload consists of youth under court supervision; the vast majority are on probation.

the information office that CPS maintains at the court, which assists probation officers—as well as DCFS staff and court personnel—in solving school-related problems. It also provides families and probation officers with information about educational programs in the area and communicates CPS policies and procedures as needed. The CPS information office does not have authority to re-enroll youth in school, however; its function is limited to providing information and helping people navigate the system.

Transitional Educational Programs for Court-Involved Youth

The transitional programs are especially designed to prepare dropouts who are very far behind in school, and who have been incarcerated or detained, to re-enter traditional educational settings. The programs are small, compared to the typical urban high school, and able to offer a structured setting and close supervision by staff.

> Youth, when they are incarcerated or detained, are told when to get up, when to go to bed, and it's regimented. Then, when a student gets released into the community, they have to start making these decisions on their own, and sometimes they don't do a good job of making these decisions. . . . So these programs are designed, not for every kid, but for those who need that smaller program, who need that nurturing. *(Program for court-involved youth)*

The two short-term programs are Project Bridge and Jumpstart (Table 2). They are funded, respectively, by a grant from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department.[20] Upon successful completion of the program, students may enter either a regular or dropout retrieval high school program, a GED or vocational program, or may attend one of the three other, longer-term transitional programs—Healy North, Healy South, or the Center Factory.

The three longer-term transitional programs are set up as Alternative Learning Opportunities programs (ALO), and as of the 2004-2005 school year, all three grant high school

[20] Chicago Public Schools, press release, 19 November 2003.

credits.[21] The Alternative Learning Opportunities Law, implemented in 2002 under the Illinois School Code, provides state funding for these programs, which are designed for students "at risk of academic failure."[22] A key feature of ALO programs is that up to 2 hours of the ordinarily mandated 5-hour instructional day may be used for such supplementary services as counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life skills training, conflict resolution or the like.

Getting in. Intended for court-involved youth who have dropped out of school, the transitional programs do not accept youth under 16. In general, their students are 2 years or more behind grade level on standardized tests and have five or fewer high school credits. None of the programs enrolls students "off the street;" that is, students cannot decide independently to enroll. Entry to all five is only via referral. Probation officers are the primary referral source for Jumpstart. Referrals to the CPS-affiliated programs most often come through the CPS education corrections office, although probation and parole officers may also make referrals.

Capacity. These programs serve a limited number of students. Project Bridge and Jumpstart each serve four cohorts of students per year; students in a cohort all begin the program at the same time. The other three programs have open enrollment; that is, students may enter at any time during the school year. The figures shown on the table for these three programs reflect their approximate capacity at any given time. However, over the course of a year, the three

[21] According to informants, Healy South offered credits prior to the 2004-2005 school year.

[22] The Alternative Learning Opportunities Law defines a "student at risk of academic failure" as one who is "at risk of not meeting the Illinois Learning Standards or not graduating from elementary or high school and who demonstrates a need for educational support or social services beyond that provided by the regular school system" (105 ILCS 5/13B-15.10). In addition to court involvement, CPS transitional programs specifically target youth who are 2 or more years behind grade level on standardized test or who have fewer than five high school credits. State funding for these programs is based on Average Daily Attendance.

longer-term programs (Healy North, Healy South, and the Center Factory) will serve a larger number of students than the capacity figures reflect.[23]

According to the capacity numbers in Table 2, all five transitional programs serve approximately 450 students each year. An informant with the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department estimates that on any given day, 3,500 Chicago youth are on juvenile probation. It is not known, however, how many would be eligible for the transitional programs, which makes it difficult to evaluate the adequacy of the programs' combined capacity. Further complicating such estimates is that youth who attend Jumpstart or Project Bridge may transition to one of the other three programs as an intermediate step before returning to a diploma- or certificate-granting setting. If many Jumpstart or Project Bridge participants needed to do so, it seems clear that more seats at the Healy schools and the Center Factory would be needed.

The Regular Public Schools

According to study informants, CPS policy says that unless a court-involved child has been expelled, he or she will return to one of the regular public schools. As one person put it, "that's the default mode." However, as noted earlier, serious questions arose early in the project as to just how many court-involved youth do indeed return to the regular schools. There are two aspects to this concern. One is that some informants working with court-involved youth opined that the regular public schools are not a good fit for the needs of this population. The other is that the regular public school simply do not want to enroll many of these youth.

[23] One informant suggested that Healy South had enrolled 120 students during the previous year, or about 1.5 times its capacity. Annual enrollment for Healy North and the Center Factory was estimated on the assumption that this relationship between capacity and enrollment is the same as that for Healy South.

How Good a Fit?

The idea that court-involved youth's educational needs may best be served outside of the regular public schools was voiced most often by informants who work within the juvenile justice system or by those involved with the transitional programs designed for these youth. One reason, indicated earlier in this paper, is that these youth need a smaller, more structured setting than that provided by the typical urban high school. Another reason is that some court-involved youth, particularly those enrolled in the transitional programs, are older adolescents who are very far behind academically and would be uncomfortable attending school with younger classmates.

> [T]he fact of the matter is when they finish [our program], they're 17 years old, 18 years old. They have very few credits, and what would be the point? Socially, and in terms of emotional adjustment, going back to their high school at that point would be very difficult for them personally and emotionally. They'd be with kids much younger than themselves; they'd stand out, you know. *(Program for court-involved youth)* [24]

A third issue is that traditional high school programs require more credits to graduate than do other educational options, and therefore represent a slower and more difficult track to school completion for older youth with poor motivation and few high school credits.[25] Noting that most transitional program students express the desire for a high school diploma, one informant suggested that for many, the alternatives are a more realistic option:

[24] Sullivan (2004) expands on this idea, noting that because education is age-graded and sequentially structured, youth who experience disruptions in their education find it very difficult get back on track.

[25] Several years ago, the Chicago Public Schools began to require twenty-four credits for high school graduation, up from twenty-one. The Illinois School Code requires only sixteen credits to graduate high school, and the private alternative schools, such as the dropout retrieval programs are bound by the state's requirements, not Chicago's. Some of the credits earned by CPS students will come from physical education classes. The dropout retrieval schools typically do not have the facilities to offer physical education.

> And we say, okay, [a high school diploma is] a great goal. Let's be real now. You're sixteen and a half years of age, here's your transcript, you have two credits. You haven't been coming to school regularly, and now you've got this new awakening, and this is great. Let me tell you what it's gonna to take to get that. Chicago requires twenty-four credits; the alternative—they call them the Youth Connection Charter School—you can get a diploma anywhere, depending on the location, in sixteen, maybe, to twenty credits. So that's an option. You can get a regular high school diploma; it's honored by the state board. *(Program for court-involved youth)*

Because the transition programs are designed expressly for older youth who with significant educational deficits, the informants quoted above, who are affiliated with these programs, speak from their experiences with that particular subpopulation. It is not clear, however, what proportion of all court-involved youth fit the profile suggested by these two quotes. We also understand little about what shapes youths' preferences for specific school types.

An Unwelcoming Environment

Regardless of whether the regular public schools or some alternative settings are more appropriate destinations for court-involved youth, several informants asserted that the regular public schools simply do not want these young people.

> [A]dults have a way of kind of throwing your past in your face in front of your peers. And we hear it often enough to know that it's more than a figment of one child's imagination. And we've had conflicts in schools, and case managers call us and say, "why are you all sending him back here?" Well, the child needs an education. *(Program for court-involved youth)*

> I think the number one place where kids who come out of the jail and detention are rejected is the regular high school program. Once the principals identify them as having come out of the jail or detention, they don't want 'em. *(Chicago Public Schools)*

One individual, although generally critical of the welcome court-involved students find at most public schools, was able to name a few schools whose principals have been willing to work with this population, but added:

> Those principals in particular have been very good about working to get their kids back in the system. But that's three out of sixty-three, or however many high schools there are. Most of the time, the kid's just stigmatized, and everybody works to keep him out of the mainstream. *(Program for court-involved youth)*

Probing for the reasons why schools would exclude students elicited explanations that referred not simply to the fact of court involvement, but to education-related behaviors and statuses that might make even non-court-involved youth unwelcome. In the current education policy climate, two issues were identified as important in shaping access to school. One is accountability, policies that force schools to demonstrate progress on such academic indicators as standardized test scores or face sanctions. The other is school safety and discipline, particularly "zero tolerance," which specifies strict and consistent punishment for disciplinary violations, particularly those deemed to endanger other students (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

Pressure from School Accountability Policy

School accountability policy was the most frequently cited reason for principals' reluctance to accept certain youth into their schools. Test scores, truancy rates, attendance rates, and graduation rates go into the school report cards and may affect principals' jobs, making them reluctant to accept a student likely to make the statistics look bad.

> A student who is not performing, who has been problematic in the schools, who has been involved now with the court, and wants to get back into a school program, who's 16 and 17 years of age, I guess that student would contribute to the dropout rate. In some instances, principals aren't super eager about putting those students back into their school program. In Chicago we have performance contracts for principals and the high-stakes of testing and all of that . . . I think everyone has already acknowledged the fact, you know, in this day and age, this age of test scores and performance levels and probation lists and all of it based on academic achievement, certainly those it's those individuals who are not academically achieving that is going to be looked at more critically. *(Program for court-involved youth)*

> Well, let me tell you something: If I was a public school principal, and I was about to lose my job, and my school was about to be reconstructed, and all my teachers will have to go look for jobs, and I have this whole bunch of kids that are just not even bothering to come to school, that are failing every subject, that I know are not going to allow me to make the gains, I would turn them out. I mean, it's only human, you know. . . . It's the only thing you can do; I mean, they would be crazy not to. *(Private alternative school)*

Although the Chicago public schools have been subject to state and local accountability standards for a number of years, informants believe that the No Child Left Behind law has intensified pressures on principals.[26]

> Every principal has a target on their front and back. It says, "Kick me and hit me hard if I don't get these kids up to national norms." And so the simplest way to do that . . . is to push those kids out. *(Private alternative school)*

School Safety and Discipline Policy

Although it was mentioned less often than accountability as a reason to exclude youth from schools, school safety and discipline policy were cited by a few informants. An individual with long experience in the juvenile justice system noted that in the schools today there is "a greater push to exclude troublemakers." Two other informants expanded on this idea. One observed that expelled youth seeking to reenter the regular public schools after attending a safe

[26] The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires, among other things, that 100 percent of students in a state, district, school, or a subgroup meet or exceed state educational standards by the 2013-2014 school year (P.L. 107-110; Robelen, 2002). Subgroups are defined by race/ethnicity, disability status, poverty, and English language proficiency; test results for subgroups numbering forty or more students must be reported. In addition, schools must make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in test score improvement, as well as meet requirements for attendance, testing, and high school graduation rates. NCLB toughens sanctions for schools that fail to make adequate progress and requires that students who attend failing schools be offered options, including being able to transfer to another public school (GAO, 2002). In contrast, accountability standards prior to NCLB required that just 50 percent of students in a school needed to meet or exceed standards. Schools failing to make this target had 5 years in which to reach it, and they had to demonstrate steady progress in each of those years.

Although the 2001 law focuses primarily on elementary schools, mandating annual testing in grades 3 through 8, high schools in Illinois have tested at eleventh grade for a number of years in order to comply with the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB is the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA. President Bush has voiced his desire to extend NCLB to high schools; that is, high schools, like elementary schools, would be required to test students annually instead of just once during the 4 years (Samuels, 2005). At the same time, threats by twenty-seven states to opt out of federal requirements and funding have, at this writing, been quieted by Department of Education officials' assurances that they will work with states to be more flexible in implementing NCLB requirements (Kelderman, 2004).

school were unwelcome, because of both their prior behavior and the likelihood that they are behind academically.

> When they return from safe schools, the principals are very reluctant to accept them back. . . . because when they come in, the data is not good. These kids are already behind in terms of credit. Alright, you put them back. You've already heard that they've committed some previous kind of thing. . . . So you are not enthused, really, having them back. *(Private alternative school)*

Another opined that the expansion of behavior violations subject to expulsion, coupled with the availability of alternative schools (i.e., Alternative/Safe Schools) for expelled students, has encouraged widespread exclusion of misbehaving youth from the regular public schools.[27]

> [P]olicy-wise [safe schools] opened up Pandora's box because school districts just dump kids all over the place. . . . When Congress passed the safe schools stuff in '94, you know, it seemed reasonable but . . . it goes awry real quickly and has the . . . opposite consequences of the intent. So, it just opened the door enough, and then the school districts just threw it open, because all the states adopted that stuff, too. And the door-open was basically, "Well, this kid's packing a gun, but then it's not far from packing a gun to looking at me cross-eyed." *(Private alternative school)*

Given that court-involved youth have engaged in unlawful behavior, one would expect to hear concerns about exclusion for disciplinary reasons more often than for academic reasons, but this was not the case. It may be that expulsion from school for serious behavior infractions is viewed by educators as a reasonable and necessary action, and if it becomes a typical and accepted feature of the school landscape, it may not come to mind as a problem worth noting.[28] Furthermore, the availability of schools designed for expelled students may obscure the question of exclusion, insofar as these youth do have a designated alternative. In contrast, students who

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[27] The federal Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (20 USC 8921) mandated expulsion for a full calendar year for students bringing firearms to school. In 1995, Illinois passed a similar act (Fornek, 1999; 105 ILSC 5/10-22.6(d)). As have other school districts around the country, CPS has expanded the list of violations for which a student may be expelled to include murder, aggravated battery, certain drug offenses, and other felonies (Finkel, 2004; Chicago Public Schools, 2004; Skiba and Peterson, 1999).

[28] A survey by the Education Law Center finds that teacher and principal organizations generally support zero tolerance policies, although they believe such policies should be reserved for severe infractions such as possession of a weapon, drug offenses, and violent assaults (Boylan & Weiser, 2002).

are very far behind academically do not have a clearly defined alternative if they are pushed of out school, and educators may take a dim view of policies that have the effect of excluding the weakest students. Finally, the sanctions for underperforming schools specified by accountability policies are a threat to educators' jobs. Therefore, they may be viewed very negatively and, consequently, be mentioned more frequently as a problem than are disciplinary policies, which may be viewed as helpful in maintaining an orderly instructional environment.

But How Can They Do That? Policy Loopholes

Although the Chicago Public Schools have an affirmative responsibility to educate Chicago minors, students can lawfully be excluded under a number of state statutes and Chicago Board of Education policies. Once again, it is important to note that these policies do not apply exclusively to court-involved students.

Expulsion for disciplinary reasons. Serious student misconduct at school or at school-sponsored activities can result in expulsion. The Chicago Board of Education has adopted policies to address student misconduct which are spelled out in the Uniform Discipline Code (UDC). The UDC classifies misconduct according to a six-level scheme; Levels 5 and 6 include the most severe infractions, and expulsion is among the disciplinary options available for these violations if committed by students at the sixth grade level or above. All Level 6 and most of the Level 5 behaviors are also violations of law and will result in the incident being reported to the police. Students recommended for expulsion receive a due process hearing. In certain instances, a student may be placed in an Alternative/Safe school pending due process.[29] Periods of expulsion may be as long as 2 years; informants suggest that 6 to 12 months is the typical

[29] Referred to as "emergency placement," this measure may be used for serious misconduct such as possession of a firearm or a large amounts of drugs, for "extreme acts of violence," or if the student's misconduct "presents a serious and credible threat of harm to themselves or others" (Chicago Board of Education, 2004b).

duration. While expelled, students may not enroll in any CPS school other than the Alternative/Safe schools. When the period of expulsion is over, the student may return to his or her original school, but reenrollment is not contingent upon having attended an Alternative/Safe school.

Returning dropouts unlikely to graduate high school by age 21. At the time the research for this project was underway, the Illinois School Code provided that a student over 16 seeking reenrollment after dropping out who has earned so few high school credits that graduation before age 21 is not feasible could be turned away, although the student had to be offered due process first.[30]. It is not known how many youth have been pushed out under this rule, but the provision was a commonly cited rationale under which court-involved dropouts could lawfully be denied entry to the regular public schools. As noted earlier, in July 2004, this loophole was narrowed slightly by raising the age of youth who could be refused reenrollment from 16 to 19 years of age.[31]

Expelling underachieving or chronically truant students over 16. Another recent amendment to the Illinois School Code allows schools to exclude currently enrolled underachieving or chronically truant students over age 16 for one semester.[32] Students subject to denial of enrollment for underachievement are those whose grade point average was less than "D" in the previous semester, and who, after notice to the parents and provision of remediation services, achieves less than a D average in the current semester. Chronically truant students subject to denial of enrollment are those who were absent without a valid reason for 20 percent or more of scheduled school days during the previous semester, and who, after notice to the

[30] Illinois School Code, 105 ILCS 5/26-2 (b).
[31] Public Act 93-803, effective 23 July 2004.
[32] Public Act 93-803; Illinois School Code,105 ILCS 5/26-2 (c).

parents and provision of remediation services, are absent for 20 percent or more school days during the current semester. Under these provisions, students under age 19 may not be removed from school rolls for more than one consecutive semester.

This new law took effect after the interviews for this project were completed, so its impact could not be assessed. However, it appears to codify what some informants described as informal practice: dropping *enrolled* students whose school performance threatens to make school accountability statistics look bad. At the time of the research, informants suggested that students often were dropped from school rolls if they were absent for more than 10 percent of school days; that is, if they were absent for 18 days (the school year is 180 days long) without a valid excuse. Such students might return to school only to be told they were no longer enrolled. In February 2004, the Chicago Board of Education unveiled a new Absenteeism and Truancy Policy, which prescribes a number of procedural and remedial steps schools must take when students are frequently absent. In addition, it proscribes dropping students from school rolls *solely* for truancy, although principals may refer students for adjudication as chronic truants (Chicago Board of Education, 2004a).

"Lost" students. Although the new Absenteeism and Truancy Policy prohibits dropping students for truancy, it requires schools to "remove from enrollment" students whose "whereabouts cannot be determined." Schools must first call all known phone numbers for the student and either send a letter to or visit the last known address without finding the student or family before removing the student from the school rolls (Chicago Board of Education, 2004a).

Discussion

Although not conclusive, the findings suggest that significant numbers of court-involved youth may find themselves excluded from the regular public schools for a variety of reasons. As

the research was proceeding, and as this report was being prepared, CPS was being publicly criticized for the large numbers of dropouts in Chicago. In response, CPS—and the Illinois General Assembly—began revising policies affecting some aspects of school access, and the impact of these reforms is as yet unknown. But school accountability measures continue to threaten access for the least-well prepared students, and the effect of these policies demands continued scrutiny.

Alternative Schools for Expelled Students and Dropouts

If court-involved youth find scant welcome at the regular public schools, they may make their way to one of the so-called "alternative schools." Before embarking on a discussion of these schools, it may be helpful to unpack the term "alternative" as it is applied to education, because it tends to be used to refer to a wide variety of schools and programs with differing arrangements and goals. In general, the term "alternative" is used to refer to educational settings that fall outside of the regular public K through 12 schools (Aron and Zweig, 2003). Alternative education serves many different subgroups of students, and the schools have differing purposes.

Raywid has identified three types of alternative schools, distinguishing among them by the length of the enrollment period, the students targeted, and whether or not students attend on a voluntary basis (1994, cited in Gregg, 1998). Aron and Zweig suggest several dimensions that might underlie a typology of alternative schools including the students targeted, the location of the school, program content and objectives, and school administrative and funding arrangements. Some alternative schools and programs work to return students to traditional educational settings; others are intended to substitute for traditional education and assume students will finish their education there. The term "alternative" is not used exclusively by the public school systems; private high schools that target students who have not done well in the traditional public

high schools, or who may have dropped out or been pushed out, also frequently refer to themselves as "alternative."[33]

Gregg (1998) points out a key difference between the goals of early alternative schools and more recent types. Many of the former were founded to counter the uniformity of traditional public instruction and, accordingly, offered individualized attention, small classes, and innovative curricula; in a sense, these schools aimed to fix the system or at least provide an alternative that did not blame the child for school failure. However, some of the newer schools have been established to impose discipline and modify disruptive student behavior; these schools may be understood as working to fix the student.

Setting up alternative schools expressly for troublesome or disruptive youth is controversial, and some worry that the programs may become dumping grounds (Gregg, 1998; North Carolina Education and Law Project, 1996). One informant long involved with alternative education observed the shift in meaning that occurred when the Chicago Public Schools created the Alternative/Safe schools for disruptive students, applying the term "alternative" to them as well to older forms of alternative education.

[33] In Chicago, many such private schools that serve low-income youth are members of the Alternative Schools Network (ASN). Founded in 1973, ASN's members are nonprofit, independent schools, and comprise elementary and high schools, and youth and adult education organizations. ASN high schools offer both high school diplomas and GED programs, and some also have vocational programming. Many participate in CPS dropout retrieval programs; a few have contracts as Alternative/Safe schools or LINC schools. The umbrella organization operates a variety of programs for member schools and their students including the provision of school counselors, mentoring services for youth, and a Career Education and Development program that includes job placement. ASN also provides staff development programming and works to shape public policy that affects alternative education programs.

> But the thing is, after the creation of the Youth Connection Charter School, and then CPS started talking about "alternative schools," it started to change the meaning of it. For me, it's been a very disturbing thing. When you listen to CPS officials talking about "if you behave badly, we're going to send you to an alternative school." Well, they're talking about their own alternative schools! . . . But look, the disruptive students, for me, when I get them, they're like, oh, regular kids, you know. I mean the word "disruptive" has a terrible meaning, as a way of categorizing kids, if you ask me. *(Private alternative school)*

As noted earlier, the types of schools CPS may designate as "alternative" include not only the Alternative/Safe schools for disruptive students who have been expelled, but also dropout recovery schools, schools for medically fragile students, Pregnant Parenting Teens program, evening high schools, schools at the detention center and county jail, Academic Prep Centers for older students who have not passed the eighth grade, and transitional programs for court-involved youth. Among these types of alternative schools, the Alternative/Safe schools and the dropout retrieval schools emerged as particularly likely destinations for court-involved youth. An important distinction between the safe schools and the dropout recovery schools is that entrance to the former is only via expulsion and referral by CPS; the safe schools do not enroll students who have not been expelled. In contrast, the alternative high schools for dropouts can be accessed directly by students, although dropout status will need to be documented.

Schools for Students Who Have Been Expelled: The Alternative/Safe Schools

Opened in February 1996, the CPS Alternative/Safe schools, or simply "safe schools," are intended for students who have been expelled from the regular public schools for violations of the CPS Uniform Discipline Code. The schools initially were funded entirely through the Chicago Public Schools' general operating funds (Fornek, 1999). However, not long after their first year of operation, they began to receive state funding based on Average Daily Attendance under a state statute that allows funding for schools serving "disruptive students," defined as

those eligible for suspension or expulsion.[34] During the period for which they are expelled, students are not permitted to enroll in any Chicago public or charter schools other than the safe schools.[35]

Because nearly all of the infractions subject to expulsion under the UDC are also violations of law, it seems reasonable that a significant proportion of youth referred to the safe schools will be involved with the juvenile court. According to one informant, "virtually all kids who are expelled are involved with the police," although not all wind up in juvenile court. Another suggested that if court-involved youth return to CPS schools at all, that happened "only when they go to Chicago Public Schools safe schools. You know, they have these safe schools where they send them, like a sentence." Informants involved with the safe schools, however, indicated that they neither know nor keep track of how many of their students are court-involved.

Getting in. In Chicago, students recommended for expulsion must be offered due process and, if expelled, the student will be offered the opportunity to attend a safe school.[36] Safe schools, which are operated by private vendors under contract to the Chicago Board of Education, cannot refuse to enroll a referred student.[37] Despite the no-decline policy on the part of the schools, it appears that many students who are referred to the safe schools do not show up. According to *Catalyst,* school officials say "that many students don't show up or are chronic truants" (Fornek, 1999). An informant for this project noted that students are not obliged to

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[34] Informants' accounts of when state funding became available differed slightly, but it appears that it began soon after the schools' inception, perhaps by the autumn of 1996. The Illinois School Code was amended in 1995 to create the Safe Schools Law; this section specifies the requirements of and state funding available to safe schools (105 ILCS 5/13A).

[35] This restriction extends to the dropout retrieval programs, which report having expelled kids who are 14 or 15 years old seek admission to their programs, only to be turned away until they become 16.

[36] The UDC states that expelled students *may* be referred to the safe schools; however according to informants, all expelled students are referred, although not all enroll.

[37] Students at the safe schools participate in mandated standardized testing, but their scores are reported along with those of the school from which the child was expelled, not the safe school. Thus, safe schools do not have an incentive to exclude children with low test scores.

attend the safe schools in order to get back into the regular schools when the period of expulsion is over and linked that policy with the failure by many to enroll.

> I've seen some data that indicates to me that, like for example with our Alternative/Safe schools . . . although a student is referred to them, in order to get back into a CPS school after the term of their expulsion, they don't have to attend. And so what happens is, we may get 1000 kids that have been expelled from school; 500 may enroll in the alternative [safe] schools. *(Chicago Public Schools)*

This informant indicated not knowing if anyone follows up with the no-shows who are still of compulsory school age in order to get them enrolled.[38]

Capacity. If all expelled students did show up, there would not be room for them. The number of seats in safe schools reached a high of 580 during the 1997-1998 school year, but was reduced to 375 the following year (Fornek, 1999). An informant for this study indicated that just under 300 student were in attendance on a day in late April, 2004.[39] While the number of safe school seats has declined, the number of expulsions has increased dramatically over the past several years. Catalyst reports that in 1997, there were 172 expulsions (Finkel, 2004). But study informants stated that there were 802 during the 2001-2002 school year and 912 the following year. At the time of this research, the 2003-2004 numbers were not yet available, but the trend was pointing to 1,000 expulsions or more.[40]

Although the safe schools are designed to serve students in sixth though twelfth grades, it appears that schools enroll mainly students under the age of 16. CPS reported safe school enrollment, broken out by grade level, for the nearly 300 students enrolled in late April, 2004:

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[38] Parents are free to enroll an expelled child in a private school or have them attend school outside of Chicago, perhaps by sending them to live with relatives. It is not known how many expelled youth attend school in these ways.

[39] The exact daily attendance on 26 April 2004 was given as 294. Our informants indicated that that number fluctuated slightly from day to day, but did not change significantly. The attendance rate was given as approximately 80 to 80 percent for the elementary safe schools and about 80 percent for the high schools, indicating that actual safe school enrollment at that point was approximately to 375.

[40] By the end of January 2003, the mid-point of the 2002-2003 school year, there had been 535 expulsions. At the same point in the 2003-2004 school year, there already had been 762 expulsions.

Two-thirds of enrolled students were in ninth grade or lower; ninth graders were by far the largest group, comprising more than a quarter of the students. CPS states that the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades have consistently been those with the largest enrollments.

The reasons why expelled students over the age of 16 are enrolling in the safe schools in smaller numbers than younger classmates is not well understood. Enrollment across all CPS schools tends to be smaller in the upper high school grades than it is in eighth and ninth grades (Allensworth & Miller, 2002). One of the project's informants opined that expelled students over the mandatory school age of 16 are pushed out of school altogether, rather than being referred to the safe schools. Whatever the reasons, there appears to be little disagreement that only a fraction of expelled students are finding their way to the safe schools.

Dropout Retrieval Schools

Like the schools for expelled students, alternative schools for dropouts were implemented early in Paul Vallas' tenure as Chicago Public Schools CEO. Initially, they were funded entirely with local dollars, which were provided to private schools through contracts with the Chicago Board of Education (known then as the "School Reform Board"). However, in July 1997, the Board created a charter school that acted as an umbrella group for the private schools and enabled Chicago to capture state funding for them. The new entity was named the Youth Connection Charter School. It is the major dropout recovery program under CPS.[41]

[41] As noted earlier, starting in the 2004-2005 school year, CPS added another program for dropouts and "at-risk" youth—including those involved with the juvenile court. Called Learning in New Communities, or LINC, it has 500 seats and targets youth 16 and over who have five or fewer high school credits. The schools are operated by private vendors under contract to the Chicago Board of Education. LINC was not in operation at the time this study was in the field, and the present report's discussion of dropout retrieval schools pertains only to Youth Connection.

The Youth Connection Charter School (YCCS) has 22 sites, each is operated by a private vendor that contracts with the umbrella organization, which is the charter holder.[42] Most vendor schools also operate educational programs that are not under the charter, although the charter accounts for a large portion of their school revenue. YCCS's current annual per pupil allotment is $5,325. State funding based on Average Daily Attendance covers most of this amount, and local dollars make up the difference.[43]

The site schools impose their own entrance requirements on students, often in the form of test scores or a minimum number of completed high school credits. However, the schools understand their mission as being a second-chance alternative for youth and are reluctant to turn applicants down; some schools offer students transitional classes or individualized computer-based instruction to bring them up to the requisite skill level as a way of avoiding an outright rejection. Students may also be referred for tutoring and told to apply again. About 20 percent of YCCS students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs); special education services are provided by seven itinerant special education teachers furnished by CPS.

Accommodating Court-Involved Youth

Many of the individual schools participating in Youth Connection have long histories of working with low-income, inner-city youth and see their mission as providing a second chance to those who have experienced failure in the regular public schools. School officials interviewed stated emphatically that court involvement was not a barrier to enrollment, noting that involvement with the police and the juvenile court was a typical feature of many of their

[42] Initially, there were 28 schools under the charter, but a change in CPS policy about supporting GED programs, which some site programs were operating, and the failure of others to meet accountability standards resulted in the present 22 sites.

[43] The Average Daily Attendance formula is the basis for determining state funding for public schools. For the 2003-2004 school year, the state "foundation" amount was $4,810; an 80 percent average daily attendance yields $4,810 x .80 or $3,848 per pupil per year (105 ILCS 18-8.05 (B)). Note: One informant put the state amount at about $4,500, which is approximately equal to the amount for the 2002-2003 school year.

students' lives. "That's our population," one stated; another said the school has to "deal with the law every day." Asked if court involvement affected a student's acceptance by the school, this emphatic response was typical:

> It doesn't make any difference. It doesn't make any difference to us because they are just, these are kids, and they are minority kids, and they are poor, minority kids, and that's what they do. . . . If you are going to turn them down on the basis of that, you don't have any. *(Private alternative school)* [44]

School officials generally do not have a clear sense of the proportion of their students who are involved with the court, although they believe that law enforcement and justice system involvement among their students generally is high. As one commented, "they all get stopped [by the police]." Court involvement was a familiar phenomenon to all informants affiliated with the dropout retrieval schools, and the schools reported practices to accommodate the absences and other disruptions that characterize a court-involved youth's school career.

> So that's one group that we work with as well, where we open the door. And the whole structure of the school even accommodates that. For example, the kids used to complain—oh, this is maybe 15 years ago—that "look, we do have court cases and when we go to these courts you mark us absent." . . . So we say, okay, what we do is, every marking period, we'll allow you five absences. And those five absences will mean court dates and other situations. . . . And then we say also, if you're incarcerated, you know, and . . . you're not responsible in so many ways, when you come back, [our school] will open the doors and then you'll have a space to go to. *(Private alternative school)*

[44] According to their 2004 Illinois Report Card, YCCS's enrollment is over 95 percent minority, and African Americans comprise more than two-thirds of the students. In this quote, the speaker's main point is to convey that court involvement has no bearing on access to Youth Connection Charter School. The relationship between race and juvenile court involvement, and especially the disproportionate representation of minority youth in the justice system, are critically important issues, but beyond the scope of this paper.

> We try to work with the probation officers and the people from labs to see if they can possibly schedule the appointments after 2:30 so that the students can be here. But when they are uncooperative or that cannot be done, then we excuse the students, and we tell the teachers to just give the student the work that they missed, and the student then has detention, not as punishment, but they have to stay one hour more to catch up. And when they are put away in a correctional facility, usually they give them instruction, you know, they have some kind of instruction. We get those, they send us the number of days, and the grades and we give the students credit for that. *(Private alternative school)*

Schools also report sending staff to court with the student, if the student wishes it, to be a "face in the crowd" and demonstrate support. Asked how court-involved students compare academically to their non-involved peers, one school official responded this way:

> I would say that the retention for the kids who have had some court involvement appears to be a little bit better. I think it's because they've experienced the system and understand that, what's out there if they don't do things that they should do. We have a young man in our school now [who] was in the system. . . . Things that upset other students don't really bother him; I think that's because he's been there. *(Private alternative school)*

Most of the schools do not systematically gather data and compare performance between court-involved and non-involved students, and the above quote must be understood as an impression. However, what it does suggest is that court-involvement is not the red flag for the dropout retrieval schools that it appears to be at many of the regular public schools.

Pressures that Constrain Access

Despite a school philosophy that emphasizes opening the doors to youth who may not be welcome or who have not done well at the regular public schools, three factors may limit, in varying ways, a student's ability to enroll or stay enrolled in Youth Connection: limited capacity, disciplinary policies, and school accountability. We already have seen that two of these—discipline and accountability—were cited as reasons for exclusion at the regular public schools. As a charter school under CPS, Youth Connection comes under some of the same pressures to exclude certain youth that the regular public schools experience.

Capacity. Unlike the regular public schools, Youth Connection's enrollment is capped, and applicants outnumber available seats by a wide margin.[45] Consistent with state law governing charter schools, enrollment at YCCS is determined by lottery if the number of applications exceeds the number of seats.[46] For the 2003-2004 school year, the cap was 1,900, and as of November 2003, there were approximately 1,100 students on the waiting list. Although the cap was raised to 2,200 the following year; the waiting list remains long, numbering 978 in mid-December 2004. A key goal of Youth Connection's development plan is to increase capacity to 3,200 seats by 2007 (Youth Connection Charter School, 2003). However, scrutiny of the planned year-by-year seat increases suggests that the school has not added as many new seats as anticipated. As a result of limited seating and the lottery system, many students wishing to attend Youth Connection will not be able to get in.

Disciplinary Policy. As a charter school under CPS, YCCS follows the CPS Uniform Discipline Code, "with variation," as one informant put it. The schools report trying to avoid expelling students if possible. Disruptive students may instead be transferred to another YCCS site whose program is thought to be a better match for the student's needs.

> What happens is that if a student is not working out here and the reason is behavior, we tell the parents that the parents have the option of going to another division [of Youth Connection Charter School]. . . . Because sometimes just going to another environment makes a difference for the student. *(Private alternative school)*

There are limits to the schools' tolerance, however. The same informant quoted above acknowledged that bringing a firearm to school would result in expulsion. An informant from another school indicated that two youths who had sexually assaulted another student the previous

[45] Enrollment caps refer to enrollment at a point in time. Because students move in and out of the school during the year, the total number of students who attend the school at some point during the year may exceed the cap.
[46] Illinois School Code, 105 ILCS 5/27A(h).

year were expelled. Thus, although the alternative schools strive to include youthful offenders, violence at school is not tolerated.

School Accountability Policy. Staff involved with Youth Connection expressed concerns about the effect of the No Child Left Behind law on their programs. Because of their interest in being flexible enough to serve students whose academic performance and achievement often is not in keeping with their grade level, YCCS schools face particular pressures emanating from the new law's more stringent requirements for annual test score gains. The requirement for testing at the eleventh grade prompts two concerns, both of which are related to the disruption that often characterizes alternative school students' educational careers. First, because the alternative schools require fewer credits for graduation than do the Chicago public schools, a student with the equivalent of a tenth grader's course credits in a regular school may be considered an eleventh grader at an alternative school; under Illinois's plan for compliance with federal testing standards, eleventh graders must be tested. Second, students who attend the alternative schools are dropouts who often have gaps in their education and, consequently, in the courses they have taken and passed. Therefore, they have not had the academic exposure typical of an eleventh grader, placing them at a significant disadvantage on standardized tests.

> But regular high schools do that easily [determine who is an eleventh grader], all right, because there has never been any break in the learning process of the kid. But now, they come to these charter schools like our school, we're saying, okay, who is a junior? Who is an eleventh grader? They might have 10 credits, but they have never taken a science class. Right? Or they have 10 credits, they spent three years in high school, they've never passed a history class, they've never passed a social studies class, but they have these 10 credits, scattered all over, by definition the kid is still a junior because of the credits that he has. *(Private alternative school)*

The overview section of the 2003 Youth Connection *Development Plan Summary* makes particular note of this concern:

> One of the most problematic issues faced by alternative school educators is the fact that students may enter alternative schools with sufficient high school credit, but do not have the requisite skills to perform high school level work.

Because of the disruptions and gaps in their educations, Youth Connection students often enter the school already far behind grade level. Many YCCS schools use the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) in their admissions screening. TABE test scores translate into grade levels, and schools typically require that students test at the fifth-, sixth-, or seventh-grade level in order to be enrolled.[47] These schools are concerned that many of their students' test scores will not rise to grade level proficiency by the time they are deemed to be in the eleventh grade.

> We are mandated to increase the number of students who are successful on that eleventh-grade test, the PSAE, by a certain percentage every year. And the time is going to come when it's not going to be doable anymore. You know, given this population, the scores won't be able to go any higher. You know, in this school, the only way in which that can continue to happen after 3 or 4 years is by us raising the [admission] standards and begin to require like tenth-grade level, so that after a year they can test at 11.8. Because, you know, otherwise it's going require brain surgery.[48] *(Private alternative school)*

As this statement implies, YCCS schools may face pressure to accept only higher-performing students, despite what is for many a long-standing commitment to serving youth who have not fared well in the regular schools. Another informant argued that such policies will have the opposite effect of their stated intention of educating all children:

> [B]ecause they want us to meet these levels, so that means we have to take the kids who are out on the streets that have the best reading and math scores. . . . So, if a kid comes in that reads below level, we can't take that kid. In actuality, he doesn't show up on anybody's books, so he doesn't show up on No Child Left Behind. But he's actually left behind. The kid can't get in school. *(Private alternative school)*

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[47] The *Development Plan Summary* indicates that more than a quarter of YCCS students enrolled during the 2001-2002 school year had reading levels below sixth grade; another 23 percent read between the sixth- and eighth-grade levels (Youth Connection Charter School, 2003). The plan does not indicate whether these are entrance test reading scores, or the results of mandated standardized tests administered during the school year.

[48] The reference to "11.8" means a test score indicating a skill level commensurate with what would be expected of a student in the eighth month of the eleventh grade. Similarly, "7.0" indicates a student with the skill level expected of an entering seventh grader.

Youth Connection already is facing sanctions under accountability policies: As a result of its 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 test scores, it has been identified as a school needing improvement for failing to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards under federal and state law.

GED Preparation

Courses that prepare students for the General Equivalency Diploma, or GED, are another potential destination for court-involved youth. Informants associated with the transitional programs were particularly likely to identify GED courses as one of the educational settings to which youth transition after completing their program. One such individual indicated that "a large majority" of their youth enter GED preparation courses. These courses are offered by a number of vendors, including private, community-based schools affiliated with the Alternative Schools Network, and the Safer Foundation, which specializes in working with ex-offenders.[49] However, informants identified the City Colleges of Chicago as the primary provider of GED preparation courses in the city.

Six of the seven City Colleges of Chicago—Richard J. Daley, Kennedy-King, Malcolm X, Olive-Harvey, Truman, and Wright—offer GED preparation classes. These courses are part of the colleges' adult education programs, which—although geared primarily to persons 18 years of age or older—will admit 16- and 17-year olds who can document that they are not currently enrolled in school. The courses generally are free of charge. Students may be tested prior to admission to determine their reading and math skill levels. Those whose skills would make

[49] A number of Alternative School Network's member schools offer GED preparation as part of their adult education offerings. The Safer Foundation was established in Chicago in 1972 and operates a number of programs that work to reintegrate ex-offenders into the community. Safer works with adults and youth; its primary program for the latter is the Youth Empowerment Program, an 8-week, classroom-based GED preparation program open to ex-offenders 16 to 21 years of age who lack the high school diploma. Participants are followed by a case-manager for 1 to 2 years after the classroom program. There is no charge to participants for Safer Foundation services.

regular GED-preparation courses too challenging may be directed to Adult Basic Education or literacy courses as a first step in preparing for the exam.

Despite their formal availability to 16- and 17-year-olds, the City Colleges' GED programs are intended primarily for adults, not teenagers. Reportedly, however, younger students are enrolling in large numbers, and the City Colleges' GED courses are "clogged with 16- and 17-year-olds," although not all of them have been involved with the court. Because of their adult education focus, the City Colleges' GED programs are not designed to offer what high school programs offer: Their teachers may not be trained to work with a younger population; the colleges generally do not offer the counseling and support that might be needed by younger students, particularly those with troubled histories; and the programs do not receive special education dollars. One informant suggested that GED programs were ill-suited to youth who do not read at least at the sixth-grade level or who have fewer than five high school credits. Another individual, who works exclusively with court-involved youth, noted that youth who are very far behind in school will not be able to move successfully into a GED preparation program.

> [S]ome of the City Colleges have a GED program, which a lot of kids believe that they want, until they get there, and they find that there's such a gulf in the information, that they know they need to go back into a high school program. *(Program for court-involved youth)*

Thus, the GED preparation courses may be a viable option primarily for older youth whose educational deficits are not severe.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to explore the mechanisms for educating court-involved youth in Chicago, learn about the available educational options, and the barriers, if any, these young people face when continuing in or returning to school. A key finding is that educational options

in Chicago that are designed expressly for court-involved youth who are not incarcerated or detained are limited to transitional programs that grant neither a high school diploma nor a GED certificate. As a result, youth who wish to complete secondary education are expected to attend schools that also are used by young people who are not involved with the court. Most of the individuals interviewed for this study believe that court-involved youth tend to be excluded from the regular public schools or that these schools are not a good fit for the needs of this population. The regular public schools are the only schools that have the capacity to absorb large numbers of youth and, other than the safe schools, they are the only schools available to youth under 16 years of age. If large numbers of court-involved youth do not enroll and finish their educations in the regular schools, they must compete with many other students for a limited number of seats in alternative programs. Some youth will find it difficult to gain entrance, particularly if they have severe academic deficits.

To date, good data are lacking on educational outcomes for Chicago's court-involved youth. Although a few programs gather statistics on their own graduates, none follows students who enroll but drop out before completion, nor do any track program completers over the long term to determine if they continue (or resume) their education, obtain a diploma or degree, secure employment, or find themselves in court again. Finally, court-involved youth who don't enroll anywhere don't get tracked at all.

Because it was intended as a preliminary exploration that would lay the groundwork for additional research, the present study's findings are more suggestive than conclusive, and much work remains to be done. What this work does do is lay out the programmatic and policy context with which court-involved youth in Chicago must grapple when seeking an education. At the same time, the findings raise concerns about the adequacy of available school options and

the effect on school access of a broad range of educational policies and practices. Finally, the study indicates that we lack good quality data on the educational experiences of court-involved youth. Because education plays a such key role in youth development, it is critical that we gain a better understanding how well the educational system is working for those young people who already are struggling to be productive and successful.

Next Questions for Research

As the above discussion makes clear, there are many unanswered questions about court involvement and education among youth in Chicago. The findings from the present study suggest the need for work in three broad areas: gathering basic descriptive measures of youths' school involvement, examining patterns and predictor of school involvement among court-involved youth, and tracking the effect of education policy on school access for this population.

Descriptive Measures of School Involvement

We lack good basic measures describing school involvement of court-involved youth in Chicago. Such measures ideally would be based on a cohort of youth processed by the juvenile court, rather than school- or program-based data, as there is reason to believe that not all youth return to school, or if they do return, stay enrolled. Questions to be answered include:

- How many court-involved youth continue in or return to school; how long do they remain enrolled and how many graduate?
- How many youth attend which types of schools, and how is type of school related to age, prior school performance, or the nature of the youth's offense?
- How many youth do not return to the regular public schools? Where do they go? What educational outcomes do they have?
- How many youth do not return to any educational setting after entering the juvenile justice system? What are the reasons for their non-return?

Answering questions such as these is fundamental. It will be difficult to proceed with policy and program development absent a clearer idea as to the numbers of court-involved youth who do or do not enroll in school, where they enroll, the reasons for non-enrollment, and the outcomes they experience.

Patterns and Predictors of School Involvement Among Court-Involved Youth

We need to better understand what predicts school involvement among court-involved youth. One set of questions would go to exploring the predictive power of factors such as youth age and demographic characteristics, prior school involvement and performance, and the like. Another set of questions would explore the pattern of episodes of school involvement and offending and whether there are different outcomes among groups of youth with different patterns. Preliminary findings from the present study suggest that patterns in the sequence of school enrollment or non-enrollment, offending, arrest, and court-involvement are complex and varied. Such findings suggest an opportunity to clarify distinctive trajectory types and explore their implications for youth outcomes. Understanding these sequences in the context of developmental and life trajectories may also be of use in formulating appropriate strategies for measuring school outcomes like graduation and dropping out, given the disruptions that characterize the lives of many low-income urban youth, including those involved with the juvenile court. Projects in this vein may include quantitative approaches to model predictors and youth life trajectories, as well as qualitative methods incorporating in-depth interviews with youth to explore in detail the transitions between episodes of school and court involvement. Examples of research questions include the following:

- To what degree does becoming involved with the juvenile justice system affect youths' subsequent educational opportunities, and how strong a predictor is such involvement relative to education-related factors such as prior school performance and attendance?

- What is the typical sequence of school involvement or noninvolvement and court-involvement? That is, does being inactive in school typically precede or follow court-involvement—or both?

- Are there trajectory patterns or clusters of patterns that usefully distinguish among subgroups of youthful offenders in terms of predicting future school involvement or offending? What implications might these patterns have for youth outcomes and for effective programming?

- How do youth understand and describe their experiences in the school system and juvenile justice system at different points in time? At different ages?

The Impact of Specific Education Policies and Practices

A variety of policies and practices shape educational opportunities for all youth. Because of their educational deficits and involvement in behaviors such as truancy, dropping out, and violation of discipline policies, court-involved youth may be particularly likely to experience exclusion from school or find their school options otherwise constrained. Certainly, the unfolding of stricter academic accountability policies under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the impact they have on low-achieving students' access to schools needs to be explored, not only the public schools, but also private alternative school programs funded with public dollars. More locally, state and local policies and practices for addressing truancy, dropout and reenrollment, poor academic achievement, and truancy may disproportionately affect court-involved youth, and their impact on this population also needs to be tracked.

Studying the direct impact of policy and practice is one avenue for research. Another is to explicitly incorporate a thorough understanding of policy requirements in studies focusing on outcomes such as youth well-being and development, reentry after incarceration, or recidivism. For example, sampling can be conducted with an eye to which subgroups are likely or unlikely to be affected by the policy and how they might be affected. Survey and interview questions can be worded to elicit youths' experiences with particular policies and their attendant practices; study

timeframes can be selected according to policy implementation dates, and so forth. Designing a study to account for policy influences supports making important inferences about the quality of systemic responses and enables the formulation of policy recommendations that are pertinent to the specific policy context.

Researchers interested in primarily in juvenile justice may be inclined to overlook general educational policies because they do not specifically target court-involved youth. However, to the degree that such youth must negotiate the same educational system as do non-court-involved youth, their experiences will be shaped by the overall education policy context. Therefore, whether their effects are assessed as a central question, or treated explicitly as the context in which youth educational and developmental trajectories unfold, an understanding of these policies will significantly enrich our understanding of these youths' experiences.

The present study focused on the educational opportunities of court-involved youth in one major city. But the literature on education and juvenile offending suggests that the challenges Chicago faces in educating its young people who are involved with the juvenile justice system are by no means unique. Providing appropriate, quality educational services to court-involved youth and balancing the often-competing demands of public policy are challenges faced by school districts across the nation. The author hopes this exploratory effort will be useful to educators, juvenile justice professionals, and others working to improve the lives and opportunities of court-involved youth in Chicago and elsewhere.

APPENDIX A

METHOD

Data were gathered from interviews with expert informants affiliated with the Chicago Public Schools, a range of alternative school programs, the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department, and persons working for organizations involved with education, the legal system, or urban youth. A snowball sampling strategy was used. Conversations with colleagues who have experience with the juvenile justice system in Chicago identified several informants for the first interviews, and through these individuals, additional key informants were identified. A total of twenty individuals was interviewed for this study; fourteen were interviewed in person in sessions lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, and the other six were interviewed over the phone. Several informants received follow-up phone calls to update information given during the in-person interview. Informed consent was obtained verbally.

Because the nature of informants' involvement with education or the juvenile justice system varied from person to person, the author prepared a customized interview guide for each person. However, some basic questions were asked of many informants. For example, those affiliated with schools or educational programs were always asked about the student population, entrance and exit requirements, and soforth. Most informants also were asked for data on program participants, although few were able to supply it. All in-person interviews were recorded, with the informant's consent.

The project budget did not permit preparation of full verbatim transcripts for recorded interviews. Instead, detailed interview summaries were prepared; however, selected portions of some interviews were transcribed to facilitate the inclusion of quotations in the paper. All interview notes were analyzed using atlas.ti qualitative analysis software.

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