

# Engaging the Arts Across the Juvenile Justice System

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On a given day, more than [43,000 youths](#) who largely [identify as students of color](#) and are [disproportionately male](#) are held in residential placement facilities as a result of involvement with the juvenile justice system. More than two-thirds of youths living in placement facilities who participated in a [national survey](#) shared aspirations to continue their education, with nearly half wanting to pursue postsecondary education.

Despite these aspirations, youth involved in the juvenile justice system encounter [educational barriers](#) before they enter the system: Nearly one third are diagnosed with a learning disability, nearly half demonstrate academic proficiency below their grade level and close to a quarter are not enrolled in school. A disruption in their academic trajectory because of involvement with the juvenile justice system may prevent a student from continuing their education upon reentry. [Sixty-six percent](#) of youths do not return to school after leaving placement.

High-quality arts education participation has lasting, positive impacts for youth by supporting development from early



ENGAGEMENT IN ARTS EDUCATION HAS LASTING BENEFITS, PROVIDING A PATHWAY OF SUPPORT FOR YOUTH WITHIN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM.



STATES, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES, ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER AGENCIES CAN IMPLEMENT ARTS EDUCATION-FOCUSED PROGRAMS ACROSS THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND PROVIDE SERVICES THAT MINIMIZE BARRIERS FOR A YOUTH'S INITIAL ENGAGEMENT AND CONTINUED PARTICIPATION.

childhood into adulthood. The arts provide [opportunities](#) to build self-efficacy and achieve personal goals by helping youth develop ownership of their learning, determine individual criteria for success and track personal progress. [Research shows](#) that these effects most strongly benefit youth who have limited access to opportunities for academic, personal and social success and are thus at higher risk for low academic achievement, dropping out of high school or entering the juvenile justice system. Arts participation can also reduce the likelihood that they will engage in delinquent, risky or violent behavior. Additionally, the arts support [civic outcomes](#), including political engagement and volunteering, among youth.

Engaging the arts across policy and service programs can support states and other agencies in helping youth achieve academic and future success at various stages in their lives.

To support existing and emerging work, this report explores research and program examples across four key areas —



**PREVENTION**



**INTERVENTION**



**TRANSITION**



**HEALING**

## Approaches From the Arts Education Field

Across the country, organizations focused on the arts and education have been exploring the effects that arts learning can have on youth involved in the juvenile justice system and examining possibilities for arts programming in schools, out-of-home placement facilities and the broader community. Opportunities may exist through the support of different organizational and agency partnerships, with implementation at the local, state and national levels. For example:

The [Shakespeare in American Communities](#) program — from the National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with Arts Midwest — provides arts education opportunities for students who attend historically underserved schools and engages youth involved with the juvenile justice system in theatre education.

[The Creative Youth Development National Partnership](#) — led by the National Guild for Community Arts Education, Americans for the Arts and Mass Cultural Council — works to advance cross-sector CYD practices and creativity to support positive development for youth.

In partnership with the Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network, Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute established [Create Justice](#), a multi-year collaboration that culminated in the production of an [open-access resource bank](#) for research, policy and practice.

# PREVENTION

Prevention efforts, particularly those that take place in [early childhood](#), can reduce [risk factors](#) that may increase the chances that youth will engage in delinquent behavior or suffer harm. High-quality programs provide [productive settings](#) that foster the development of cognitive, linguistic, regulatory, and social and emotional skills that can help increase academic and future workforce success. Additionally, school dropout [prevention programs](#) offer opportunities for students to participate in [arts-based activities](#) that can help decrease absenteeism and truancy and improve academic achievement and performance.

Research reveals that the arts can limit risk factors for involvement in the juvenile justice system and increase [protective factors](#) that lead to productive environments and positive supports. For elementary students, the arts have been shown to [stop progression](#) of aggressive and violent behavior and increase prosocial behaviors, such as cooperation and self-control. Additionally, students enrolled in a drama-integrated language [arts program](#) missed fewer days of school than their peers not in the program. The arts also provide pathways to forming [positive relationships](#), including with peers and school authorities, both in and out of school. Including the arts as a component of [prevention efforts](#) can also decrease the chance that youth will consume alcohol, engage in substance use and delinquent behaviors and become involved with the juvenile justice system during adolescence.

[Creative Youth Development](#) is one example of a prevention strategy and is a practice that fosters students' potential through integrating creative skill-building, inquiry and expression with principles drawn from the [positive youth development](#) movement. CYD programs typically take place after school and provide safe and healthy environments for youth to engage in [hands-on learning](#) activities that strengthen their leadership, teamwork and communications skills, and help them to form strong relationships and connections to their communities. These programs are often partnership-based and provide arts learning opportunities for youths who may not otherwise have access because of financial restrictions, arts course availability or other factors. After-school programs provide an opportunity for students to productively continue their learning and engage in social situations after the school day ends.

Benefits of arts education extend to the whole school, as they can foster a positive and supportive school climate. For [students](#), the arts can improve attendance and decrease suspensions and discipline referrals. Arts

programming can also benefit educators by increasing engagement and satisfaction in their [careers](#), [confidence](#) in their individual [abilities and skills](#), and awareness of students' abilities. The arts also create [a collaborative culture](#) and encourage more [parent and community](#) involvement in the school.

## Program Example

[JUMP StArts](#) funds programs that provide access to high-quality arts education and artists-in-residence programs for youth who are considered at an increased risk of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system. Grants support projects that cultivate [positive](#) academic, developmental, and social and emotional learning outcomes. Projects must be created through a partnership of an arts organization and a juvenile justice facility or social service entity. Funded projects have included an [interdisciplinary photography curriculum](#) from Nevada County Arts Council that meets state education standards and supports students' growth, self-reflection and transformation, as well as an educational program from Slow Theatre that gives

students the chance to create a [theatre performance](#) project based on their personal experiences.



### Related Resources

[Creative Youth Development: Transforming the Learning Environment](#) (Arts Education Partnership)

[State Information Request: Arts and Social Emotional Learning Measures in State Accountability Systems](#) (Education Commission of the States)

[Creative Youth Development Toolkit](#) (Americans for the Arts)

[Risk Factors](#) and [Protective Factors](#) (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention)

## RELATED PROGRAMS



FLORIDA

[Miami Music Project](#)



LOUISIANA

[The Roots of Music](#)



MASSACHUSETTS

[Raw Art Works](#)



NATIONAL

[Aim High Grant Program](#)  
(New York Life Foundation and Afterschool Alliance)

# INTERVENTION

Intervention strategies for youth who are already involved in the juvenile justice system include diversion programs, alternative school programs and out-of-home placement facilities. These programs may take a holistic, therapeutic approach by providing comprehensive [support services](#) to youth and their families. Interventions, as well as restorative practices and positive behavioral supports, can help maintain [youth's interest](#) in learning while addressing the underlying causes of juvenile justice system involvement.

There are multiple points of intervention once youth become involved in the juvenile justice system — from initial contact with the system through their transition from out-of-home placement. [Diversion strategies](#) can occur before and after involvement, with a focus on reducing recidivism by redirecting youth from formal court processing in the juvenile justice system and engaging them in alternative programming. Diversion programs also provide a host of [support services](#) — including educational programs, tutoring, job skills training and service learning — that help youth attain personal goals and continue their academic career.

Intervention strategies can engage the arts to help students develop social and emotional skills, which play a critical role in their academic, personal and social success. The outcomes of arts participation are dynamic in scope, with students becoming [more confident](#) and better able to integrate into the culture of their school; showing increased enjoyment, [fulfillment](#) and stress release; and

developing [awareness](#) of other perspectives, cultural sensitivity to others and empathy. Students participating in the arts also expressed significant [optimism](#) about their future potential, including the possibility of attending college. Teenagers and young adults from low-socioeconomic backgrounds with high levels of arts engagement showed increased positive [academic outcomes](#), such as honors society membership and higher school grades and test scores, and better long-term academic outcomes than those of their peers with low levels of arts engagement.

By providing individual attention to students, [alternative school programs](#) can serve as a form of intervention by helping students who did not experience successful outcomes in a traditional school environment. Engaging the arts in an alternative school setting can increase self-perception of knowledge and skills in music, which ultimately correlate with youth's perception of [global self-worth](#) — a measure of self-esteem and self-value used in social science research.

## Program Example

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The Austin Independent School District (Texas) and [Austin Classical Guitar](#) partnered to develop the first standards-based, for-credit arts course available to youth in residence at the Gardner Betts Juvenile Justice Center. Students participating in the program take classes

taught by certified instructors twice a week and earn a fine arts credit that counts toward their required high school credits. While in the program, students can also participate in a musical performance in a public setting. Since its launch in 2010, the program has demonstrated improvement in other academic subjects, such as increased passing rates in algebra and biology, and improved GPA compared with peers not enrolled in the program, according to Matthew Hinsley, executive director of Austin Classical Guitar.



## Related Resources

[Alternative School Discipline Strategies](#) (Education

Commission of the States)

[Positive Youth Development](#)

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

## RELATED PROGRAMS

### CONNECTICUT

[Yale Prison Education Initiative at Dwight Hall at Yale](#)

### MARYLAND

[Baltimore Youth Arts](#)

### VIRGINIA

[Performing Statistics](#)

### NATIONAL

[Distribution to Underserved Communities Library Program](#) (Art Resources Transfer)



# TRANSITION

Juvenile reentry programs help youth transition from out-of-home placements to their home, school, work and community through direct support services. Placement in an out-of-home facility shifts the daily environment that a youth is accustomed to and may cause a gap in the [services and supports](#) they need to successfully return to school and communities. [Effective programming](#) involves collaboration and coordination, including through public/private partnerships, between the placement facility or institution, the school district and a youth's family and community. These efforts aim to reduce recidivism rates by implementing strategies that support youth engagement in their schools, work and communities.

To help ensure successful reentry and transition, and to [reduce recidivism](#), engagement across all system agencies at an early stage can identify and prevent lapses in priority education, health and social services and supports, and maintain consistent engagement to track a youth's progress and needs during this time. Cross-agency coordination can provide a comprehensive approach to services, including health screenings and learning assessments, that can help ensure that the transition plan is structured and implemented to best meet the collective needs of the youth and to support continued success. Programming that takes a well-rounded approach to academic instruction and career-centered learning, in addition to a focus on social and emotional

development, can provide youth with a dynamic skillset that supports [successful transition](#) and positive, long-term outcomes.

The arts also support the development of skills that play a key role in lasting success in school, work and life. This engagement can strengthen [social and emotional development](#), including self-awareness, conflict resolution skills and understanding of moral decision-making. The outcomes of these efforts can extend from personal development to broader societal impacts, such as respect for family members and peers, improved interpersonal relationships and a stronger sense of community and trust. Female youth involved with the juvenile justice system who participated in an arts program showed [positive improvements](#) in their relationships with themselves, their families, communities and peers in the program, with facility staff reporting reductions in violent behavior.

## Program Example

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[Big Thought's Creative Solutions program](#) employs an evidence-based, trauma-informed methodology in its arts-as-a-workforce intervention program, serving more than 200,000 youths involved in the juvenile justice system in the Dallas area. This program provides access to project-based learning in digital, performing and visual arts to help youth process trauma and to heal, while also developing and improving

job skills, fostering social and emotional development and supporting positive self-change and youth agency. Youth involved in the juvenile justice system have the option to join the program or are recommended to the program during the probation process. Participating youth receive financial stipends for their participation, and graduates of the program can serve as peer mentors. Creative Solutions has demonstrated significant results in reducing recidivism rates, according to Byron Sanders, president and CEO of Big Thought.



## Related Resources

[State Financial Aid Barriers for Students Impacted by the Justice System](#) (Education Commission of the States)

[State and Federal Policy: Incarcerated youth](#) (Education Commission of the States)

## RELATED PROGRAMS



**CALIFORNIA**

[InsideOUT Writers](#)



**OHIO**

[Bridging the Gap](#) (Cincinnati Arts and Technology Studios)



**UTAH**

[Spy Hop Productions](#)



**MULTI-STATE**

(Multi-State) **California, Indiana, Louisiana, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia**  
[Transforming Juvenile Probation Certificate Program](#) (Annie E. Casey Foundation, Georgetown University's Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, Council of State Governments Justice Center)





# HEALING

Youth may experience [trauma](#) prior to or directly from involvement in the juvenile justice system, and this trauma may continue into adulthood. Trauma-informed care and education practices understand trauma and its impacts and respond by creating a healthy, safe and supportive environment that promotes opportunities for healing. Such environments can help youth develop [skills and strategies](#) for building self-empowerment and self-control. Engaging youth in [arts learning](#) across disciplines, whether in an independent program or as part of a therapeutic method, can help lessen symptoms related to anxiety and depression and support them to better understand their actions and emotions and relieve stress. These efforts happen in out-of-home placement facilities, community organizations and schools, among other settings, and help youth to improve their [self-efficacy and self-esteem](#) in a creative and productive environment.

Arts-based [healing programs](#) can help youth process trauma, improve coping skills and build resiliency and positive emotions. Research shows that in a therapeutic setting, music lessons can be an effective method of supporting [productive behavior](#) and decreasing unproductive behaviors. Providing youth with opportunities for self-expression, self-reflection and healing through a creative process can promote a stronger sense of self and help them forge closer relationships and positively engage with their peers and communities. These outcomes can

also benefit youth who are in out-of-home placements during the transition process by improving trust and building social and emotional skills.

## Program Example

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The [Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network](#) — a California-based arts collaborative — offers program coordination and supports to 14 member organizations that provide high-quality arts programming to youth involved in the Los Angeles County juvenile justice system. AIYN engages youth in arts and cultural learning and experiences that build creativity and community to help them heal and transform. AIYN employs trauma-informed training as a method of professional development for staff who work within the juvenile justice system. Programs now reach 22 juvenile detention sites and support diversion from further involvement with the juvenile justice system and reentry services through arts-based experiences. Member organizations use arts education as a strategy to create pathways for youth to find success throughout their lives. For example, [the Dance for Healing Project](#) provides tools and approaches to support trauma processing; [artworxLA](#) provides access to a long-term, sequential arts program to increase the likelihood of high school graduation; and [Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory](#) engages students in career development opportunities in media arts.



## Related Resources

[Arts-Based Programs and Arts Therapies for At-Risk, Justice-Involved, and Traumatized Youths](#) (National Endowment for the Arts and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention)

[Healing-Centered Practices Through Creative Youth Development](#) (Webinar, National Guild for Community Arts Education)

## RELATED PROGRAMS



**CALIFORNIA**

[Rhythm Arts Alliance](#)



**ILLINOIS**

[Arts Healing Trauma](#) (Urban Gateways)



**OREGON**

[My Voice Music](#)



**NEW YORK**

[NeON Arts](#) (New York City Department of Probation, Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute)

# Policy Examples

Current national and state policy reflects the demand for ongoing work and funding to support the needs of youth involved in the juvenile justice system. It also provides opportunities to engage arts education as a pathway of support. Opportunities for policymaking exist at the federal and state levels and across juvenile justice and education agencies.

## Juvenile Justice

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### FEDERAL LEVEL

In December 2018, Congress reauthorized and amended the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and signed the [Juvenile Justice Reform Act](#) into law. This reauthorization includes [key amendments](#) concerning the care and services states provide to youth, such as mental health screening and treatment, reentry plans and educational attainment plans.

Additionally, the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations' approval of the [FY2020 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act](#) includes language regarding the use and implementation of arts programs and therapies for youth who are considered at risk of low academic achievement, dropping out and/or involvement in the juvenile justice system and youth involved in the juvenile justice system. The act also includes guidance for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to review opportunities for implementing arts-based methods in prevention and diversion efforts, as well as in residential grant programs.

### STATE LEVEL

In 2019, [Louisiana](#) passed legislation to support the creation and use of arts-based programming within juvenile detention/placement institutions.

In 2019, [Nevada](#) updated legislation to include specific guidelines for art and music instruction requirements in elementary school. These new requirements build on existing ones and extend to state facilities where youth are detained.

## Education

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### FEDERAL LEVEL

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides funding opportunities for states to support students who are considered at risk of low academic achievement, dropping out and/or involvement in the juvenile justice system and to include [the arts](#) as part of a well-rounded education. States may consider designing policies that combine strategies across these funding opportunities:

[Title I, Part D](#) (Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk) provides funding to support prevention efforts for youth, in addition to support for services that help youth involved in the juvenile justice system successfully transition from an out-of-home placement facility to school or the workforce.

[Title IV, Part A](#), (Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants program) provides funding to school districts to expand and improve education in their schools, including work to support safe and healthy schools. The [21st Century Community Learning Center Program](#) also provides funding for after-school programming, including CYD programs.

### STATE LEVEL

Through its [state ESSA plan under Title I, Part D](#), **Utah** includes the arts and music in a nine-month education plan that provides high-quality, credit-earning programs to youth who are in state custody.

## Final Thoughts

As more states begin to adopt policies related to the juvenile justice system, new opportunities for engaging the arts in prevention, intervention, transition and healing services for youth may become available or expand. The Arts Education Partnership at Education Commission of the States will continue its work in sharing topical information about existing and ongoing work across arts education and juvenile justice on our [resource page](#).



## About the Author

### Cassandra Quillen

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As project manager, Cassandra contributes to reports and publications for the Arts Education Partnership and provides support for AEP convenings. Prior to this position, she worked as a communications specialist at Education Commission of the States and AEP. With an educational background in art history and a strong belief in the transformational qualities of learning, Cassandra is passionate about her work and dedicated to sharing research and resources on arts education with stakeholders across the country. Cassandra can be reached at [cquillen@ecs.org](mailto:cquillen@ecs.org) or **303.299.3631**.

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| [Americans for the Arts](#)

| [Big Thought](#)

| [American Youth Policy Forum](#)

| [Carnegie Hall](#)

| [Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network](#)

| [National Guild for Community Arts Education](#)

| [Austin Classical Guitar](#)

| [Performing Statistics](#)

As this topic is wide-ranging and continues to evolve, AEP encourages state leaders, arts and education organizations and other stakeholders to share their work and contributions in this field.

# About the Arts Education Partnership

AEP is a national coalition of more than 100 education, arts, cultural, government, business and philanthropic organizations. AEP has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education since 1995 and is administered by Education Commission of the States.

