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Report:

Teachers in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice

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Juvenile Justice Programs

This report, focusing on the number of teachers in Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice facilities, was written by Patricia Connell, J.D., for the John Howard Association of Illinois and is based upon observations reported by teams of volunteer citizens who visited Illinois Youth Centers from 2002 until October 2007.

The John Howard Association of Illinois provides critical public oversight of the state's prisons, jails, and juvenile correctional facilities. As it has for more than a century, the Association promotes fair, humane, and effective sentencing and correctional policies, addresses inmate concerns, and provides Illinois citizens and decision-makers with information needed to improve criminal and juvenile justice.

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Teachers in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice

The purpose of this report is to update legislative leaders and the public on the status of the schools operated at each of the eight Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice facilities. This report expands upon information presented by the John Howard Association of Illinois to the Illinois House of Representatives Juvenile Justice Reform Committee on October 10, 2007.

Since July 2006, the John Howard Association of Illinois has been engaged in a program of monitoring the new Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice, an activity sponsored by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of its Juvenile Justice Models for Change initiative. Association staff members are currently in the midst of a second round of evaluative visits and an assessment of conditions, staffing, and performance in terms of the goals of the Department's enabling legislation.

In the course of our first year of work with the new Department of Juvenile Justice, we encountered a number of systemic issues which we have previously highlighted to the members of the Juvenile Justice Reform Committee and other policy makers in a series of reports and letters. Our first published report, The Challenge of Change: Illinois' Secure Facilities for Youth Under the New Department of Juvenile Justice, focused on conditions at IYC Joliet at the time of the creation of the new Department and reported on the Department's educational program. A memorandum written in October 2006 for legislative leaders and advocates raised concerns about a lack of management staff, training of staff, incorporation of Balanced and Restorative Justice Principles, and the challenges of constructing an effective aftercare system, among other issues. This memo was followed up with letters to Governor Blagojevich and legislative leaders in May of 2007. Executive Director, Malcolm Young, appeared before the Committee and presented oral testimony and a written statement on June 20, 2007. Throughout this year, education, and specifically shortages of teachers at IYC facilities, has been a principle concern, and so it remains today.

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Classroom education is perhaps the most important and effective agent for change in the lives of youth committed to the care of the Department of Juvenile Justice. Boys and girls enrolled in school spend more time in classes than in any other activity. Observers from the John Howard Association who visit the youth correctional facilities have been struck by the high level of attention the students give their teachers and the individualized teaching methods employed. Both are credited with producing striking results for many residents including educational gains of years as measured by standardized testing and high levels of passage on the high school equivalency test.

And yet for too many youth and for many years there have been an inadequate number of teachers and other resources in the schools operated at Illinois Youth Centers. The teacher shortage is sufficient to have denied some students a basic education, and in certain instances, fails to meet the requirements of state law.

The Illinois School Code provides that “whoever has custody or control of any child between the ages of 7 and 17 years... shall cause such child to attend ... public school.” 105 ILCS 5/26-1. It further provides that the school day must be at least 300 minutes excluding lunch. 105 ILCS 5/18-8.05. In addition, federal law and state statute provide that all youth who qualify under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act are entitled to education through their 21st birthday if they have not yet received a high school diploma. 105 ILCS 5/26-2.

All education for both adults and children confined in secure institutions by the state (Department of Corrections and the new Department of Juvenile Justice) is provided by School District 428 which had been operated by the Illinois Department of Corrections. This entity, established by state statute, has the responsibility to offer primary, secondary, vocational, adult, special and advanced education to all inmates and wards under the age of 21 who have not attained a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. 105 ILCS 5/13-40. In July 2006, the responsibility for the administration of School District 428 was transferred to the new Department of Juvenile Justice.

The enabling legislation for the new Department of Juvenile Justice makes it clear that the Department is responsible for increasing the competencies of those committed to its care, and nowhere is that more likely to occur than in the educational setting. In our increasingly complex world, vocational, technical and advanced academic skills are crucial to provide youth an opportunity to enter the work force and become productive functioning citizens. Many years ago youth committed to the Juvenile Division of the Department of Corrections were able to access college courses through community colleges which taught classes at many facilities. Others attended post high school technical and vocational institutions outside the institutions. Sadly, these options have been eliminated at all but one facility: youth at IYC Harrisburg are still able to attend college classes through the Blackhawk Area Community College. These classes are taught inside the facility and no youth leave the grounds for education or training.

Our report emphasizes that the lack of educational opportunities and critical teacher shortages predates the creation of the new Department. A one-day snap shot of educational vacancies existing in November 2004 showed 169 open positions at all levels, including school administration, within the Illinois Department of Corrections. At juvenile facilities the vacancies included 44 teachers and vocational instructors (16 elementary teachers, 13 secondary teachers, 11 special education teachers, and 4 vocational instructors); 4 librarians, 7 administrators (principals and assistant principals)

and 6 office coordinators. This total of 61 vacancies, more than one third of the total vacancies throughout the entire District 428, existed at the eight juvenile facilities in a Department with a total of 36 adult and juvenile institutions.

Since 2002 the John Howard Association visiting teams have tracked a continuing pattern of shortages of classroom teachers at youth facilities. This data is presented in the table attached to this report.

For the year 2007 the ratios of students to teachers are the following:

Institution	Youth	Teachers	Ratio
IYC Chicago	103	5	21: 1
IYC Harrisburg	296	36	8: 1
IYC Joliet	246	19	13: 1
IYC Kewanee	263	8	33: 1
IYC Murphysboro	110	8	14: 1
IYC Pere Marquette	21	3	7: 1
IYC St. Charles	328	17	19: 1
IYC Warrenville	101	5	20: 1

The high student-teacher ratio only begins to tell the story.

- At the time we made our 2007 visits only four of the eight institutions had a principal.
- “Filled” positions do not always translate into a teacher in a classroom. In June at IYC St. Charles two of the seventeen teachers on staff were on long term leave, had not been in the school in months, and were not soon expected back. The actual student-teacher ratio was closer to 22 to 1.
- Due to a chronic lack of clerical staff at most institutions principals or other facility administrators perform clerical tasks in addition to supervising teaching.
- At smaller facilities even a single vacancy can result in a critical deficiency. For example IYC Pere Marquette has no vocational instructor and thus cannot offer instruction despite having a classroom fully equipped to teach nail care which could lead young women to careers in the community as certified nail technicians.

On the other hand, not all youth are deemed “eligible” for classroom education, effectively reducing the number of youth for whom classrooms and teachers are technically required. Several policies, the wisdom of which may be open to question, are in play. The Department of Juvenile Justice classifies youth as “eligible” or “ineligible” for classroom teaching for several reasons:

- Students who have earned a high school diploma or a GED have “completed” the educational program and are no longer “eligible” for educational programming.

- At some facilities, students who are over 18 who have not been classified as needing special education services can opt out of classroom academics to perform paid work assignments.
- Youth in “Reception and Classification” do not attend school and do not become “eligible” until they reach their “permanent” institution.
- Many youth involved in therapeutic programming (e.g., sex offender treatment or mental health treatment) attend school part-time with the expectation that they will participate in treatment programming the rest of the day.

It is clear that desired policy changes which would increase the number of youth “eligible” for classroom instruction can only be supported by the addition of teaching and educational staff in School District 428.

Measured by student-teacher ratios alone, teachers are unevenly distributed throughout the system. For example, IYC Harrisburg with a population of roughly 300 has 36 teachers, while IYC Kewanee with a population of over 250 has just 8. Consider the following student-teacher ratios as we observed them over five years:

Facilities ranked by average student-teacher ratio 2002-2007	
9:1	Harrisburg
11:1	Murphysboro
12:1	Pere Marquette
13:1	Joliet
14:1	Warrenville
16:1	St. Charles
26:1	Kewanee
28:1	Chicago

The three lowest ratios are found at IYC Harrisburg (9:1), IYC Murphysboro (11:1) and IYC Pere Marquette (12:1). In contrast, IYC Chicago has the highest average ratio at 28 youth to 1 teacher followed closely behind with IYC Kewanee with 25 youth to 1 teacher. Somewhere in between are IYC St. Charles with an average of 16 youth to 1 teacher, IYC Warrenville with an average of 14 youth to 1 teacher and IYC Joliet with an average of 13 youth to 1 teacher. While not nearly as high, all of these ratios are above the Department of Juvenile Justice’s professed standard of 1 teacher to 12 youth in regular education classes and the more stringent 1 teacher to 8 youth in special education classes.

The facilities with the highest student-teacher ratios are simply failing to provide the minimum classroom education. Youth at IYC Kewanee were receiving as little as 7.5 hours of education a week in 2006. And in 2007 some youngsters at IYC Chicago, and Warrenville and all youth at Kewanee, and St. Charles were enrolled part-time.

The actual number of teachers present and teaching in any one facility can be more an historical accident or the result of outside economic factors than the result of conscious planning. If a teacher retires or resigns, and the overall number of teachers in the District has been reduced for budgetary reasons, it is likely that the position will remain unfilled.

Some facilities have a difficult time getting and keeping teachers because salaries set by District 428, while quite competitive in some parts of the state may be well below the market rate in Chicago or the collar counties. But at IYC Kewanee the high student-teacher ratio is probably better explained by its history than by higher teacher salaries in the community. IYC Kewanee was originally opened in November 2001 with only 6 of 18 teaching positions filled, an insufficient number of teachers to provide full day schooling for its residents. Under the regimen originally designed for Kewanee youth attended school half days and spent the remainder of the normal school day in therapeutic treatment. But in short order the facility began providing more treatment and therapy on weekends and during non-school hours. No adjustments were made to add the teaching staff needed to provide full-time classes for residents during the week. Instead, the Illinois Department of Corrections added one or two teachers each year, an incremental increase often offset by resignations or transfers.

IYC Harrisburg has achieved the lowest student-teacher ratio by starting with an historically larger faculty and by a uniquely successful effort to obtain outside funds and volunteers to expand their teaching staff. The school obtained a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor which provides an additional math and reading teacher, bringing their total number of teachers from 34 to 36 for a 9 to 1 student-teacher ratio. In addition the grant provides two "Workforce Instructors" and two "Career Counselors" who assist youth in job readiness and job placement thereby further enriching the facility's ability to prepare its residents for a successful transition to the workforce in the community to which they will return. IYC Harrisburg and Chicago both have AmeriCorp volunteers who provide help with reading and tutoring for the GED test. These additional resources are the fruits of hard work by a full-time, well-qualified and highly motivated principal.

A significant cause of teacher shortages is the length of time required by the hiring process. Much of this time is not under the Department's control, since the State's Office of Central Management Services (CMS) posts position descriptions and reviews and clears all applicants. The length of time it takes from the initial posting of a position to the offer of employment is at least three months. Additional time is taken to run background checks and do pre-employment screening. By the time successful applicants are told they have been hired, many have accepted other jobs. The efforts to fill all teaching positions by the Department of Juvenile Justice requires additional administrative staff in the Department and executive action to streamline and accelerate the process at CMS.

As striking as the number of unfilled teacher positions is the overall decrease in the number of authorized teaching positions. For state fiscal year 2008 (July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008) the authorized number for all educational positions (includes teachers, librarians, principals and clerical) is 118. The total institutional population was 1437 on June 30, 2007. Even if all 118 positions were filled, youth within the Department would not be assured full-time enrollment in classes.

The Department is currently undergoing an analysis of staffing needs to determine the minimal number of educational positions needed to provide full time schooling for “eligible” students. This analysis is based on the assumption that youth who have received a GED or high school diploma are “ineligible” for additional educational programming. It is expected that even with this minimal goal the analysis will show a need for additional educational staff. But what is truly needed is a thorough examination of the post-institutional needs of all youth committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice. Most will be returning to communities in which they will be expected to pursue post-secondary education in order to become self-sufficient. The Department of Juvenile Justice could be the place in which the youngster begins this process. But this reasonable, legislatively mandated goal cannot possibly be achieved without the expansion of the curriculum and teaching staff at all facilities.

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Educational staffing at the Department of Juvenile Justice is always somewhat fluid, and there are recent positive developments. Two facilities recently informed us that they were in the process of hiring new teachers. (IYC Pere Marquette has gotten permission to post its vocational instructor position, and IYC Kewanee has permission to hire 16 educators.) Three of the four principal openings are now filled; IYC Kewanee is the only facility without a full time principal. IYC Harrisburg continues with its robust and generously staffed educational program. High percentages of youth at all institutions obtain their GED certificates. Dedicated staff and volunteers at some institutions have assisted youth in their efforts to enroll in college and other post secondary education. But these individual successes must be institutionalized and made more uniform throughout the system so that all youth have the best possible chance of increasing their competencies and returning to their communities more capable of being self-sufficient and contributing members than when they.

**Resident and Teacher Counts
Illinois Youth Facilities
2002-2007**

As Reported to the John Howard Association Visiting Teams

	2002			2003			2004			2005			2006			2007			SUM		
	youth	teachers	ratio	youth	teachers	ratio	youth	teachers	ratio	youth	teachers	ratio	youth	teachers	ratio	youth	teachers	ratio	youth	teachers	ratio
Chicago	107	8	13.4	112	3	37.3	54	1	54.0	81	3	27.0	85	5	17.0	103	5	20.6	542	25	21.7
Harrisburg				301	37	8.1							365	34	10.7	296	36	8.2	962	107	9.0
Joliet	284	31	9.2	282	23	12.3	293	24	12.2	302	21	14.4	260	15	17.3	247	19	13.0	1,668	133	12.5
Kewanee	156	6	26.0	163	7	23.3	162			173	9	19.2	205	7	29.3	263	8	32.9	1,122	37	30.3
Murphysboro				92	9	10.2							80	9	8.9	110	8	13.8	282	26	10.8
Pere Marquette	44	6	7.3	59	2	29.5				25	4	6.3	39	4	9.8	21	3	7.0	188	19	9.9
St. Charles	394	30	13.1	438	22	19.9	405	35	11.6	349	21	16.6	356	27	13.2	328	17	19.3	2,270	152	14.9
Warrenville				107	13	8.2	94	6	15.7	80	6	13.3	90	7	12.9	101	5	20.2	472	37	12.8
Total	985	81	12.2	1,554	116	13.4	1,008	66	15.3	1,010	64	15.8	1,480	108	13.7	1,469	101	14.5	7,506	536	14.0

This table was drawn from information reported to visiting teams on the day on which a particular visit occurred. The number of youth in IYC facilities changes frequently and the number of teachers on duty also changes over time. Consequently, these numbers and the ratio of teachers to students vary over the course of the year. For example, we visited IYC Kewanee in 2007 on two occasions; in June there were 270 youth present with 10 teachers, while in September there were 263 youth and just 8 teachers. Visits to IYC Warrenville in 2007 showed 101 youth and 5 teachers in May and 76 youth and 4 teachers present in September. Based on on-going monitoring and communications with IYC staff, we believe that the numbers reported here are representative of general teaching levels at IYC facilities, even to the extent that the one teacher reported at IYC Chicago in 2004 reflects a situation that existed at that facility for many months.