

# Education and justice involvement in Hennepin County

People's experiences with the educational system and the justice system are often intertwined. Many of those involved in the justice system have unique educational needs that go unmet, starting in childhood. This can limit their access to successful educational attainment, which can impact whole families, communities and future generations.

Hennepin County's Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCCR) is addressing these disparities through education-specific programming. DOCCR programs offer both prevention and intervention strategies for young people, adults, caregivers and families.

## Field Services Client Programming

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## National background

The COVID-19 pandemic brought dramatic shifts in the educational landscape across the United States. While these shifts have affected all students, systemically marginalized youth and families are impacted the most, according to [CDC research from 2021](#).

For decades, the Department of Justice's [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#) has contended that a link exists between delinquency, crime and academic disengagement. They note that this link is specifically "welded to reading failure."

[National-level data](#) related to literacy and justice shows:

- 85% of youth who interface with the juvenile court system nationally are functionally low literate.
- Seven out of 10 people in American prisons can't read at a functional level.
- Literacy education can reduce recidivism rates by more than 30% among formerly incarcerated populations.

A 2019 study by the [Education Research & Data Center](#) provides additional insights on the disparities:

"Court-involved students differed from court non-involved students in many observable ways. In particular, students who came into contact with the court systems disproportionately experienced adverse social, economic, and physical conditions such as poverty, housing instability, school mobility, special education needs, and in-school disciplinary sanctions. For many court-involved students, these adverse conditions were evident since 6th or 7th grade, i.e., two years prior to their court involvement."

Based on this data, there are opportunities to better identify and serve at-risk students as a strategy to prevent later justice involvement.

## Local background

The [Minnesota Department of Health](#) reports that 17% of all Minnesota youth ages 18 and under experience the incarceration or justice involvement of a parent or caregiver. The resulting trauma for children has been linked to adverse impacts on attention, memory, information processing, the ability to learn to read, and more.

In Hennepin County alone, more than 22,000 residents receive community-based supervision from DOCCR, on average each year. Approximately 4% of those residents are youth ages 18 and under.

[Educational Outcomes for County-Involved Youth](#), a 2014 study sponsored by Hennepin County, revealed considerable educational disparities for Hennepin County youth involved in the criminal legal system. At the time of the study, youth on community-based supervision, also called probation, had a 25% six-year high school graduation rate.

In addition, 68% received special education services, as compared to the statewide special education involvement rate of 15%. Attendance rates for youth on probation begin declining under the 90% threshold in middle school. This chronic absenteeism is a factor in the low graduation rate. The youth also attended an average of 10 schools by the time they reached high school age.

The 2014 study offers the most current and targeted data on educational disparities in Hennepin County. This data has proven invaluable in DOCCR's efforts to build a continuum of education support for youth and families who are systems-connected in our jurisdiction.

### **The role of Field Services Client Programming**

Hennepin County DOCCR is working to increase awareness of the disparities, as well as access to resources that improve outcomes at the intersection of justice, education and public safety. This includes creating a dedicated role for an education resource liaison. This position is part of the broader Field Services Client Programming (FSCP) division, which DOCCR created in 2022 to enhance resources for residents impacted by the criminal justice system.

FSCP deploys a wide variety of education strategies and programming. These programs are rooted in recommendations for academic success in the 2014 educational outcomes report mentioned above.

Those recommendations include:

- Focus on family stabilization and support for caregivers to promote healthy child development.
- Engage with metro-wide initiatives to ensure youth have a system of educational support.
- Develop alternative pathways to high school graduation and equivalencies; create an expanded educational toolbox of resources designed to support high school completion.
- Facilitate academic interventions for youth ages 11 to 14, when school attendance statistically begins to decline.
- Develop county programming with organizations that have knowledge and expertise in social emotional learning and building self-efficacy.
- Dedicate staff to assist youth and families, and support county workers, in navigating complex county and school systems.

Based on these strategies, and in partnership with other Hennepin County areas, FSCP supports the following education programs:

#### **Plus program**

In 2010, Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) piloted the Alternative Learning Center (ALC) Plus program. The program was designed to help county-involved youth (including those connected to DOCCR), ages 14 through 24, graduate from high school or earn a GED, attend college or employment training, and plan for a career. In 2018, ALC Plus became the Plus program. Plus continues to offer site-specific academic case management and wraparound support for enrolled youth.

#### **Academic Credit Recovery**

Inadequate high school credit earning affects 15% of the general high school population. Students of color and students who experience additional barriers to educational access are affected at dramatically higher rates. To help address these

disparities, Hennepin County requested proposals in spring 2024 from community providers interested in offering academic credit recovery services. In partnership with Education Support Services, DOCCR is funding and deploying services resulting from this RFP for county-connected clients, beginning with the 2024-25 academic year.

### **Diploma Connect**

Diploma Connect is an adult high school diploma program located in Project for Pride in Living's Career Center. The adult diploma is a high school diploma issued by Minnesota to anyone over the age of 19 who shows mastery of the college and career readiness state standards. The Diploma Connect program helps adult learners achieve high school graduation equivalency through competency-based learning versus standardized testing.

### **Pathways to Success and the Prodigy Program**

Pathways to Success is an academic reengagement program for county-involved young people, ages 18-24 years. Pathways seeks to increase high school graduation/GED completion rates and to improve career exploration and achievement for involved youth.

Pathway's Prodigy Program deploys an Adult Basic Education (ABE)-approved employment readiness curriculum to help young people explore interests, skills, education, professional training and various work environments.

### **Education Support Services**

Education Support Services (ESS) is partnering with Hennepin County youth, families and community professionals to support student engagement and to address disparities in the educational system. ESS provides mentoring and individualized tutoring for students, help for families in navigating the school system, and more.

### **Adult GED support through ESS**

In partnership with Education Support Services, DOCCR Field Services Client Programming offers adults on community-based supervision access to individualized GED preparation and no-cost GED testing.

### **Books for youth and families**

Sharing and engaging with youth around books is an excellent way to support literacy skill building. Field Services Client Programming provides young adult fiction, nonfiction and graphic novels for young people involved with juvenile probation in Hennepin County.

### **LIT(eracy) KITS**

DOCCR partners with Hennepin County Libraries and community organizations in distributing free books, evidence-based literacy support tools, and learning resources to children and families connected to the department. Our LIT KITS provide intergenerational touchpoints that can improve core learning outcomes for families impacted by the criminal justice system.

### **Summary**

The work of Field Services Client Programming is rooted in independent research, data from current programs, and evidence at the state and federal levels. We recognize the need to address educational disparities experienced by justice-involved youth, adults and families. In response, we continue to grow partnerships with county departments, contracted services and community members to identify needs and provide innovative programs. Our goal is to make high-impact educational resources accessible to all the residents we serve.