THE CROSSOVER YOUTH PRACTICE MODEL (CYPM)

CYPM in Brief: Improving Educational Outcomes for Crossover Youth

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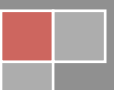Elizabeth Barnett, MSW, Ph.D.

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The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) at the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy developed the Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) to improve outcomes for youth who are involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The model advances a research-based approach that child welfare, juvenile justice and related agencies can use to better address the needs of these youth and enhance their life outcomes. The term "crossover youth" refers to all youth who have experienced some form of abuse or neglect and who engage in delinquent behaviors regardless of their involvement in the systems. This brief is the third in a series that addresses important issues faced by crossover youth and the systems that serve them.
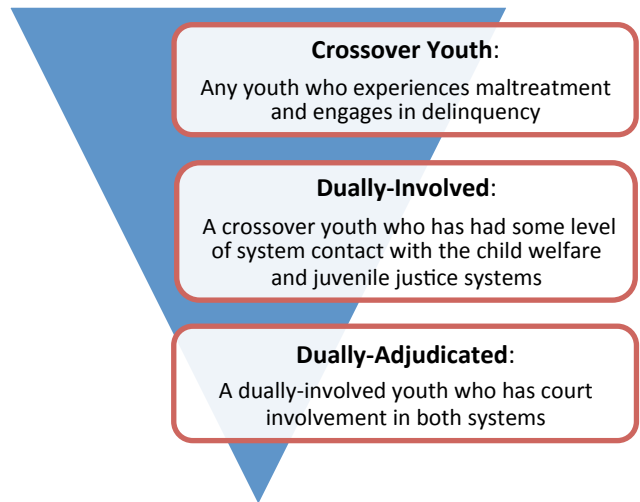
Crossover Youth: Any youth who experiences maltreatment and engages in delinquency

Dually-Involved: A crossover youth who has had some level of system contact with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems

Dually-Adjudicated: A dually-involved youth who has court involvement in both systems

Figure 1: Definitions

Improving Educational Outcomes

A quality education is an invaluable asset in a child's life. Educational attainment is an important factor in improving a child's future income, health status, employment opportunities, and housing stability (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007; Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2006; Lochner & Moretti, 2001). All children deserve access to a quality education. Unfortunately, children who are involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems face a number of significant challenges when it comes to achieving positive educational outcomes. Policy-makers, educators, and child-serving agencies need to be aware of these challenges and make appropriate efforts to support improving the educational outcomes of this unique population. To aid in these efforts, this issue brief discusses:

- The relationships between childhood maltreatment, delinquency, and educational outcomes;
- The ways in which the CYPM addresses educational outcomes;
- How jurisdictions that have employed the CYPM have sought to improve educational outcomes for crossover youth.

Maltreatment, Delinquency, and Education

Children who are involved in the child welfare or the juvenile justice system often struggle to succeed in the classroom. Research shows that maltreated children are at a higher risk than their peers of having a lower grade point average, missing school, repeating grades, experiencing behavior problems at school, and being involved in special education programs (Romano, Babchishin, Marquis, & Frechette, 2014; Stone, 2007; Leiter & Johnsen, 1997). Similarly, delinquent youth exhibit reduced educational attainment when compared to their non-delinquent peers, and youth who have been incarcerated exhibit both "substantially lower high school completion rates and higher adult incarceration rates" (Aizer & Doyle, 2015; Tanner & Grady, 1999). The research is similarly clear that children who are known to both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are likely to experience educational difficulties, need special education services, drop out of school, and have mental or behavioral health issues that negatively impact school performance (Leone & Weinberg, 2012; Gonsoulin & Read, 2011). Two recent studies of crossover youth in Los Angeles County found that 51% of youth who were enrolled in school were either not regularly attending school or truant; 47% had received a suspension due to behavior issues in the school; 49% were not performing well academically; and 21% had a learning disability (Herz & Ryan, 2008; Herz, Ryan & Bilchik, 2010). A similar review of crossover youth in Arizona showed that 67% of youth on probation had a history of truancy, 59% experienced academic problems, and 23% exhibited signs of a learning disability (Ryan & Bilchik, 2010; Halemba, Siegel, Lord, & Zawacki, 2004).

The relationship between maltreatment, delinquency, and educational problems is well documented and complex. Difficulties in the classroom may result from the same social and environmental factors that often correlate with maltreatment and delinquency. For example, research suggests that childhood poverty may be a causal factor in all three events (Cancian, Yang, & Slack, 2013; Ludwig, Duncan, & Hirschfield, 2001; Pagani, Boulerice, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 1999; Brown, Cohen, Johnson, & Salzinger, 1998). This relationship suggests that poor educational outcomes coincide with maltreatment and delinquency, but are not necessarily caused by these events. However, some researchers indicate that poor school performance may also stem from the experiences of child maltreatment and delinquency themselves (VanZomeren-Dohm et al., 2013; Brown et al., 1998; Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). Additionally, as described below, interactions with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems themselves can disrupt a child's education, increase the likelihood that a child's educational needs fall through the cracks, and expose that youth to a high-risk peer group (Leone & Weinberg, 2012).

Trauma and the Disruptive Effects of System Involvement

Exposure to traumatic events, such as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and exposure to violence, can have a lasting impact on the brain and social development of young people. For these youth, the effects of trauma often exhibit in academic difficulties and impaired social and behavioral competences (Covington, 2016; Cooper, 2007). Several studies on the prevalence of childhood trauma suggest that 50% of youth in the child welfare system and between 60% and 90% of youth in the juvenile justice system have experienced traumatic events at some point in their lives. This is also true for 83% to 90% of youth who live in neighborhoods with high levels of violent crime (Cooper, 2007).

Traumatization can influence educational outcomes in several ways. Trauma may leave youth feeling betrayed and distrustful of adults and authority figures, including school administrators and teachers (Bicknell-Hentges & Lynch, 2009). These students may be less likely to work with teachers who are acting in the best interest of their education. Maltreated children may learn from the violence at home and externalize their trauma through similar disruptive and aggressive behavior at school (Windom & Wilson, 2015; Brown et al., 1998; Finkelhor & Brown, 1985). Additionally, the trauma of maltreatment and child welfare involvement leaves youth more prone to behavioral health issues, including mental health and substance use disorders (Mallet, 2013; Bender, 2010; Kilpatrick et al., 2003). In turn, behavioral health issues are associated with lower academic test scores, lower graduation rates, and anti-social behavior (Breslau, Sampson, & Kessler, 2008; King, Meehan, Trim, & Chassin, 2006).

To counter-act these effects, policy-makers, educators, and education systems should be trauma-informed. To serve youth in a manner that is considered trauma-informed, practitioners should be trained in the causes of trauma and the pervasive impact it can have on a youth's development. This allows educators and others working with youth to identify the symptoms of traumatization and use that knowledge to contextualize students' feelings and behaviors. Being trauma-informed can also help systems avoid actions or procedures that have the potential to trigger or re-traumatize a student (Covington, 2016). The threats of re-traumatization are especially potent for youth who are attending school in juvenile detention facilities. In every school setting, however, the impact of trauma on brain and social development make it an unavoidable issue for systems that seek to improve the educational outcomes of maltreated and delinquent youth.

Maltreatment and delinquency can contribute to poorer educational outcomes through other mechanisms as well. For instance, child welfare and juvenile justice systems are vested with the power to remove children from their homes when necessary. In the child welfare system, this is done to protect youth from potentially dangerous situations and improve their overall well-being. In the juvenile justice system, a removal may be made in an effort to protect public

safety, mitigate the risk of a youth not appearing in court, or to provide treatment not otherwise available in the community. While these removals may be well intentioned by both systems, involvement and removal by these systems is often traumatic and can cause disruptions to a child's normal routine and education.

Children placed in the foster care system for an extended period of time are likely to experience several home placements (Leone & Weinberg, 2012). This instability requires children to adjust to different rules and responsibilities whenever they move to new homes and schools. Research suggests that it can take four to six months for a child to recover academically after transferring to a new school (Yu, Day, & Williams, 2002). These new challenges, compounded with the existing emotional and social issues with which the foster child may be dealing, make it more difficult for students to concentrate and succeed in the classroom. Mobility is also a challenge for justice-involved youth, who may miss school due to arrest and court appearances or alternate between schools in the community and schools housed in detention facilities. Once in these facilities, youth may have not access to special education services and vocational and academic programing with appropriate behavioral support (Umpierre, Dedel, Marrow, & Pakseresht, 2016). As a result of these compounding challenges, children who experience high placement mobility are at risk of low graduation rates, low standardized test scores, and increased behavioral problems (Leone & Weinberg, 2012; Burley & Halpern, 2001; Zima et al., 2000; Astone & McLanahan, 1994).

Historically, child welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems have not sufficiently collaborated with one another to ensure that crossover youths' educational needs are fully met. In many jurisdictions, inadequate communication between systems results in delayed school enrollment and delivery of educational services. Incomplete academic records and delays in record transfers, for example, have been cited as issues in the inadequate assignment of education services for students in foster care and juvenile justice environments (Green, 2014; Leone & Weinberg, 2012; Stone, 2007; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2004; Parrish et al., 2001). These challenges can be severe for youth involved in correctional facilities. Gaps in information sharing can especially challenging for crossover youth who require and are entitled to special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Schools may be temporarily unaware of a student's needs or Individualized Education Program (IEP), preventing them from engaging in the special education programs. Alternatively, school systems may provide child welfare and justice-involved youth with special education services they do not require based on incomplete information or assumptions about the population (Leone & Weinberg, 2012).

Beyond information sharing, many systems also struggle with creating educational environments that recognize and are sensitive to the unique needs of the crossover youth

population. Involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems may stigmatize a youth as a "problem child." When these children act out or exhibit anti-social behavior, the response of school officials may be unduly harsh—further contributing to a cycle of negative youth behavior. Children involved in foster care, for example, are removed from the classroom, either through suspensions or expulsions, at a much higher rate than their peers (Scherr, 2007). Once pulled from the classroom, it becomes harder for students to stay on top of their schoolwork and engaged in their education. This type of "exclusionary discipline" is associated with poorer education outcomes and an increased risk of delinquency (Gallegos & White, 2013).

While the literature remains mixed, some researchers have suggested that the presence of school resource officers (SROs) on a school campus can contribute to an increase in exclusionary discipline and lead students through the "school-to-prison pipeline." Having SROs in the school may have the effect of criminalizing behaviors that otherwise could be resolved through a school's internal disciplinary procedures (Fisher & Hennessy, 2015; Theriot, 2009; Hirschfield, 2008; Beger, 2003; Schreck, Miller, & Gibson, 2003). Training SROs in trauma and crisis response can reduce school violence and help school officials better respond to the needs of at-risk students (Rosiak, 2015; James, 2011; Finkelhor & Jones, 2006). In general, unduly harsh punishments can cause resentment and distrust towards teachers and other authority figures and expose youth to the other high-risk peers—a situation that increases the risk of delinquency and other behavioral problems (Henneberger, 2013; Cameron & Sheppard, 2006; Smith, Lizotte, Thornberry, & Krohn, 1995). Keeping students in the classroom allows youth to benefit from many of the protective factors schools can provide. Schools can offer students a safe environment to learn important academic, social, and decision-making skills (Farn & Adams, 2016). Educators and child-serving agencies must be aware and respectful of the experiences of this population while balancing the needs and safety of the other students. Failure to do so may contribute to delinquency, recidivism, and overall lower educational outcomes for this high-needs population.

Meeting the Needs of Crossover Youth to Improve Educational Outcomes

As indicated above, youth involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems face several barriers to academic success, including but not limited to:

- A lack of parental or family support
- The traumatic experiences of maltreatment and removal from home (e.g., foster care placement, incarceration)
- The social stigma of being a "problem child"
- A high-risk peer group
- Inadequate or improperly assigned education services

- Mental health and substance use disorders

These challenges can build upon each other, making it increasingly difficult for the crossover population to achieve classroom success. There are several tools available to educators and practitioners who seek to improve educational outcomes for these youth. Early intervention, youth and family engagement, mentoring, and other evidence-based treatment programs have been shown to positively support educational attainment for crossover youth[1]. However, for these tools to be most effective, it is important that education practitioners understand the trauma that crossover youth often experience and coordinate services effectively across systems.

As youth are generally involved in the education system before they are known to the child welfare and juvenile justice agencies, schools are on the front line of identifying problems at home and referring students to necessary services. Unfortunately, educators, counselors, school resource officers, and administrators often have little training in identifying trauma and are unsure how to best support these students. By providing trainings and clearly defining roles and responsibilities, school systems can assist these practitioners in becoming trauma-informed (Alisic, 2012; James et al., 2011; Ko et al., 2008). Some school systems have developed specific crisis response programs that allow for the early detection and intervention of youth undergoing traumatic experiences at home (Ko et al., 2008). For those youth being educated within the juvenile justice system, creating trauma-informed facilities reduces the risk of re-traumatizing incarcerated youth and contributing to a cycle of behavioral challenges (Burrell, 2013). By becoming trauma-informed, a school promotes a culture of safety and support that helps students work through the impact of their trauma and better focus on their education.

In addition to becoming trauma-informed, the child welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems must collaborate effectively to serve the crossover population. Jurisdictions should clearly define the responsibilities of the child welfare or juvenile justice systems in monitoring the education of a crossover youth. Cross-systems workgroups can help jurisdictions define agencies' roles and develop memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to codify these responsibilities (Leone & Weinberg, 2012). Another strategy for cross-systems collaboration is the employment of education liaisons. These liaisons ensure that someone is tracking a youth's educational progress and advocating for his or her educational needs across all systems. The liaison acts as an important adult voice for students who may not have a parent at home to speak on their behalf (Zetlin et al., 2006). By defining agency roles and ensuring that a child's needs are being advocated – in conjunction with becoming trauma-informed – school systems are taking crucial steps in ensuring that youth are receiving the appropriate education services they need to succeed in the classroom.

[1] For more information on these practices, please see *Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare System* by Peter Leone and Lois Weinberg.

Crossover youth face a dynamic and complex set of barriers when it comes to achieving positive educational outcomes. The CYPM assists jurisdictions, practitioners, and child-serving agencies in improving educational outcomes by coordinating care and recognizing the strengths, needs, and requirements of this population.

What the CYPM Recommends

One overarching goal of the CYPM is the reduction in the number of youth crossing over and becoming dually-involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. This requires CYPM jurisdictions to identify and, if necessary, address the policies that may be contributing to a "school-to-prison pipeline" in their community. The CYPM recommends the creation of a Prevention Workgroup that can perform a "hot-spot" analysis to determine common sources of delinquency referrals. If the data suggest that a high number of youth are crossing over due to arrests at school, it may be the result of specific school policies and practices that push them into the juvenile justice system. The next section of this brief discusses two CYPM jurisdictions that enhanced their prevention activities in schools to reduce instances of youth becoming dually-involved.

For those youth who do cross over into multiple systems, the lack of education stability can be a significant challenge. For this reason, the CYPM calls for jurisdictions to engage with partners in the education system early and often throughout a youth's case. School partners must be aware of a child's situation at home and the challenges he or she may be facing in order to provide supports within the school setting. This involves educating teachers and administrators on what it means for a child to be involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. Understanding this process can help teachers anticipate potential changes in a student's situation. It also provides additional context to the challenges a student may be facing and the resulting behavior. At the point of child welfare removal, notifying a school counselor (or designee) about the student's placements and how they can work with caseworkers to stabilize a student's experience may reduce the likelihood of a youth crossing over in the juvenile justice system at a later date.

Once a youth is involved in both systems, the CYPM recommends that representatives from the education system be key partners in the multi-disciplinary teams that will convene to address the youth's needs throughout the life of the dependency and delinquency cases. These teams meet to inform the decision to divert the case or proceed with formal juvenile justice involvement, conduct an aligned assessment process, develop case plans, and monitor and assess the youth's progress. On these teams, an education representative can ensure that a youth's educational needs are always being considered in addition to other treatment and case needs.

Whenever possible, schools should work to ensure that youth are able to maintain "home school" enrollment should a student require out-of-home placement. This may involve coordinating the procurement of transportation from the youth's new placement to his or her original school. If a youth does need to transfer schools, practices must be in place for the immediate enrollment in the new school and the immediate transfer of school records. The McKenney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act makes provisions for these recommendations for homeless youth and youth "awaiting foster care placement," as defined by school district policy. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008 extends some of these rights to youth in out-of-home care not covered by the McKenney-Vento Act (Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, 2010). Additionally, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law in December 2015, creates new protections to youth returning to community schools from the juvenile justice system. These include requirements to: conduct educational assessments for youth entering juvenile justice placement; facilitate timely record and credit transfers; plan for reentry while the youth is still in placement; and provide timely re-enrollment and higher-education opportunities for youth exiting placement (Juvenile Law Center, 2016). While these three laws provide important protections for a broad population of dually-involved youth, jurisdictions must be vigilant that the rights prescribed in the laws are being respected for all eligible students.

The CYPM also recommends that a youth's educational needs are considered in all permanency planning and transitions from system involvement. For youth who age out of the juvenile justice system, education outcomes can be particularly poor. Over 40% of aged-out-youth drop out of high school without earning a GED (Stewart, Lutz, & Herz, 2010). For this reason, jurisdictions that implement the CYPM should commit to ensuring that youth who leave their systems have access to independent living services, including college and higher education planning, to help prepare them to transition successfully to adulthood.

Jurisdictions that implement the CYPM and commit to addressing the educational needs of their youth have seen improvement in educational outcomes in their crossover population. In a review of the data collected in the first cohort of CYPM sites, 67% of jurisdictions showed improvement in at least one of three measured areas—school attendance, academic performance, and behavioral problems in the school setting. Overall, within one year of implementing the Model, sites saw a 12 percentage point decrease in the number of youth in their target population who had academic and/or behavior problems at school (Herz & Fontaine, 2013). The next section highlights two of these jurisdictions: Woodbury County, Iowa and Travis County, Texas. Each used various elements of the CYPM to address the educational needs of crossover youth and improve educational outcomes.

Perspectives from the Field

In 2010, Travis County, Texas and Woodbury County, Iowa partnered with CJJR to implement the CYPM in their communities. A key focus within the Model is the improvement of academic and behavioral problems for those crossover youth attending school. Behavior problems at school often result in arrest. For youth involved in the child welfare system, this event becomes the moment of crossover. In an effort to prevent crossing over, both jurisdictions focused their efforts on improving school responses to students' behavior. As part of the CYPM, sites are required to collect information on school enrollment, attendance, and graduation. According to the data collected within the first 15 months of their CYPM implementation, Travis County and Woodbury County demonstrated improvements in these areas.

School-to-Court Agreement

Woodbury County supports upwards of 18,000 public school students across six school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Prior to Woodbury County's implementation of the CYPM, school offenses accounted for a sizable portion of the total number of juvenile complaints filed each year. In 2010, 1,635 total juvenile complaints were filed in the county. Of those complaints, 511, or 31 percent, were the result of school-based offenses. By 2015, Woodbury County had decreased the number of school-based offenses to 155, or 18 percent of total juvenile complaints. (L. McNeil, personal communication, Feb. 20, 2015). This reduction was achieved in part due to collaboration spurred by the CYPM process.

The schools, police, and probation departments worked together to develop several strategies for dealing with problem behavior inside the school setting. One of these strategies, known as the School-to-Court Agreement, delineates the responsibility for involving police officers in school-related behavior problems for students who may be eligible for criminal citations. Police officers issue these citations when there is probable cause that a student's behavior is a public criminal offense. Recognizing that students do better academically when they are able to remain in school and are not subject to criminal penalties when they behave poorly, the School-to-Court Agreement clarifies the role of school officials in dealing with a student's behavioral issues. Prior to the implementation of the School-to-Court Agreement, there was not always a clear protocol that laid out the responsibility for involving police and issuing citations. The decision was often made by the school resource officer or a teacher. The new agreement developed a tiered intervention strategy that schools are required to follow in the event of a behavior problem. Ultimately, it is the school's principal that has the final say in the removal of any student from the campus. The only exception to this hierarchy occurs when school officials deem that an incident poses a clear threat to public safety. In that case both the SROs and the principal have the authority to make the determination about a student's removal.

Since the introduction of the School-to-Court Agreement, Woodbury County has seen reductions in the number of dropouts each year and increases in overall student attendance and performance. By clarifying roles and responsibilities, the school district is better able to make more uniform decisions regarding police involvement. Additionally, putting this decision in the hands of someone who may be more familiar with the individual child and his or her circumstances allows school officials to make more informed decisions about disciplinary action. Research suggests that SRO involvement has the potential to increase the use of exclusionary discipline. By clearly defining how and when police become involved with a student, Woodbury County schools are ensuring that disciplinary issues are handled internally within the school when appropriate and externally with the police and juvenile justice system when necessary.

Enlisting School Resource Officers and Court Appointed Special Advocates

Like Woodbury County, Travis County, Texas focused on defining the roles and responsibilities of key professionals involved in the lives of the region's vulnerable youth. This was part of a two-pronged strategy the county developed to address the educational needs and improve outcomes for crossover youth. The first effort focuses on strategies for preventing high-risk students from crossing over into the juvenile justice system. The second effort is designed to ensure that the educational needs of crossover youth remain a priority while their other needs—such as housing and mental health treatment—are being addressed.

With a focus on prevention, county leadership facilitated training for all of the school districts' SROs on the elements of the CYPM with an increased focus on the impact of trauma on maltreated youth. As a result of being trained in the psychosocial needs of at-risk youth, the SROs are able to adapt their practice philosophy from a law enforcement-focused response to a more trauma-informed collaborative response. Administrators report that this led to a reduction in exclusionary discipline as a response to problem behaviors in the classroom. By limiting the use of arrests and expulsions to the most serious cases, high-risk students are less likely to prematurely enter the juvenile justice system. Instead, these students are able to stay enrolled in school and have the opportunity to improve their attendance, behavior, and academic performance.

The second prong of Travis County's approach involved formally assigning the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) the responsibility of monitoring the educational progress of each youth. As "education liaisons," CASAs must track all important information regarding school placement, attendance, record transfers, special needs, and behavioral issues. Judges can turn to the CASA as the expert on a youth's educational needs, and the CASA can serve as an important advocate for a youth who may not have other adults ensuring that their educational needs are met.

In Travis County, youth involved in the CYPM saw, on average, an increase in school attendance of 28 percentage points at the time of their case closures or one year (whichever came first) after their identification by both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Over that same period, CYPM youth as a group experienced an average 15-percentage point decrease in academic and/or behavioral problems at school.

Conclusion

A high quality education can have positive long-term effects on a child's life. It can lead to higher lifetime earnings, better job and housing stability, and even better health. Unfortunately, the educational needs of crossover youth can be overlooked while child-serving systems seek to address their safety, permanency, and well-being in other areas of their lives. Children who have been maltreated often have lower test scores and grade point averages than their peers. The trauma of their maltreatment can lead to distrust in their teachers and school administrators and can contribute to behavioral problems in the classroom. These behavioral problems can lead to exclusionary discipline and contact with police or SROs, which often further exacerbate behavioral issues and can accelerate a student's crossover into the juvenile justice system. Youth involved in either or both systems may find their education disrupted by multiple placements, court dates, treatments, or stays in detention or residential facilities.

The efforts in Woodbury County, Iowa and Travis County, Texas demonstrate how deliberate attention to crossover youths' educational needs can mitigate the potential harmful impact of maltreatment, delinquency, and system involvement. By working with the Crossover Youth Practice Model, both jurisdictions have been able to develop and implement policies and practices that prevent the unnecessary or inappropriate involvement of SROs and the justice system in the school setting. Additionally, Travis County's work with CASAs shows the value of education liaisons who can track a student's educational needs and serve as an advocate within the child-serving systems. Jurisdictions like Woodbury County and Travis County—that adopt the principles of the CYPM and establish the policies and practices to minimize the impact of system involvement on school performance—are taking important steps to ensure that crossover youth have the opportunity to enjoy the lifelong benefits of a quality education.

For more information about the Crossover Youth Practice Model, please visit http://cjjr.georgetown.edu.

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