

# **Education Placement Team**

## **Process Evaluation**

Prepared for the Family League of Baltimore City, Inc.

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## Introduction

According to the most recent estimates from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) (2011), on any given day, approximately 70,000 juveniles are held in residential placement facilities such as group homes, shelter, detention, and corrections facilities nationwide. In fiscal year 2011, nearly 6,400 youth were detained prior to adjudication in the state of Maryland, and approximately 39% of these detention admissions were from Baltimore City (DJS, 2011). Juveniles leaving detention, even after serving a short period of time, face a number of challenges upon reentering their communities, both immediate and long-term. Holman and Ziedenberg (2011) suggest that while in detention youth are at higher risk for mental illnesses, such as depression; after release, they may experience recidivism, employment difficulties, and educational challenges.

Indeed, one of the most troubling outcomes of detention for youth is the disruption of their educational progress. Arthur (2007) reports that, at the national level, 66% of youth released from some form of juvenile custody quit school. Not only do these youth have significantly higher dropout rates than those youth who have not been institutionalized (Keeley, 2006), but their failure to earn a high school diploma compromises their ability to obtain employment. Additionally, while lower levels of recidivism are associated with successful school reintegration upon release from juvenile justice placements (Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2009/10), juveniles with histories of detention who drop out of school have a greater risk of becoming prisoners as adults (Hodgkinson, 1995). Recent research on the relationship between incarceration and educational attainment indicates that approximately 1 in 10 young male inmates are high school dropouts while 1 in 33 are high school graduates (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009).

Ensuring that youth released from detention are reintegrated into school as soon as possible is paramount. Some states (Feierman et al., 2009/10) and the federal government (Stephens & Arnette, 2000) are attempting to address these issues by facilitating the transition for youth reentering school after periods of confinement. While many of these programs focus on juveniles who spend lengthy terms in post-adjudication correctional facilities (Unruh, 2005), there is also a need to assist youth who are detained for shorter periods of time prior to adjudication. Unfortunately, however, there is a dearth of literature on pre-adjudication programs and outcomes.

While Baltimore City has made concerted efforts to improve its high school graduation rate in general,<sup>1</sup> recent efforts by community stakeholders have more specifically focused on addressing the educational needs of youth leaving pre-adjudication detention. Near the end of 2008, the Baltimore City Educational Placement Team emerged as a collaborative effort aimed at assisting families as youth were released from secure detention by ensuring that youth be

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<sup>1</sup> A recent report indicates that the graduation rate rose from 60.1% in 2006 to 71.9% in 2011 (O'Doherty, 2011).

reconnected to an appropriate educational program as quickly as possible. In this process evaluation, we describe the Education Placement Team in detail, highlight the challenges associated with the program, and make recommendations for improvements.

## **The Education Placement Team**

### *Program Overview and Objectives*

In December 2008, Baltimore City implemented the Educational Placement Team (EPT) in order to facilitate the transition of youth from detention to school. Another program, simply called the Transition Team, was already in place to facilitate the reconnection of DJS-involved Baltimore City youth in long-term placements to educational institutions upon reentry into the community, as well as to provide these youth with credit for the schoolwork they completed while in placement. Similar to the Transition Team effort, EPT was designed to be a collaborative initiative among numerous stakeholders to ensure that youth are reconnected to appropriate educational opportunities shortly after release. However, unlike the Transition Team, the focus of the EPT is on youth who serve short terms in detention prior to adjudication; this excludes youth detained pending placement.

Agencies involved in the creation of the EPT included the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS), Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS), Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the Chesapeake Center, the Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center Advisory Board, the Baltimore City DMC Advisory Board, and two community-based non-profit agencies: the East Baltimore Community Corporation (EBCC) and the Family League of Baltimore City (FLBC). A draft program description distributed at a Central Student Support Teams / DJS Transition Team Meeting on February 24, 2009 listed the following key objectives:

- To secure a school or GED program for youth released from detention within five days;
- To ensure that youth and parents are key players in the education placement process;
- To assist parents and youth in eradicating those extraneous variables that hinder the youth from attending school regularly and being on time; and
- To afford youth and their families the additional support of a DJS case manager and BCPSS Support Team member during the transitional process.

The EPT program was originally designed to focus on Baltimore City youth who were detained for at least fifteen days. This criterion was specifically chosen so that youth experiencing the greatest educational needs would be served; it was reasoned that, after more than two full weeks in detention, many youth would be discharged from school rolls. Youth who were detained for fourteen or fewer days were not provided full EPT services, but instead were to be monitored to ensure that they had successfully returned to school. The EPT originally concentrated on youth detained in the Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center (BCJJC), which was then experiencing issues with overcrowding. Unfortunately, this meant that initially there was *de facto* exclusion of female detainees from participation. However, beginning in January 2010, the program expanded to serve youth detained both at Hickey and Baltimore City girls detained at Waxter.

Although other stakeholders were involved in EPT meetings to varying degrees, the primary participants were BCPSS and DJS, with youth and parent participation strongly encouraged. Meetings were held twice a week to ensure that youth could be reconnected to an appropriate school or GED placement within five days of release. After BCPSS provided an initial informal recommendation regarding the appropriate educational placement for the youth, DJS was permitted to agree or disagree with the recommendation based on its own information. Parents and youth were permitted to offer additional insight, and, if not in attendance, parents and/or case managers were sometimes called for their input. Once consensus about the appropriate recommendation was reached by the EPT, a formal decision was made. If the parent or youth were not in attendance at the meeting, the DJS detention liaison informed the youth, parent, and/or case manager of the decision.

### *Evolution of the EPT*

The EPT program has seen substantive changes in the nearly four years since its inception, resulting in a program that is much less intensive and systematic than its original form. Importantly, lower-than-expected numbers of youth participants have resulted in a relaxation of the eligibility criteria such that youth detained for any length of time – not just those detained for at least fifteen days – are now eligible for participation in the EPT. Additionally, the frequency of weekly EPT meetings has been altered on multiple occasions. The EPT members told us that, owing again to smaller than anticipated numbers of youth served, the number of meetings was reduced from twice to only once a week in January of 2010. However, in March 2011, the Executive Director of Safety and Student Support, Jonathan Brice, recommended that the EPT meetings resume their twice a week schedule, as it was determined that meeting once a week compromised the timeliness of the program. Since April 2011, meetings have been held on Tuesdays at 1pm and on Fridays at 10am.

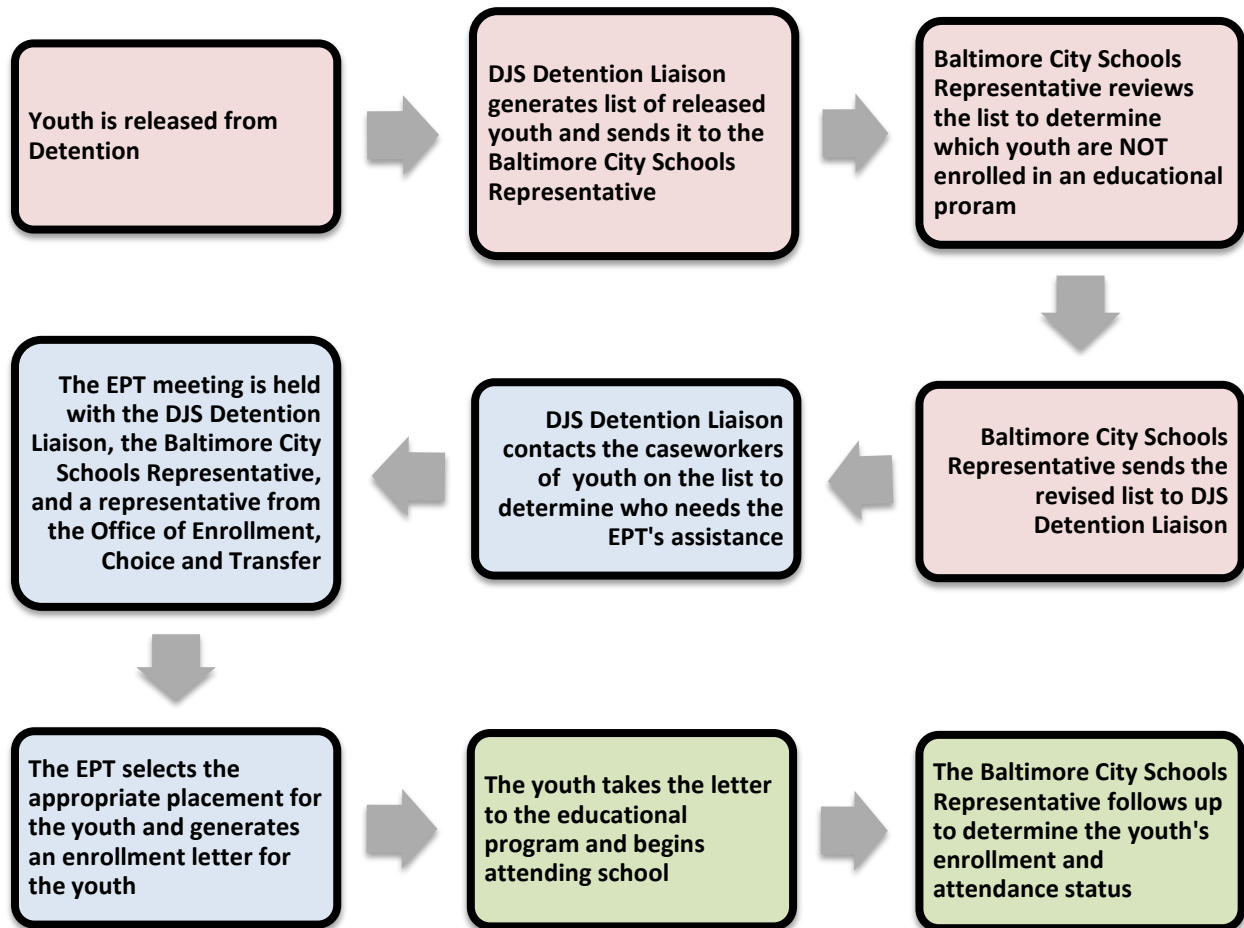
Stakeholder participation in the EPT has also evolved over time. Although DJS and BCPSS have always played the lead roles as team members, other community partners were more actively engaged at the start of the program and gradually stopped attending meetings. During the pilot phase of the program (December 2008-May 2009), the FLBC provided close oversight in data collection and management, and, as a result, they were able to report out to other community stakeholder groups, such as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), about the achievements of the effort. As will be discussed in more detail below, once this third party guidance and direction were withdrawn, data completion and accuracy suffered.

Because program changes have been numerous and not well documented, and because data completion has not been consistent over time, the focus of this report is on detailing the current EPT process and providing recommendations for improving program protocols, data collection, and, ultimately, outcomes. Although basic descriptive statistics are presented, program data collected after the pilot phase lacked the identifying information needed to incorporate offense histories and outcomes from DJS' ASSIST data system. Accordingly, we are limited in drawing conclusions not only about program-specific outcomes but also about whether the program was influential in reducing future contacts with the juvenile justice system.

### *The Current EPT Process*

The EPT currently employs a three step process which involves identifying youth appropriate for the EPT intervention, meeting to determine the appropriate educational placement for the youth, and informally following up to determine whether the youth has remained successfully engaged in his or her placement. These steps are described in detail below and are illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Current Baltimore City Education Placement Team Process**



### Identification

Identification of program participants begins with the Department of Juvenile Services Detention Liaison (DJS DL), who generates a list of Baltimore City residents who are being released from short term, pre-adjudication detention (excluding pending placement) in one of three eligible facilities: BCJJC, Hickey, and Waxter. This list is generated from DJS' ASSIST database and includes youth who have been detained for any length of time. The DJS DL sends the list to the Baltimore City Schools Representative (BCSR), who determines the enrollment status of each of the released youth and reduces the list to include only youth who are not enrolled in a BCPSS school or educational program; she then sends the revised list back to the DJS DL. In applicable cases, the DJS DL contacts the youth's case manager to obtain further

information about school enrollment status and needs. However, it should be noted that, in many instances, the youth selected for EPT have not been assigned a case manager. This represents a significant issue because it often leaves the program without current information about the youth and also creates a gap in addressing his or her needs. As will be discussed in more detail below, this also points to the need to more actively engage parents in the EPT process.

### EPT Meetings

EPT meetings are held twice a week at the BCPSS Central Office on North Avenue. The EPT currently includes the BCSR, the DJSDL, and a representative from the Baltimore City Office of Enrollment, Choice, and Transfer (OECT). Due to the quick turnaround required by the program, EPT staff report that they lack sufficient time to invite the youth, parent, and case manager (if applicable) to attend meetings; accordingly, participation is often limited to the three members of the EPT, although parents occasionally participate via telephone. During these meetings, the EPT reviews the information for each youth and recommends placement in a regular public school, an alternative school, a GED program, or a referral to the Office of Special Education. Once a placement is decided upon, the EPT generates an enrollment letter at the meeting that will allow youth to re-enter the school. The DJSDL provides the letter to the case manager and asks her or him to share the letter with parents. In instances in which a youth does not have a case manager, the letter is mailed to the youth's parent or guardian. The BCSR and DJSDL also keep a copy of the letter in the youth's files.

### Follow-up

There is no formal, in-person follow-up meeting held by the Team. Instead, the BCSR periodically checks BCPSS records to determine whether youth are enrolled in and attending the schools or programs for which they were recommended. If an individual youth is not enrolled, the BCSR contacts the DJSDL, who then contacts the youth's case manager to determine why there is a lapse in the youth's resumption of educational activities. Here again, youth that lack a DJS case manager are underserved, as no appropriate follow-up is likely provided.

## **Evaluation**

### *Purpose*

Unfortunately, due to severe limitations in the available program data, the purpose of the present evaluation is restricted to describing, documenting and assessing the current EPT process. Secondarily, we will examine how changes have affected data collection and accuracy and suggest corrective actions. A more complete evaluation would assess whether the program is achieving the goals set forth by the partnering agencies: placing youth in an appropriate educational program within five days of release from detention, ensuring that youth remain connected to that educational placement in the long term, engaging youth and parents in the education placement process, and providing the support necessary to ensure youth's regular and timely attendance in school or GED programming. Such an evaluation would build upon the initial assessment of the EPT completed by the FLBC in 2009. That study found that, between December 2008 and April 2009, the EPT made 112 assessments and recommendations, and 82 (73%) of these youth were reconnected to school after release from detention. The FLBC's initial assessment also revealed that the mostly African American male participants between ages 16 and 17 were in need of education placement services for 9<sup>th</sup> grade education. Notably, the need for older students to be placed in lower grade level classes presents challenges to the youth as well as to the school system.

*Method*

This process evaluation assesses the implementation of the program over time. Information was derived from documentation and presentations about the program, in addition to conversations with both stakeholders and EPT personnel. As described above, despite the fact that the ultimate responsibility for EPT has always rested with DJS and BCPSS, additional oversight was provided by the FLBC and other community partners during the program’s pilot phase (December 2008-May 2009). In addition to the loss of this supervision over time, responsibility for the program and its data also changed hands several times among DJS personnel. With each staffing change, the completeness of the data collected was reduced. Table 1 shows how collected elements have changed over time.

**Table 1: EPT Data Collection over Time**

<b>EPT Variables</b>	<b>December 2008- May 2009</b>	<b>School Year 2009-2010</b>	<b>School Year 2010-2011</b>
Identification Number	X	X	X
Name	X		
Date of Birth	X		
Age	X	X	X
Race	X	X	X
Gender	X	X	X
Zip Code	X	X	X
Detention Admission Date	X		
Detention Discharge Date	X	X	X
Detention Length of Stay	X		
Alternative to Detention (ATD) Program	X		
DJS Case Manager	X		
EPT Meeting Date	X	X	X
New or Returning Youth	X		
Instruction Level (General or Special Education, Intervention)	X	X	X
Grade Level	X	X	X
Recommended Educational Program	X	X	X
Actual School or GED Program	X		
School or GED Start Date	X	X	X
Number of Days Until Enrollment	X		
Support Services Team	X		
Initial Follow-up Status*	X	X	X
Secondary Follow-Up Status	X		
45 Day Follow-Up Status*	X	X	X
Attendance Status	X		
Other Notes	X		
90 Day Follow-Up*		X	X
School Year End Status*		X	X

\*The majority of data were missing for one or both periods after the pilot phase.



The loss of several programmatic data elements are particularly worth highlighting. First, although a complete set of identifying information on program participants was collected during the pilot phase, names and dates of birth were completely replaced by sequence numbers in the second year. Unfortunately, these sequence numbers were not used in conjunction with a list containing information about which youth was associated with each number; accordingly, there is no way to determine, using the program data supplied by DJS, who actually participated in the program after the pilot phase. Second, length of stay could not be calculated due to missing information on the admission date. Although program staff reported that the EPT has deviated from its originally-stated goal of providing services to youth who were detained 15 days or longer, the missing start dates prevent us from providing an accurate profile of the population of youth who have been served since the start of the 2009–2010 school year. Further, after the initial program period (December 2008–May 2009), no information was collected on placement enrollment status, making it impossible to determine whether the youth attended the recommended program or some other educational program. Finally, although the DJSDL collected some information on attendance status during the 2009–2010 school year, this information is missing for 58% of the cases at the 45-day follow-up and 65% of the cases at the 90-day follow-up. For the 2010–2011 school year, 99% of the follow-up data are missing for both the 45- and 90-day periods.

*Descriptive Statistics*

The descriptive statistics for program participants are provided in Table 2.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for EPT Referrals**

	<b>December 2008- May 2009</b>	<b>School Year 2009-2010</b>	<b>School Year 2010-2011</b>
<b>Number of Referrals</b>	236	189	172
<b>Length of Detention Stay (Days)</b>	31.18	--	--
<b>African American</b>	97%	99%	98%
<b>Male</b>	100%	98%	98%
<b>Mean Age</b>	16.54 (1.99)	16.88 (1.24)	16.85 (1.31)
<b>Top 5 Zip Codes</b>			
21217	18 (8%)	35 (19%)	26 (15%)
21213	21 (9%)	24 (13%)	18 (10%)
21205	24 (10%)	14 (7%)	16 (8%)
21215	18 (8%)	18 (10%)	16 (9%)
21223	28 (12%)	8 (4%)	12 (7%)
<b>Instruction Type</b>			
General Education	110 (47%)	155 (82%)	138 (80%)
Special Education	94 (40%)	34 (18%)	34 (20%)
Intervention Services	26 (11%)	--	--
Unknown	6 (2%)	--	--
<b>Grade Level</b>			
5th	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
6th	10 (4%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)
7th	28 (12%)	9 (5%)	10 (6%)
8th	41 (17%)	21 (11%)	18 (10%)
9th	117 (50%)	117 (62%)	104 (61%)
10th	23 (10%)	36 (19%)	25 (14%)
11th	7 (3%)	5 (3%)	9 (5%)
12th	4 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Missing Grade	5 (2%)	--	2 (1%)

A total of 597 youth were referred to the EPT program from December 2008 through the end of the 2010-2011 school year, and 236 of these participants attended EPT during the pilot phase of the program. The number of referrals to the program dropped during the first full school year (2009-2010) to 189 and during the second full school year (2010-2011) to 172. During the pilot phase of the program, participants averaged 31.18 days in detention prior to participating in EPT. As noted above, calculations for length of stay during the 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 school years were impossible to determine due to the missing detention admission dates.

<sup>2</sup> Because data collected after the pilot phase excluded adequate identifying information, it was not possible to determine whether the same youth participated in the program multiple times. Accordingly, the number of referrals presented in the table reflects a case count, rather than a youth count.

During the entire study period, the majority of participants in the program were African Americans. Additionally, virtually all of the participants were males. The first female participant did not appear in the data in January 2010, and only 7 females participated in EPT during the two full school years included in the study; this represents only 2% of the referrals made during that time period. The average age for participants across the entire study period was roughly 17 years old. Consistent with the initial assessment completed by FLBC, the majority of program participants from December 2008 through the end of the 2010-2011 school year were listed as general education, and the largest group of youth required assistance at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level.

*EPT Placement Recommendations*

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the placement recommendations made by the EPT over time. The majority of recommendations were made to regular public schools and special education programs. A greater number of recommendations to GED programs occurred after the pilot period. The drop in numbers of youth reported to be ineligible for EPT during the 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 school years suggests that in these years these youth were filtered out prior to the EPT meetings or were simply excluded from the data.

**Table 3: Education Placement Team Recommendations**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>December 2008- May 2009</b>	<b>School Year 2009-2010</b>	<b>School Year 2010-2011</b>
Regular Public School	174 (74%)	121 (64%)	119 (69%)
Special Education	15 (6%)	32 (17%)	18 (10%)
Alternative School	12 (5%)	5 (3%)	4 (2%)
GED	1 (0%)	28 (15%)	20 (12%)
Missing	34 (15%)	3 (2%)	11 (6%)

*Follow-up*

Program staff completed follow-ups to determine whether participants were attending the recommended educational program. However, these follow-ups were not done uniformly across time periods, and the EPT has indicated that follow-ups are now mostly informal. Follow-up dates were not available in all cases for data collected during the pilot phase of the program, and there were no follow-up dates provided in the data for subsequent school years. The data also contain no indication regarding how the follow-up information was obtained, whether through phone contact with the youth, through meetings, or through conversations with DJS case managers. Overall, the follow-up data are more complete for the pilot phase than for subsequent years of the program, and they suggest that that 38% of youth had returned to school by the initial follow-up. Still, about 17% of pilot phase cases were missing follow-up information, and this information was missing in 50% of cases in the 2009-2010 school year and in 94% of cases in the 2010-2011 school year. The high percentage of missing cases in the two latter periods makes it ill advised to draw substantive conclusions based on these data.

Although additional follow-up information was collected during all three time periods, the format of the collected data changed, making it impossible to compare information from the pilot phase of the program to information collected during subsequent school years. At the same time, the data collected for all three time periods is almost meaningless because of the large amount of missing data. Approximately 70% of the pilot phase participants lacked secondary

follow-up information. Despite more concrete follow-up benchmarks at 45- and 90-days during the subsequent school years, data were still plagued by missing information. For the 2009-2010 school year, follow-up data were missing for 58% of youth at the 45-day mark, and data were missing for 65% of youth at the 90-day follow-up. Follow-up data were missing for 99% of the youth in both follow-up periods for the 2010-2011 school year, suggesting that data collection on these variables ended at the beginning of the school year.

Information on “end status,” which refers to the enrollment status of youth at the end of the school year, was supposed to be collected during both the 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 school years for youth who participated in the program. Unfortunately, the end status for youth who participated in EPT during the 2009-2010 school year is reported in categories that are not mutually exclusive and not always meaningful. Additionally, this information was collected for only one youth in the 2010-2011 school year.

## **Recommendations**

The purpose of this process evaluation is not only to describe Baltimore City’s Education Placement Team and to discuss how the program has changed over time, but also to identify challenges and to suggest ways that the program may overcome them. Accordingly, the following recommendations are offered.

- Increased clarity about the program’s goals and policies is needed. Even though a mission statement and objectives for the program were drafted and distributed at a meeting in early 2009, current EPT personnel are disconnected from these ideals. This detachment is likely due to the numerous programmatic and staffing changes the EPT has experienced over time; the BCPSS representative has remained constant over the life of the program, but the DJS representative has changed three times. With each transition, there has also been a pronounced decline in the completeness of the data collected. As such, it is suggested that:
  - DJS and BCPSS must take greater ownership of the EPT. Although these two agencies have no pecuniary investment in the program, staffing resources continue to be devoted to the effort. These staff deserve guidance and supervision, and they and their agencies should be held accountable for upholding the agreed upon mission of the program.
  - Current program practices and policies should be reviewed with the broader group of community stakeholders and EPT personnel. To the extent possible, decisions regarding policies should be informed by data. Formal, written documentation of the program’s protocols should be developed and distributed, and the use of a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) may be necessary to clarify each agency’s responsibilities. Regular, monthly meetings with stakeholders, separate from weekly EPT meetings, should be held to review current data and to address any issues.
  - Program staff should begin utilizing a revised data collection spreadsheet provided by the University of Maryland’s Institute for Governmental Service and Research in the upcoming school year. Any problems with data collection or the spreadsheet itself should be discussed with the broader group of stakeholders.

- A full outcome evaluation could not be completed due to the poor quality of program data and the inability to match these data to additional data maintained by DJS. During the pilot phase of the program, the EPT benefited not only from wider involvement by community partners at meetings, but also from close supervision by the FLBC of the data collection effort. Both of these benefits appear to have dropped off over time. Strengthening the data collected by the program is of prime importance, and follow-up periods should be adequately defined to ensure that data are collected consistently. Without accurate and reliable data, it is impossible to determine whether:

  - appropriate youth are being referred to EPT;
  - some youth who are eligible for EPT, particularly girls, are falling through the cracks and not provided EPT services;
  - EPT participants are being placed in educational settings within a timely manner;
  - educational placements are appropriate;
  - youth benefit from placement in GED programs;
  - children continue their enrollment over an extended period of time;
  - greater follow-up means youth are able to successfully stay out of trouble; and, ultimately,
  - the program should be continued.
  
- As noted in the Program Overview and Objective section, one of the original goals of the program was to engage both youth and their parents in the education placement process. Early documentation, as well as presentations made in 2009 by members of the FLBC, EBCC, and/or DJS, suggests that the EPT process once placed a prime emphasis on contacting parents and youth, not only to retrieve important information from them but to invite them to EPT meetings. At EPT meetings, parents and other caretakers were encouraged to express their feelings and concerns about appropriate educational placements for their children, and these attitudes and perceptions were taken into account in the EPT's final placement recommendation. For obvious reasons, parents can play an influential role in youth follow through and ongoing follow-up. No data are kept by the EPT to track parent participation at meetings either in person or via telephone, but the impression given by current program personnel is that parents are seldom involved in these important discussions regarding their children's futures. Although it is not certain when the EPT's emphasis on parental involvement dwindled, the current process does not actively seek to engage parents in either providing information to the program or helping to shape or help pursue decisions concerning their children's education. While the fast turnaround time may pose a significant obstacle to successfully contacting all parents whose participation is requested, the limited data presented in this report indicate that, despite relaxed eligibility criteria, the number of EPT participants has been declining over time. Accordingly, the DJS DL should make every effort to reach out to as many parents as possible, and, in the event that they are unable to attend EPT meetings, parents should be encouraged to participate via telephone. Additionally, parent participation should be tracked by the program so that future evaluations may investigate whether parental involvement is associated with successful educational outcomes for youth.

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