

JEdI: A Powerful Source in Arkansas Schools

In the fall of 2003, Karen Richardson, librarian in the Jessierville Arkansas School District, was browsing in the library at lunchtime. She observed a young student working very diligently on a computer and was surprised since this student was known in school as a troublemaker and non-achiever. Karen watched her for a long while, then sat down beside her and asked what she was doing. The student responded, "I am working on a program that Ms. Reese (a teacher from the local juvenile detention center) put me on in Juvie."

Karen questioned her further and learned that the student was accessing an Internet-based program that was originally initiated in the Garland County Juvenile Detention Center.

Because Mrs. Richardson was recently assigned the added responsibility of remediation leader for her school district and this student was so engaged in her learning, she wanted to find out more about the program. As she began researching, she learned of an Arkansas initiative called the Juvenile Education Initiative (JEdI). This article is about the development and implementation of the JEdI model.

With every aspect of public education coming under increased scrutiny, no program is left unexamined. This includes programs that serve incarcerated youth. According to Shay Bilchik, former administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "We are developing a better understanding of how programs and services can help youth".

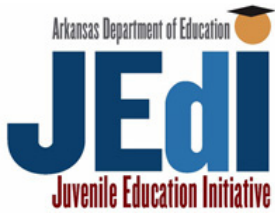
"Education is one of these critical services that can assist a troubled youth to return to a law abiding lifestyle," said Bilchik.

Historically, detention education has been unregulated, has had a lack of consensus regarding purpose and has been staffed by untrained personnel who are often inappropriate for the job (Brooks, 2003).

The state of Arkansas has faced these same issues. For the last several years, Arkansas has served incarcerated juveniles in 15 juvenile detention centers located in rural as well as urban areas throughout the state. These centers operate under the direct supervision of county judges, sheriffs or juvenile judges. Because of the local nature of their governance, the sites had developed into 15 distinct programs across the state, using different curricula and ranging in size, structure and available resources.

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Four years ago a Web-based educational program was piloted by the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE-SEU), in one of the Juvenile Detention Centers in northwest Arkansas. The program, SkillsTutor, is diagnostic and prescriptive, focusing on areas of academic weakness in math and reading.



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The program was implemented in the Sebastian County Juvenile Detention Facility and data was collected concerning the effectiveness of the program. The other 15 sites used a disk-based program for remediation, called SkillsBank 4. Shortly after the pilot, all 15 sites became part of a special project initiated by the ADE-SEU called JEdI (Juvenile Education Initiative). Each detention center was asked to submit demographic information and education reports to be used in a research project.

Goals for the project included:

- ◆ provision of FAPE (free appropriate public education);
- ◆ ensuring that math and reading be given priority;
- ◆ physical tracking of students in the detention centers to and from other educational placements; ensuring that students be given continuity of instruction as they passed through the detention environment; and
- ◆ beginning data collection to be used in future decisions concerning this population.

After the establishment of the JEdI goals, schools surrounding the detention centers became involved in the project.

Over the next year-and-a-half, 14 of the 15 detention centers became regional sites for JEdI. A “two-way street” was established. Juveniles residing in detention centers were placed on the SkillsTutor program and, when released, were able to continue the program within their schools, libraries or homes.

In addition, a select number of special education or at risk youth were placed on SkillsTutor at school before ever being sent to a juvenile detention center. Regional information sessions were held with superintendents, special education

supervisors, counselors, juvenile judges and probation officers.

Through the data collection process, the state was able to determine on a daily basis the number of youth served in the detention centers with data including gender, ethnicity, age, special education designation and average length of stay.

Juveniles are housed in the detention facilities for an average of 17 days; the recidivism rate is 29 percent.

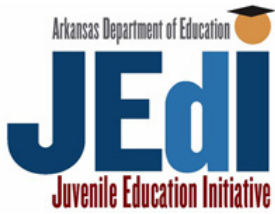
Nineteen percent are identified as needing special education services, most of them placed by the courts.

Having a greater access to the demographic information, the state began collecting educational data. During the academic year starting in August 2003 and ending July 2004, 8,213 Arkansas youth were incarcerated and 6,340 attended classes.

Using the SkillsTutor program, pre-test and post-test mean scores were collected from January 2004 until December 2004. These data are displayed in Table 1.

Mean Academic Outcomes for Students with and without Disabilities			
January 2004 through December 2004			
	Math Pre/Post	Reading Pre/Post	Language Arts Pre/Post
Without Disabilities	59/72	62/78	45/60
With Disabilities	56/69	72/81	57/61

After review of the data, the state made the strategic decision to expand availability of the JEdI concept to interested school districts, including those who were not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and those schools who needed additional access beyond just those students utilizing the program through the juvenile detention centers.



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All schools identified as being at risk for not making AYP, special education supervisors and persons responsible for the educational programs in residential treatment facilities were invited to an informational meeting. All participants were given a preview of the JEdI success, a brief history of the project and a preview of the Web-based program. The state promised to assume a portion of the cost, and regional training sites were established, using a trainer model.

To date, more than 60 schools have joined the JEdI program. Schools are given creative freedom in implementing the program.

A variety of uses includes homebound, in-school suspension, computer labs, Saturday schools, Resource and Title I programs, general education classes and inclusive classroom settings. Schools are able to generate school-wide reports detailing minutes used, teacher and student rosters, skill acquisition and skills needing additional remediation. Teachers are able to view reports at any time. Teacher reports are class-specific as well as assignment-specific. Schools are encouraged to use the reports to diagnose and remediate school and classroom areas of weakness. Reports can be generated at any time. Through use of the Internet, both teachers and students can access the program from anywhere and anytime that a computer with Internet access is available.

To date, the JEdI program has accomplished numerous goals. These include the following:

- ◆ implementation of a remediation program in every Juvenile Detention Center (JDC);
- ◆ provision of a holistic approach to the education of at-risk youth by implementing an educational aftercare program for juvenile judges to include in their wraparound services and transition programs;
- ◆ placement of statewide emphasis on reading and math for incarcerated youth;
- ◆ regulation of educational programs in JDCs;
- ◆ addition of full-time coordinator to assist JDC teachers in data collection and reporting and to serve as a program resource;
- ◆ collaboration among JDC and public school service providers sharing juvenile offenders;
- ◆ formation of collaboration and mutual support among JDC staff;
- ◆ provision of standard and successful system of delivery in JDCs;
- ◆ extension of successful programming to 60 public schools in addition to regional sites and JDCs; and
- ◆ provision of increased data driven decision making in all programs operating under the JEdI umbrella.

The state has expanded the use of JEdI beyond Juvenile Detention to public schools and privately operated residential treatment facilities. In these additional settings, plans are being made to assess the effectiveness of the program using Arkansas State Benchmark Exams, End of Course exams, and the Test of Adult Basic Skills (TABE). It is believed that results will support continued expansion of the JEdI model beyond Juvenile Detention.

Patty Kohler, Ed. D., is the assistant professor of the Department of Early Childhood and Special Education for the University of Central Arkansas.

Jacque Reese, M.S.E., is the JEdI State Coordinator for Hot Springs School District #6, Arkansas.