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Trends in Juvenile Delinquency, School Suspensions, and Expulsions

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Over the past few years, many highly distinguished and well respected professionals have retired after lengthy careers working with troubled youth in Alaska. For this issue of the *Alaska Justice Forum*, we asked three of these professionals to provide reflections from their work within the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice, the Anchorage School District, and the Alaska Court System. These professionals are Dean Williams, who was the Superintendent of the McLaughlin Youth Center; Carol Comeau, who was the Superintendent of the Anchorage School District; and William Hitchcock, who was the Master of the Anchorage Children's Court. Together, they provide a thoughtful perspective on key issues facing school districts and the juvenile justice system. The purpose of this introductory article is to provide some context for school discipline issues by summarizing recent trends in juvenile delinquency, school suspensions, and expulsions in Alaska.

Trends in Juvenile Delinquency

Law enforcement agencies make referrals to the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) if there is a finding of probable cause to conclude that a youth (1) committed an offense which would be criminal if committed by an adult, (2) committed a felony traffic offense, or (3) committed an alcohol offense after two prior convictions in District Court for minor consuming. The Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice publishes yearly statistics on juveniles, referrals, and charges (or offenses). Each juvenile may be referred multiple times within a fiscal year (resulting in multiple referrals per juvenile), and each referral may include multiple charges.

In looking at trends, rates were calculated using Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development estimates for the 10 to 17-year-old population in Alaska. Very few youth under 10 years of age are referred to DJJ—usually about one percent. A small number of youth who are 18 years of age or older are referred to DJJ for pro-

bation violations or for crimes committed prior to their 18th birthday—usually 3–4 percent. Following are data on three related measures: rate of juveniles referred to DJJ, rate of referrals to DJJ, and rate of offenses referred to DJJ. Each has shown a marked decline since 2003.

Rate of Juveniles Referred to DJJ

Since 2003, there has been a steady decline in the rates of juveniles referred to DJJ (see Figure 1). This rate is based on an unduplicated count—juveniles who were referred multiple times within the same fiscal year are only counted once. In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2003, there were 564 juveniles referred to DJJ per 10,000 juveniles in the state population. By SFY 2012, the rate of juveniles referred to DJJ dropped by 42 percent, down to 325 per 10,000 juveniles.

Rate of referrals to DJJ

Some juveniles were referred multiple

Please see Juvenile trends, page 11

Juvenile Justice, School Discipline, and Zero Tolerance

This issue of the *Alaska Justice Forum* is devoted primarily to issues related to school discipline facing school districts and the juvenile justice system.

“Trends in Juvenile Delinquency, School Suspensions, and Expulsions” provides a context for this issue by examining recent juvenile delinquency data for Alaska and looking at the rates for school suspensions and expulsions. The authors also note how recent changes in the reporting of offenses may be affecting the trend data.

A key policy that has impacted school discipline and juvenile justice is *zero tolerance*, which came out of the federal Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. This policy mandated out-of-school suspensions for firearms in schools, and was soon applied to a number of additional student offenses. This resulted in a tremendous increase in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions nationally. Three distinguished professionals who have long worked with troubled youth in Alaska offer their unique perspectives on zero tolerance:

“School Discipline and the Zero Tolerance Approach” by Dean Williams, former McLaughlin Youth Center Superintendent, explores research on school discipline and the zero tolerance approach,

how the zero tolerance approach expanded to include a multitude of offenses, and how research challenges long-held notions about school discipline and school safety.

“Does ‘Zero Tolerance’ Work? Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion” by Carol Comeau, former Anchorage School District Superintendent, describes the effects of zero tolerance, the efforts of the school district and a number of agencies to address the issue of juvenile crime and school discipline, and the programs that grew out of that collaboration.

“Zero Tolerance and Juvenile Justice: A View from the Bench” by William Hitchcock, former Anchorage Children's Court Master, discusses the impact of zero tolerance policies, the link between educational failure and juvenile crime, and the need for the appropriate response to wrongful behavior by youth.

The final article, “StepUp: Helping Kids with Discipline Problems Stay in School,” describes a diversion program for expelled or long-term suspended high school students developed in 2009 by the Anchorage School District and the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice and its expansion in 2011 to include middle school students.

School Discipline and the Zero Tolerance Approach

Dean Williams

Data-driven or *research-based* are terms that many in the juvenile justice field both extol and sometimes curse. This love/hate relationship with research and data both informs and confounds. Most professionals recognize that before a policy or program became a “best practice” or better yet, “data-driven,” someone had to come up with an informed idea that this approach, or this policy, will better serve our society than what we are currently doing. An idea comes first, then the research comes to study the idea to see if “doing X will really get us to our belief that Z” will happen. While data and research help clarify certain suppositions, justice professionals recognize that if you only committed yourself to proven or data-driven programs, nothing new or innovative would ever be tried.

Keeping this in mind, we waded into one of the most studied public policy issues in our school/juvenile justice system: the *zero tolerance policy*. As a disclaimer, let me make it clear that I am not a researcher and in many ways I don’t really understand or get research-type people. The work seems tedious, detailed, and so focused as to bore many of us to tears. And yet, when the drum beat of data and research keeps piling up regarding an issue of huge public concern and consequence, it might be best for the most seasoned of professionals to take a closer look.

Zero Tolerance in Schools

The term *zero tolerance* has been used in so many venues and topic areas that it has become nearly impossible to hold an informed discussion because it means so many different things to different people. Brian Schoonover in *Zero Tolerance School Discipline Policies* notes, “For a person to simply learn a new word is not useful unless a corresponding definition of what that word means accompanies the proper enunciation of the word.” With the waters sufficiently muddied, the most recognized genesis of the term *zero tolerance* seems to be the passage of the Gun-Free School Act of 1994 (GFSA). This federal law provided firm (and yet not so firm) guidelines on what should happen to a youth who brought a gun to school. States/school districts had to meet the minimum standards of the GFSA to continue to receive federal education dollars, but they could also exceed the minimum requirements, and that is where the story gets interesting. So no longer did *zero tolerance* (a term which is never actually used in the GFSA) apply to guns, it could also mean knives, clubs,

violence, drugs (illicit, but also prescription and over the counter), alcohol, bullying, harassment, etc., depending upon what school district you attended. The penalty of expulsion was also loosely defined in the GFSA and a huge caveat was that each expulsion could be subject to case-by-case exceptions.

Given the climate of the time and the legitimate concern over school safety, the GFSA laid the foundation for very aggressive school expulsion/suspension policies throughout the country. For many school districts, keeping kids safe in school now equated to kicking out the “bad kids.” Let’s be clear, school safety is a hugely important issue that well-intentioned professionals wrestle with every day. As a former juvenile justice superintendent, operational safety commanded my attention every day. The risks are real, but the response to the risks is where the collision of research and “gut instinct” occurs.

The Research

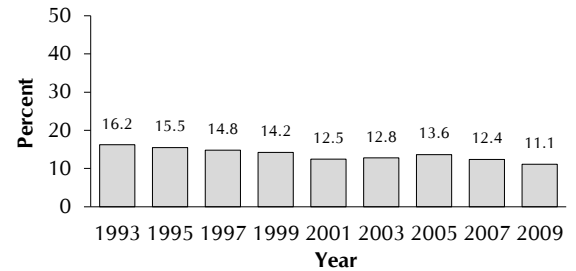
This article can in no way fully summarize the mountain of research done on the issue of school discipline/safety, but let me highlight certain work in response to very popular beliefs around this topic. Here are some common perceptions about this issue:

“Schools are safer when you expel and suspend the trouble-making kids.”

The terms *expulsion* and *suspension* can take on varied meanings, but the above well-established notion generally follows the belief that kicking the “bad kids” out of school generally makes everyone else in school safer. On this one point alone, numerous debates among law enforcement, juvenile justice professionals, school district personnel, and parents have ensued. Intuitively, it seems to make sense that the school environment would be safer. Challenging this notion and summarizing the research done on this topic alone would lead to a very large book, but let me point to some very well-respected work.

In August 2006, the American Psychological Association (APA) Zero Tolerance Task Force issued a comprehensive report on zero tolerance policies, *Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in Schools? An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations*. Essentially, the APA reviewed all available

Figure 1. Percentage of Students in Grades 9–12 in the U.S. Who Reported Having Been in a Physical Fight on School Property at Least Once During the Previous 12 Months, 1993–2009



Note: “On school property” was not defined for survey respondents.

Source of data: Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2011,” NCJ 236021 based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS).

research and asked this very basic question: “Have zero tolerance policies made schools safer and more effective in handling disciplinary issues?” In a word, the answer was “no.”

The first presumption addressed was that crime was rampant, schools were unsafe. As you can see in Figure 1, there was no real crisis in school violence in the first place, though any level of school violence is, of course, completely unacceptable. In more real terms, and more locally, the juvenile crime referral rate overall has been on a downward trend for years. Juvenile criminal referrals in Alaska are down, and according to an Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Facility Report, in March 2012 approximately 33 percent of secure cells/rooms in Alaska’s juvenile justice system sit empty. Upon my departure as superintendent from McLaughlin Youth Center in Anchorage in May 2012, I closed down a 31-bed boys’ detention unit that simply wasn’t needed. There was no explosion of school crime (committed by school-aged students) to respond to in the first place, and there certainly isn’t now. I realize this runs contrary to certain perceptions, especially in the face of tragic school shootings where the loss of life has been shocking.

Key conclusions of the APA report include:

- Schools with higher rates of school suspension and expulsion appear to have *less* satisfactory ratings of school climate and school governance, and spend a disproportionate amount of time on disciplinary matters.
- Rather than reducing the likelihood of disruption, school suspension in general appears to predict higher future rates of

misbehavior and suspension among those students who are suspended.

The report is long and extensive, but these key findings (among others) call into question the intuitive notions of school safety.

The U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education issued an extensive report in 2002 on a safe school initiative titled *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. In this report, they researched and reviewed every fatal school shooting from 1974 to June 2000. This initiative came on the heels of the Columbine High School attack in 1999. (Much of the impetus of the GFSA and the budding zero tolerance approach came from some of the horrific shootings that occurred in our schools across the nation.) Some interesting findings—and there are many—out of that report include the following:

- Nearly two-thirds of the attackers had never been in trouble or were rarely in trouble at school.
- Only one-quarter of the attackers had ever been suspended from school.
- Only a few attackers (10%) had ever been expelled from school.
- Even fewer of the attackers (5%) were failing in school.
- Forty-one percent (41%) of the attackers were doing well in school at the time of the attack and were generally receiving A's and B's in their courses.
- Most attackers had no prior criminal history or history of violence.
- There is no accurate or useful "profile" of students who engaged in targeted school violence.

In this very comprehensive report there are many useful guidelines or warnings for school administrators and law enforcement, but what is striking is that the attackers researched in this study didn't match many of our notions, including my own, of what a school shooter would look like.

"Kicking the 'bad kids' out of school makes the school environment more conducive to those students who want to learn."

In July of 2011, the Council of State Governments and the Public Policy Research Institute issued a report, *Breaking Schools' Rules*, that could arguably be called the "mother of all reports" (my words, not theirs). This report looked at the impact of school discipline policies (where zero tolerance may or may not be influencing school discipline) as it related to student success

and/or student involvement in the juvenile justice system. The study was conducted in Texas, involved over 900,000 7th grade student records, and followed those students for a period of six years.

Some relevant findings from this study include:

- "The majority of students in the public school system (59.6%) experienced some form of suspension or expulsion in middle or high school." This very first finding of the report starts to challenge the notion or understanding of what a "bad kid" or "trouble-making kid" looks like. Getting suspended or expelled is far easier now, plain and simple.
- "Students who experienced suspension or expulsion, especially those who did so repeatedly, were more likely to be held back a grade or drop out of school than students who were not involved in the disciplinary system."
- Another finding concludes that "a school that makes frequent use of suspension and expulsion does not necessarily create an environment that enables the overall school to achieve better academic outcomes." The reason, of course, is that the net of suspension/expulsion has grown, and with zero tolerance in place, a "bad kid" as well as a "good kid" making a silly choice are viewed the same.

The Advancement Project issued a March 2010 report, *Test, Punish, and Push Out: How Zero Tolerance and High Stakes Testing Funnel Youth into the School to Prison Pipeline*, which included descriptions of real life incidents of suspension/expulsion. Among the examples given were:

- October 2009: a six-year old student was so excited about Cub Scouts that he brought his camping utensil to school to use at lunch. Because the tool had a small knife, he was suspended and referred to alternative school for 45 days.
- November 2009: 25 Chicago middle-school students were rounded up, arrested, taken from school, and put in jail after a food fight in the school cafeteria.
- May 2007: an 8th-grader in Norfolk, Virginia was suspended and ordered into a program for substance abusers after she got some Tylenol from a classmate to deal with a headache.

It could be easy to dismiss the above examples as anomalies, but I would be cautious in doing so. A debate at the Anchorage School Board just a few years ago focused

on the issue of whether a student "must" or "may" be expelled for an entire year for giving another student any drug, including non-prescription Tylenol, Midol, or aspirin. There was strong advocacy from school district personnel that "must" be expelled should prevail, but the School Board at the time settled on "may."

"Zero tolerance discipline is the most fair because it treats every youth the same."

If this one supposition were at least true, then there might be some small comfort in the fact that at least a problematic policy of zero tolerance was being equitably dispensed. Data contradicts this position.

In August of 2012, the Civil Rights Project issued a report *Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School* that thoroughly reviewed suspensions of K–12 youth in 2009–2010 from nearly 7,000 school districts across the nation. Key findings on the national level include:

- One out of every 6 Black school-children in K–12 (17%), were suspended at least once. That is much higher than the 1 in 13 (8%) risk for Native Americans, 1 in 20 (5%) for Whites, or 1 in 50 (2%) for Asian Americans.
- For all racial groups combined, more than 13% of students with disabilities were suspended. This is approximately twice the rate of their non-disabled peers.
- One out of every four (25%) Black children with disabilities enrolled in grades K–12 was suspended at least once in 2009–2010.

Disparities or disproportionate suspension rates varied of course from state to state. While Alaska fared better in the analysis than many states, it was noteworthy that Alaska still suspended Black youth more than twice as often as White youth, and suspended Native youth almost twice as often as White youth.

A quote from the Civil Rights Project report perhaps summarizes the issue best:

The large differences in the risk for suspension suggest that what drives the use of out-of-school suspension is not a constant or predictable level of student behavior. This large variance, along with the research discussed at the end of this report, indicates that the differences in policy, practice, and leadership contribute to the frequency with which students are suspended from school. These findings should help educators in the

*Please see **School discipline**, page 4*

School discipline (continued from page 3)

higher suspending states, districts, and schools reject the belief that the status quo of frequent suspensions and large racial disparities is unchangeable.

Some of the previously mentioned research reports also deal with the disproportionate rates of suspension/expulsion. For the sake of brevity, I will direct the reader to those reports for more specifics, but the concerns and data reviewed in those other reports are in essential alignment with the Civil Rights Project report.

Conclusion

As noted previously, the mountain of

research done on this topic cannot be fully examined in this limited space. I have done a brief overview of the research/data at best.

The research in some ways helps explain what happened and where we stand in terms of school discipline, zero tolerance, school safety, high school graduation rates, dropout rates, etc. It does not answer the question of what should be done about it. Some work on the fix has progressed both on the national (Council of State Governments School Discipline Consensus Project) and local level. StepUp, the Anchorage School District/Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice diversion program for expelled/suspended students, is now starting its fourth year of operation. (See article on page 8.) It is a promising program that was developed by many of us who worked across jurisdictional

boundaries. It is a start. Promising approaches and strategies have been and continue to be explored. That work is ongoing and hopefully this *Forum* piece encourages that work.

Dean Williams retired in 2012 as the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice Superintendent for McLaughlin Youth Center in Anchorage. He also serves as vice chair of the Alaska Juvenile Justice Advisory Commission, is an appointee to and sub-committee chair of the Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention), and an appointee to the Council of State Governments (CSG) School Discipline Consensus Project.

Juvenile Justice and School Discipline Resources

Gun-Free Schools Act

Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, 20 U.S.C. § 8921–8923 (20 Oct 1994). (Repealed 2002). (<http://www2.ed.gov/offices/OSDFS/GFSA/appendixa.html>).

Gun-Free Schools Act, 20 U.S.C. § 7151 (8 Jan 2002). (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/7151>).

The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994 imposed a federal requirement on school districts receiving federal funding to establish policies requiring a minimum one-year expulsion of any student who brought a weapon, including a firearm, to school. The GFSA was repealed and reenacted as part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (signed into law January 8, 2002). The amended GFSA broadened the term *school* to include school-sponsored events and activities, including those held off school grounds, and replaced *weapon* with the more specific and statutorily-defined *firearm* as the prohibited weapon. The newer version of the law also permits local school authorities some discretion to modify expulsions on a case-by-case basis and to provide alternative educational settings for expelled students. For further discussion, see “Federal Law on Guns in Schools” (Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 21 May 2012), <http://smartgunlaws.org/federal-law-on-guns-in-schools/>.

School Discipline and Zero Tolerance

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[youth/publications/breaking-schools-rules-a-statewide-of-how-school-discipline-relates-to-students-success-and-juvenile-involvement-2/](http://publications/breaking-schools-rules-a-statewide-of-how-school-discipline-relates-to-students-success-and-juvenile-involvement-2/)).

Schoonover, Brian. (2009). *Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies: The History, Implementation, and Controversy of Zero Tolerance Policies in Student Codes of Conduct*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse. (<http://bookstore.iuniverse.com/Products/SKU-000114791/ZERO-TOLERANCE-DISCIPLINE-POLICIES.aspx>).

Vossekuil, Bryan; Fein, Robert A.; Reddy, Marisa; Borum, Randy; & Modzeleski, William. (2002). *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education. (http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_final_report.pdf).

Other resources

“Aggression Replacement Training® (ART®).” (2007). *National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention* (website). (<http://www.promoteprevent.org/publications/ebifactsheets/aggression-replacement-training%C2%AE-art%C2%AE>).

“Ending the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track: Stories and Victories.” (2013). *Advancement Project* (website). (<http://www.advancement-project.org/issues/stopping-the-school-to-prison-pipeline/pages/stories-and-victories>).

“Juvenile Justice.” (2013). *Annie E. Casey Foundation* (website). (<http://www.aecf.org/OurWork/%20JuvenileJustice.aspx>).

“Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: Prevention and Early Intervention.” (2013). *Find Youth Info* (website). (<http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/youth-topics/juvenile-justice/prevention-and-early-intervention>).

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Does “Zero Tolerance” Work? Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion

Carol Comeau

The Anchorage School District (ASD) has had a strict *zero tolerance* policy for firearms and assaultive weapons, selling of drugs, and second offenses for drugs and alcohol since the mid-1990s. These policies were formulated as a result of an increase in firearms and other potentially lethal weapons being brought onto school campuses, and national and state legislation requiring automatic expulsions and long-term suspensions for certain types of student misbehavior and violation of the district’s discipline code of conduct. The development of these policies was done through a public process by the Anchorage School District administration and School Board after receiving input from ASD staff, parents, and students.

Over the past two decades, these policies have been revised with more attention being paid to developing some options for non-violent students. Administrators and educators have been trained in many proactive approaches to better engage students, particularly students who are not motivated and interested in school and their studies, or who have other life situations that are interfering in their school success. Many of these methods incorporate culturally responsive approaches, social-emotional learning skills, positive behavior supports, and real attention to brain development and learning styles of students.

Since the 1990s, the Anchorage School District administration has participated in a number of task forces and committees attempting to reduce juvenile crime and to decrease recidivism, while requiring consequences for the violation of policies and laws.

Master William Hitchcock, a Master of the Anchorage Children’s Court (Master Hitchcock retired in 2012), facilitated the Juvenile Justice Working Group beginning in the mid-1990s. This group comprised key individuals from all areas of juvenile justice, children’s services, public defenders and prosecutors, the Alaska Attorney General, the Anchorage Police Department, the Municipal Assembly and municipal prosecutors, the local school board and administration, the Anchorage Youth Court, and the Alaska Office of the U.S. Attorney, among others. The entire focus of the group in the beginning was to establish a Youth Offender Program which mandated consequences for first time juvenile offenders, and at the same time, provided counseling, mediation, conflict resolution, and community service,

rather than incarceration in the local youth detention facility. The program was called “Making a Difference.” The Anchorage Youth Court (AYC) ran the program using grant funding, some local resources, and many community agencies. Cases involving non-violent offenders were referred by the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice to the AYC for adjudication. The program was very successful. The ASD supported the program because it allowed the students who committed low-level crimes to continue in school in many cases because the offenses occurred off campus and/or on weekends and during school vacations. Students benefited from the counseling and other supports put in place, and in most instances they did not repeat the offenses and they did better in school.

This working group also wrestled with the issue of what to do with students who committed violent crimes, brought firearms and other weapons onto campus or to school activities, or sold and distributed drugs and alcohol. The ASD’s “zero tolerance” policy required immediate recommendation for expulsion and withdrawal from school, even when there was an appeal. The Anchorage School Board policy was very clear and was well-supported by most of the staff, parents, and the community. Most people agreed with the view that criminal behavior was a choice and there were consequences. Students who chose to violate the law, or rules, should be removed from the school environment so the educators could teach, and the rest of the student body could continue to learn in a safe teaching and learning environment.

Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich (now U.S. Senator) convened a Community Youth Violence/Gang Response Task Force in 2005 with U. S. Attorney for the District of Alaska Nelson Cohen. This task force was made up of many of the same groups and people who had participated in the Juvenile Justice Working Group. Others were added, most notably the United Way of Anchorage, the Alaska Court System, and representatives from the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Kenai Peninsula Borough. The task force’s purpose was to reduce the impact of gangs and their criminal activity, to find alternatives to immediate suspension/expulsion of students, and to recommend a community-wide approach in support of families who were struggling with these issues. It was widely acknowledged that a disproportionate share of students who were expelled or suspended were males, and more

disturbing, were from the African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Alaska Native populations.

While expelled or suspended, these students were not getting an education, and, in many cases, were committing more crime because they had no supervision or constructive activities. The task force wrestled with the issues and tried to find a balance between having serious consequences for students who violated laws and rules, and the intuitive knowledge that the young person still needed an education in order to be rehabilitated and become a productive citizen. Youth who were incarcerated were required to go to school at the juvenile facility. For students who were expelled or suspended there was a definite gap in educational services that would reduce their ability to graduate on time—if at all. The other major issue to be resolved was funding. All agreed that this was *not* the school districts’ responsibility

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Zero tolerance

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alone, but in order to really solve the problem, a community-based shared services model would be required.

The ASD was already collaborating with a number of community and government agencies, many of which began with the network established with Master Hitchcock's Juvenile Justice Working Group. The Anchorage Police Department was already a strong partner with the district due to a good working relationship with the various chiefs of police and the ASD superintendent, along with officers and educators. This partnership grew even stronger with the addition in 2003 of the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program. Eighteen APD officers were assigned to the high schools, one middle school, and the superintendent's office through a federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grant. The program was fully funded with a federal U.S. Department of Justice grant the first year, with supplements of office space, computer equipment, etc. provided by the ASD. The funding requirements of the grant called for increasing municipal funding and decreasing federal funding over the four-year period of the grant. This caused ripples politically from some elected municipal officials, but the strong community and student/educator support for the SROs allowed the program to strengthen and thrive. The officers were a deterrent when necessary, but overall, they provided excellent role modeling and a proactive approach to youth and the many issues that often led them to criminal activity. The

program has wide support, but the current prospect of the municipality requiring the ASD to fully fund the salaries and benefits of the SROs—at a time of substantial educational budget cuts—puts the future of the program in jeopardy. The SRO program is successful because of the quality of the officers, and the high level of trust between the ASD, the APD, and the staff and students at all levels in our schools. The recent tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut may deter a reduction in this very successful program. The Anchorage community must truly engage in the discussion of the proactive benefits of this program before any changes are made.

Along with the SRO program, the recommendations of the Community Youth Violence/Gang Response Task Force proposed a multi-agency funded pilot program for expelled and long-term suspended youth. It was called StepUp. Agreements were made to have the ASD hire the staff and supply the educational equipment, while the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice provided the probation staff and other agency supports. Space was rented in a facility downtown where the Nine Star Educational Services programs were delivered. Student numbers were limited to ten the first year and the program was voluntary. Strict protocols were put in place, and evaluated regularly. Students who succeeded educationally and made progress towards graduation were allowed to graduate with a diploma after reinstatement by the School Board. Some students chose to apply to go back to a regular or alternative ASD school; each case was managed individually. Some

students resisted the rules and stopped attending; other students applied to take their place. Each graduate was celebrated and, hopefully, lessons were learned that will be carried with each individual on the road to becoming a contributing citizen. The future of the program will depend on academic success rates, and a decision by all entities as to whether the investment is producing the desired results. If the desired results are seen, there will need to be consideration for expansion of the program in a bigger facility with more staff.

Many school districts around the country are realizing that these types of approaches are saving lives and mitigating the negative effects of zero tolerance policies and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. There has been a sea change in attitudes regarding the "one size fits all" zero tolerance approach. It is now widely understood that if a community really values its youth, and providing a safe place to learn, live, and play, collaborative approaches work best. Educating our youth so they can be successful and productive citizens is the responsibility of all of us—not just the schools. When families are struggling, community interventions are required. Priorities need to be clear, and adequate funding is necessary to provide the supports needed. No matter the cost of prevention activities and programs, investing in our youth *now* is less expensive and more beneficial than incarceration!

Carol Comeau was an educator for 38 years in the Anchorage School District. She retired on June 30, 2012, after serving 12 years as the Superintendent of Schools.

Zero Tolerance and Juvenile Justice: A View from the Bench

William D. Hitchcock

The factors that lead youth into juvenile crime are many and varied. Drugs, alcohol, and interpersonal violence are often cited as major contributors. However, in my estimation, one of the principal factors that may often precipitate a plunge into the juvenile justice system is the failure to maintain and succeed in school.

Today there is growing concern that the zero tolerance policies of many school districts are leading to unnecessary suspensions and expulsions—which place many youth out on the street and vulnerable to high risk behavior. The federal Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 required school districts to adopt zero tolerance policies for firearms at school or lose federal funding. About the same time the crest in the wave of juvenile violent crime reached a peak and brought on paranoia about so-called "superpredator"

juvenile offenders. Response to juvenile crime became increasingly more punitive and retributive.

However, the expansion of zero tolerance policies did not stop with weapons and assaults. In schools across the country, out-of-school suspensions have become the default punishment for truancy and non-criminal disciplinary infractions. Nationally, suspension rates have more than doubled over the past two decades. The line between crime and non-criminal misbehavior has begun to blur. Zero tolerance has become an easy way out for many school officials who would rather suspend or expel a student than intervene and deal with the behavior in a meaningful way.

As a juvenile court judge for over thirty years, I became more and more cognizant of the correlation between educational failure and juvenile crime. The vast majority of

juvenile crime is property crime, and most of that occurs during daytime hours when youth are normally in school. As more youth were expelled and suspension periods grew longer, it became commonplace to see youth in court who were not in school and not performing at grade level. At one time in the recent past in the Anchorage Juvenile Probation Office, it was estimated that approximately 40 percent of offenders coming onto probation were not in school and many were not in any form of alternative programming or in-school suspension.

Suspension policies are usually graduated sanctions, with the length of suspension increasing as further infractions occur. A student on a 45-day suspension is in serious jeopardy of failure in that school year. Though alternative academic programming is available for less serious offenders, the loss of actual seat time in a regular classroom

can be devastating. This in turn may drive the slippage in on-time graduation rates. A recent study of the Portland (Oregon) Public Schools revealed an astonishingly low on-time graduation rate of 63 percent. While numerous factors undoubtedly contribute to that figure, being driven out of a regular classroom and into an alternative school has been cited as a chief contributor. In the Portland study of 1,000 students in these alternative schools in the class of 2010, only 89 of them earned a diploma within five years of starting high school.

There has been increasing opposition to rigid zero tolerance across the country in recent years. The American Bar Association has gone on record as opposing zero tolerance policies. The American Psychological Association has publicly questioned their effectiveness. As egregious examples of even first and second graders being hauled off to juvenile hall have emerged, reactions have become understandably pronounced.

Nonetheless, the development of higher quality alternative programs for suspended or expelled students has been helpful in keeping some of these youth on track. The Anchorage School District, in partnership with the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice and other key collaborators, developed a program called StepUp, which provides an educational environment for otherwise expelled youth. Within the district itself there has been more effort to create in-school suspension alternatives, which help maintain academic advancement. Many other efforts have been championed by Anchorage United for Youth, a United Way-led consortium of public and private agencies and individuals committed to raising the graduation rate for Anchorage students.

There is no question that school districts have an obligation to create, foster and maintain a safe learning environment for all students. Dangerous and disruptive behavior must be confronted. But kids make mistakes and act impulsively. The more we learn about brain development in children and adolescents, the more our responses and reactions to those mistakes must be tempered with a measure of common sense and reasonableness. I have faith that our educators can fit the right response to the wrongful behavior, but we must begin by removing the shackles of zero tolerance policies that often bind their hands. And we must encourage them to utilize other less draconian measures that preserve school safety while promoting educational success.

William D. Hitchcock served as Anchorage Children's Court Master from 1985 to 2012.

Faculty News

Dr. Brad Myrstol, Justice Center faculty and director of the Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center (AJSAC), has been promoted to the rank of Associate Professor and awarded tenure in the Justice Center in the UAA College of Health effective July 1. Dr. Myrstol holds a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from Indiana University and has been a Justice Center faculty member since 2009. A list of his recent research can be found at <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/justice/upload/2012MyrstolCV.pdf>.

Retirement

Alan McKelvie, Senior Research Associate for the Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center (AJSAC), retired in May. Mr. McKelvie joined the Justice Center in 2002 and served as the AJSAC Director from 2002 to 2012.

Recent Publications

- Brandeis, Jason. (2012). "The Continuing Vitality of *Ravin v. State*: Alaskans Still Have a Constitutional Right to Possess Marijuana in the Privacy of Their Homes." *Alaska Law Review* 29(2): 175–236 (Dec 2012). (<http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/alr/vol29/iss2/1/>).
- Chamard, Sharon; & MacAlpine, Heather. (2012). *The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Community Survey 2012 and Trends 2008–2012: A Sourcebook of Community Attitudes*. Anchorage, AK: UAA Justice Center. (<http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/indicators/mat-su/msb2012/msb2012.sourcebook.html>).
- Payne, Troy C. (2012). *Research Perspectives on the Use and Control of Police Force*. Anchorage, AK: UAA Justice Center. (<http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/research/2010/1302.policeforce/0302.01.policeforce.html>).
- Rivera, Marny; Parker, Khristy; & McMullen, Jennifer. (2012). *Youth Alcohol Access, Consumption, and Consequences in Anchorage*. Anchorage, AK: UAA Justice Center. (http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/research/2010/1010.voa/1010.04.youth_alcohol_access.update.html).

Update on Alaska Victimization Survey Data Releases

The Alaska Victimization Survey (AVS), launched in 2010, is an ongoing effort to gather reliable and valid estimates of intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women in our state. The AVS began with a 2010 statewide survey, and seven regional surveys were conducted in 2011 and 2012. A random sampling of women in Alaska has been contacted by landline and cell phone during each phase of the survey. The results are troubling. Sadly, a significant number of women in Alaska have experienced intimate partner violence, or sexual violence, or both within the past year of the survey or in their lifetime.

Summaries of estimates of violence against women in Alaska are available on the AVS web page at <http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/avs/>:

Survey location	Data release date
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta	10/22/2012
City & Borough of Sitka	10/19/2012
Kodiak Island Borough	10/4/2012
Bristol Bay Region	10/12/2011
Fairbanks North Star Borough	10/7/2011
City of Fairbanks	10/7/2011
Municipality of Anchorage	10/3/2011
Statewide	9/30/2010

Results from the survey are used to guide planning and policy development, to evaluate the impact of prevention and intervention services, and to provide greater empirical support for preventing and responding to violence against women. The project is conducted through a contract with the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA). The surveys have been done in cooperation with victim service providers and Alaska Native organizations. Dr. André Rosay of the UAA Justice Center is the principal investigator for the AVS.

Thanks are extended to every woman in Alaska who has participated in this survey. Because of their courage, we know more about the impact of violence and are better prepared to respond to and prevent it across Alaska.

StepUp: Helping Kids with Discipline Problems Stay in School

Barbara Armstrong

High school students who are long-term suspended or expelled from the Anchorage School District (ASD) for aggressive behavior—such as fighting, acting out, or a weapons offense—get a second chance to stay in school and on track to graduate. This second chance is a diversion program called StepUp—a unique partnership between the school district and the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice. StepUp provides a highly structured voluntary program that includes academics, anger management training, physical activities, and community work service for students who have had serious discipline problems. The program motto is “A Second Chance at Success.”

StepUp opened its doors in the summer of 2009 and grew out of the efforts of the Municipality of Anchorage Anti-Gang & Youth Violence Initiative established in 2005 by then-Mayor Mark Begich. The goal of the initiative was to intervene and prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system. Participation in the initiative expanded to include the Anchorage, Kenai Peninsula, and Matanuska-Susitna boroughs. In 2008 *The Report of the Tri-Borough Anti-Gang and Youth Violence Policy Team and Anchorage United for Youth* was released. The report recommended the creation of a program for “students who are expelled or suspended from school for over ten days, but who are not eligible for existing public or alternative education programs.”

This new effort, called StepUp, was described as “an education program utilizing ASD-aligned curriculum with the goal of re-integrating students back into the ASD system, if appropriate.” StepUp, which began as a pilot project, is now in its fourth year. It was expanded in November 2011 to include a program for middle school students with discipline problems. Classes at StepUp are small. There are 12 slots for high school students and 10 for middle school students, and one teacher for high school and one for middle school.

StepUp is jointly supported by the Anchorage School District and the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). For these first years of the program, ASD has provided the teaching staff, including a social worker who is a transition coordinator, a special education teacher who works with the students one day a week, ASD-aligned curriculum, computers, and other equipment. DJJ has paid the rent on a facility downtown, the cost of breakfast and lunch food, and assigned three specially trained juvenile justice officers to facilitate the aggression replacement

training (ART) and substance abuse training components of the curriculum. Currently StepUp is in a strip mall downtown, but the location is close to buses so students can get to class, and the program provides bus passes for students who need them. The location also allows students easy access for field trips to such places as the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center and special performances for school youth at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts.

Intervention and Prevention

Programs such as StepUp are intervention and prevention measures aimed at keeping kids from entering the correctional system by giving them the opportunity to stay productive in school and get a high school diploma. Students attend StepUp with the goal of transitioning back to their home school or another ASD school. Sometimes students will transition to a private school or go outside of the district altogether. If a student enters StepUp with enough credits to be close to graduation, he or she may end up graduating out of StepUp and obtaining a diploma. (Students in ASD need 22.5 credits to graduate.) Not all students stay in the StepUp program: some withdraw voluntarily, and some are discharged for behavior issues. But the majority of youth who enter StepUp successfully continue their education.

The goal of StepUp is to prevent young people from entering the juvenile justice system, but some students coming into the program have engaged in alleged delinquency. In any given semester, about 50 percent of the high school students at StepUp are already in the DJJ system. These students have been identified by staff of the DJJ Community Detention program as candidates for StepUp. A student’s status in the DJJ system is confidential, and the Anchorage School District is not notified about which students have engaged in alleged delinquency. Students who are in the DJJ system are assigned a juvenile probation officer who checks in with them periodically.

The juvenile justice officers at StepUp are not probation officers. They are part of the program staff, and are responsible for facilitating the aggression replacement training and substance abuse awareness training that is part of the StepUp curriculum. They accompany students during community work service, physical education activities, and field trips as well. Juvenile justice officers are also trained to recognize and defuse certain situations. The youth at StepUp have a history of aggressive behavior. These

officers know when a student is becoming agitated, and by intervening, they can prevent the situation from escalating.

The school year at StepUp is the same as for other ASD schools, but sometimes extends by a week or two to permit students to complete coursework. StepUp is an open entry program—students can enter at any time during the semester. More often than not, there is a waiting list to get into StepUp. The small class size enables good supervision and one-on-one interaction with each student.

Who goes to StepUp?

ASD high school students with aggressive behavior or weapons offenses—students who have been involved in fights—are eligible for StepUp. (Weapons may include, for example, pocket knives, as well as firearms.) As of November 2011, middle school students (grades 6, 7, 8) with aggressive behavior offenses are eligible for a separate program designed for middle school, but housed at the same location as the high school program. Since its inception, StepUp has served 155 students—101 males and 54 females. An additional 13 students have opted to do online coursework at home through StepUp.

Under Anchorage School District policy, students are eligible to attend StepUp until the semester they turn 20 years of age; special education students are eligible until the semester they turn 22. StepUp students under the jurisdiction of DJJ can also attend classes until the semester they turn 20, even though DJJ jurisdiction ends when a student turns 19 years of age. DJJ jurisdiction students certified for special education services can attend StepUp until the semester they turn 22. In the high school, most of the students are in 11th and 12th grades. The staff estimate that 70–80 percent of the students come from less privileged backgrounds. A number of minorities are represented in the student population. In reviewing data for 101 male and female StepUp students from 2009 to 2013, over 80 percent of them continued their education after being in the program. (See Table 1.)

How is a student referred to StepUp?

Typically a teacher, student, or staff member sees or reports an incident at school which is then referred to the school principal or vice-principal. There is an investigation which looks at the severity of the incident and the history of the student(s) involved. DJJ and ASD are concerned with the right level of intervention at the right time—a

concept often discussed in juvenile justice reform research.

After investigating, if the school decides on a long-term (usually 45 days) suspension or expulsion, the matter is referred to the ASD Secondary Education office. (Students with a handgun violation may be suspended for one year according to federal guidelines.) At ASD, the Secondary Director of Discipline reviews the file and determines if the student is eligible for referral to StepUp. Once that eligibility is determined, the student is sent by the school district to DJJ where a staff person from the DJJ Community Detention Programs meets with the student and the family to talk about the incident and the option of StepUp.

StepUp is a voluntary program. The parents and students must want to participate and must agree to certain requirements. At an intake interview, the DJJ staff person explains the program and rules of StepUp. After a student enters StepUp, a school social worker meets with the youth to outline the conditions established by ASD for students to return to their home (or other) ASD school. These ASD requirements may include counseling, a forensic evaluation, and community service. Students may also be required to write a letter confirming their desire to return to school. In some cases, restitution or other appropriate action may also be mandated. An ASD social worker assists the family and students with all of these requirements.

A School Day at StepUp

The start of the day is staggered, with high school students arriving 30 minutes before the middle school group, and middle school students leaving 30 minutes before the high school group. High school runs from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and middle school is from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The two groups never meet or mingle or see other. All students who enter the StepUp building go through a metal detector. They empty their pockets. Cellphones and other electronic devices are surrendered for the day and are locked in a filing cabinet. Students have their own lockers to store other items, but they can take their backpacks to their desks. For a half-hour before class, students can go into the make-shift kitchen and get some breakfast before the day officially begins. Once students enter the building, they are there until the school day is over—StepUp is a closed campus.

The security screening at the start of the morning helps students know they are safe in the classroom. Everyone has been through the metal detector. Each student comes with a history of some kind of aggressive incident(s), and making sure that everyone

feels secure at school is an integral part of the StepUp program.

There are desks with computers in both the middle school and high school classrooms. In each classroom, the teacher and one or two juvenile justice officers are always present. At each desk, two students work quietly on individualized computer instruction programs or on non-computer-based projects developed by the teacher. The teacher and juvenile justice officers can monitor what each student is doing and offer help when they see a student struggling. There is an advisory at the beginning of each day reminding students of the daily schedule and expectations. The rules for StepUp are posted on the wall of each classroom and taped to the students' desks. These rules include, among other things, no alcohol or drugs, no weapons, no inappropriate language, no cigarettes or lighters, no gang colors. The StepUp dress code requires tattoos to be covered at all times. No tops with low necklines may be worn by female students. The rules stress the importance of respect for staff, teachers, and students.

Each part of the StepUp day is designed to help students acquire life skills as well as academic ones. The morning is devoted to course work and helping students get the academic credits they need to graduate. Outside of school hours, students can also earn up to .25 elective credits for working at a job. StepUp has partnered with Nine Star Enterprises to identify employers who will hire StepUp students.

The curriculum includes a segment on aggression replacement training (ART) which is done in a group setting and involves role playing and dialogue. These sessions are facilitated by the juvenile justice officers. The training focuses on trust and confidentiality and helps students to recognize what triggers their anger, identify their emotions and physical sensations when they are angry, and learn ways to manage their feelings and stay in control. For high school students, this is a 10-week course. Middle school students receive five weeks of anger skills management training because their terms of suspension are generally not as long as those for

Table 1. StepUp Students 2009–2013

As of May 2013
N = 103. This represents 101 students,
two of whom entered the program twice.

	N	%
Semester entered		
Fall 2009	9	8.7 %
Spring 2010	10	9.7
Fall 2010	14	13.6
Spring 2011	11	10.7
Fall 2011	18	17.5
Spring 2012	13	12.6
Fall 2012	14	13.6
Spring 2013	11	10.7
Unknown	3	2.9
Grade on entry		
9th	13	12.6 %
10th	21	20.4
11th	23	22.3
12th	30	29.1
Unknown	16	15.5
Status or reason for exit		
Still at StepUp as of May 2013	11	10.7 %
Returned to Anchorage School District school and/or graduated	62	60.2
Entered online program (Apex)	2	1.9
Entered other program ¹	3	2.9
Transferred out-of-state	1	1.0
Diploma pending	2	1.9
Returned to ASD then sent to McLaughlin Youth Center	1	1.0
McLaughlin Youth Center	3	2.9
Other	18	17.5

1. Other programs include Job Corps, Alaska Military Youth Academy, and the Adult Learning Center.

high school youth. Students also have the option of filling out a "Hassle Log" to help gain insight into a problem that is bothering them. A stack of "Hassle Log" forms are in each classroom, and students are encouraged to fill these out and bring them to the anger management session. Each form has questions about what happened, when and where, and asks the student to evaluate how he/she handled the incident, and what anger control concepts were involved in the event.

Physical education is part of the core curriculum as well, and physical activity is an important part of the StepUp Day. In the afternoons, students take walks and hikes, play basketball or go to the ball fields.

In addition to computer-based curriculum and text book curriculum, students sometimes work on thematic-based projects such as a map or a timeline. A timeline project many students have chosen is one highlighting the negative and positive things that have

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StepUp

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happened in their lives. The timelines are hand drawn and posted on the walls of the StepUp classroom. Sometimes the timelines are labeled “Good Things/Bad Things.” Under “Good Things,” students have noted such events as “got a job to help my family,” “started to take school more seriously,” and “I won my first award in school.” But the timelines are sobering. They often record one or more violent deaths of family members or friends, having to move out of a home, parents divorcing, a parent leaving, getting caught for a crime (such as stealing), being kicked out of school, losing a job, and thinking about suicide. Many of these students come from challenging home situations. StepUp provides a safe, structured environment with clearly defined expectations for youth who often have had only negative relationships with adults and people in authority.

At lunch, students are free to heat up items in the microwave and hang out in the kitchen with staff. In the afternoon, students participate in physical education and community work service. StepUp has partnered with a number of agencies including the Anchorage Downtown Partnership, Salvation Army, Catholic Social Services, and Anchorage Parks and Recreation, to do clean-up and other activities. Such community work service is a way of showing students how to work on a team and complete a task. Russian Jack Ski Area, for example, traded ski opportunities for community work service by the students. Some students were able to use skis from the Municipality of Anchorage, while others used equipment received through a grant written by the StepUp high school teacher. For most of the students,

it was the first time they had ever been on skis. Middle school students from StepUp have done cleanup at Fairview Community Recreation Center in exchange for time in the gym.

What Do the Students Think About StepUp?

Most high school students stay about one semester in the StepUp program. When they exit the program, they fill out an evaluation form that asks them to rank StepUp on a scale of 1 to 10 and to list their “Likes” and “Dislikes” of the program. These evaluation forms are reviewed by ASD and DJJ. StepUp gets a “10” from almost every student. And one student who seems to have clearly understood the lessons taught in StepUp about the need to continually apply oneself to a task wrote, “I would rate ‘StepUp’ a 8, just because there is always room for improvement.” Some other sample comments are below:

- “Do I really need to leave!??? I DON’T WANT TO.”
- “...they pick you up when your [*sic*] down.”
- “From a scale, 1–10 I would rate this program .. BROKE MY SCALE! Haha.”
- “One thing I hate is calling this a program! I consider it to be my school!”
- “[We are] treated like family.”
- “[It’s a] safe place.”
- “I always remember to check my ego at the door.” [A reference to one of the building blocks of aggression replacement training.]
- “...it [StepUp] gave me a second chance when no other school would.”

A number of students also mentioned how much they liked “working at my own

pace.” The individualized computer instruction at StepUp allows students to progress through the curriculum at their own learning speed, and to repeat the modules they need to study more. The classroom teacher assists students with assignments and can guide them through the online curriculum.

The students definitely had their dislikes—“getting searched every morning,” “that we can’t listen to our iPods,” and “[being] guarded 24/7.” But again and again under “Likes” were references to the teachers, juvenile justice officers, and staff. The evaluations by students reflect their respect and affection for these adults who are so committed to this program, and genuine regret at having to leave a “school” where they have at last felt safe, acknowledged, and part of something.

The Next Step for StepUp

StepUp, as noted earlier, is a unique partnership between the Anchorage School District and the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice. DJJ and ASD are seeking larger and more appropriate space downtown for the expanded program of both middle school and high school students, and each agency will be covering a portion of the program costs. A handful of programs across the nation have similar relationships with school districts. All of these efforts are part of the Smart Justice movement and juvenile justice reform. These initiatives recommend funding programs that concentrate on intervention and prevention measures—measures that give youth a second chance.

For more information on StepUp go to <http://www.asdk12.org/home.asp?num=101231>—the web page of StepUp’s high school teacher.

Barbara Armstrong is the editor of the Alaska Justice Forum.

In Memoriam

Dr. Lawrence Trostle, retired Professor at the Justice Center, died May 2, 2013 after an illness. Dr. Trostle retired in 2009 and was on the faculty of the Justice Center for 18 years. He received his Ph.D. in criminal justice from Claremont Graduate School, where he was also co-director of the Haynes Foundation Law Enforcement Training Grant. One of his major teaching and research areas was law enforcement, and he was the author and co-author of numerous articles including, “Policing the Arctic: The North Slope of Alaska,” “The Nonenforcement Role of Police in Western Alaska and the Eastern Canadian Arctic,” and “The Alaska Territorial Police.” His course, “Cinematic Images of Justice,” was a perennial favorite in which he explored crime and justice issues with students in an engaging and interactive way.

Dr. Trostle was able to bring his real world experience in

law enforcement to his teaching and research, having served with the Los Angeles County Sheriffs’ Department and also with the San Marino, California Police Department. He was the past president of the Western and Pacific Association of Criminal Justice Educators, and served on many community committees and advisory boards including the Alaska Civic Learning Assessment Project, as well as on a variety of UAA committees. Dr. Trostle’s long-time contributions to the Justice Center have been invaluable, and the university is grateful for his service and commitment.

Research publications and papers by Dr. Trostle can be viewed at <http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/publications/authors/trostle/>.

Condolences may be sent to his family c/o the Justice Center, 3211 Providence Drive, LIB 213, Anchorage, AK 99508.

Juvenile trends
(continued from page 1)

times within the same year. The referral rate is based on a duplicated count—each *referral* is counted once. The rate of referrals to DJJ also dropped considerably from SFY 2003 to SFY 2012—from 819 down to 471 referrals per 10,000 juveniles, a decrease of 42 percent.

Rate of offenses referred to DJJ

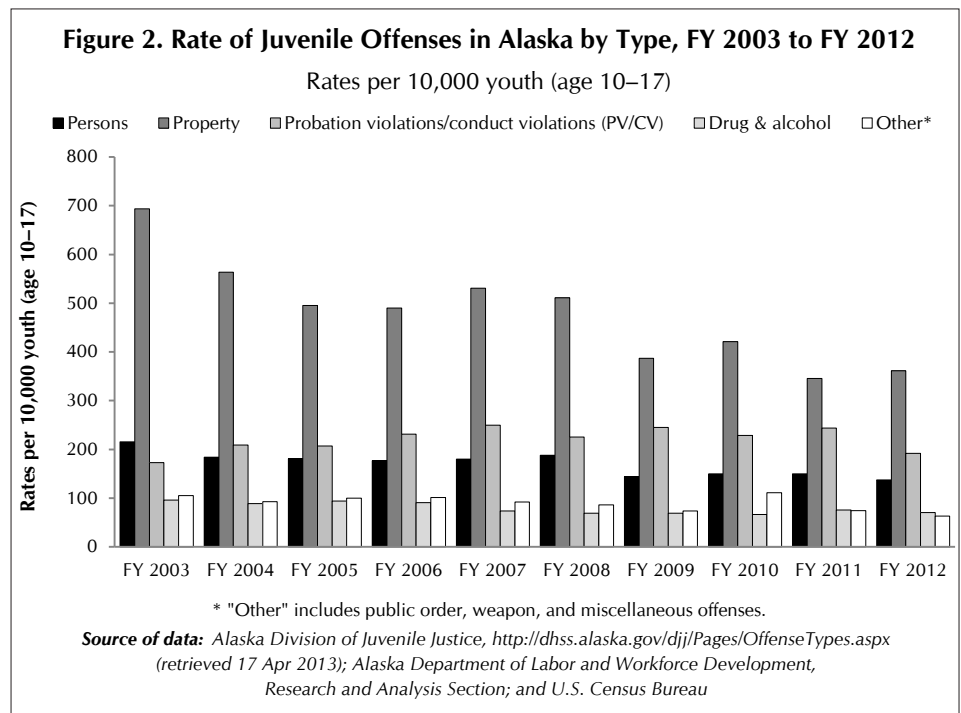
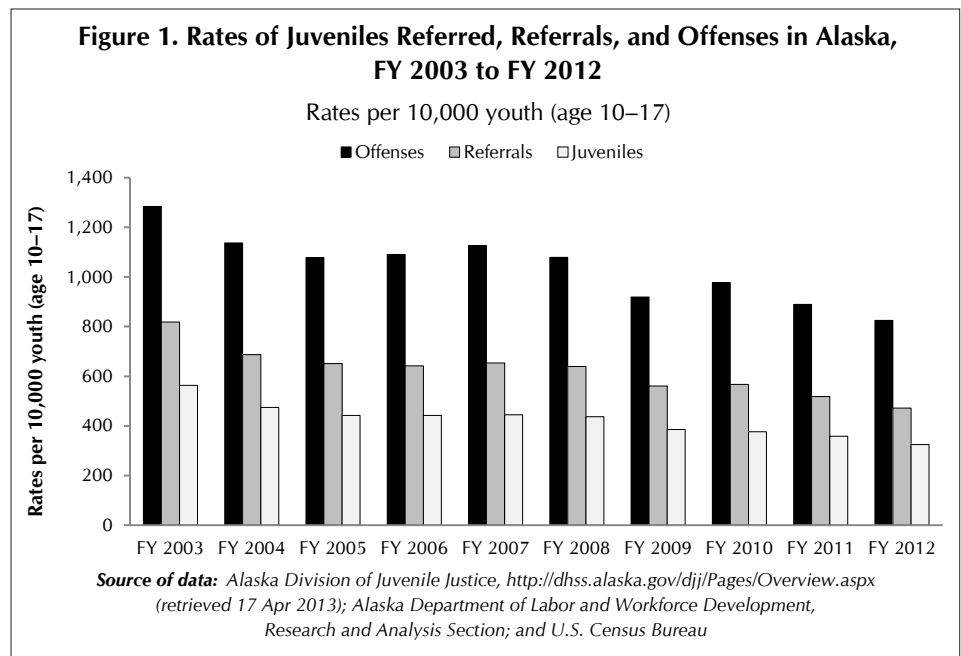
The offense rate (which counts all offenses referred to DJJ) dropped by 36 percent from SFY 2003 to SFY 2012—from 1,284 charges per 10,000 juveniles to 825. All three of these trends (in juveniles referred, referrals, and offenses) show steady and noteworthy declines in juvenile delinquency.

Figure 2 further examines the rate of offenses referred to DJJ, by type of offense—offenses against persons, offenses against property, probation violations and conduct violations (PV/CV), drug and alcohol offenses, and other offenses. Other offenses include public order offenses (such as providing false information to police, hindering prosecution, harming a police dog, escape and unlawful evasion), weapon offenses, and other miscellaneous offenses (such as municipal criminal code violations and interstate compact referrals). Most of the trends in offenses referred to DJJ are consistent with the trends in juveniles referred and number of referrals—the rate of offenses against persons dropped by 36 percent (from 215 to 138 per 10,000), the rate of offenses against property dropped by 48 percent (from 693 to 361 per 10,000), the rate of drug and alcohol offenses dropped by 26 percent (from 96 to 71 per 10,000), and the rate of other offenses dropped by 40 percent (from 106 to 64 per 10,000).

However, the rate of probation violations and conduct violations increased from SFY 2003 to SFY 2012. More specifically, the rate of probation violations and conduct violations increased by 11 percent, from 173 per 10,000 juveniles in SFY 2003 up to 192 per 10,000 juveniles in SFY 2012. The rate peaked in SFY 2007 with 249 probation and conduct violations per 10,000 juveniles in the state population. Although probation and conduct violations increased overall during this period, from SFY 2007 to FY 2012, the rate of probation violations and conduct violations decreased by 23 percent.

Trends in School Suspensions and Expulsions

From the 2005–2006 school year until 2009–2010, rates of suspensions and expulsions in Alaska among high school students remained relatively stable, but



then increased strikingly in 2010–2011. (See Figure 3.) The rate of suspensions and expulsions per 10,000 students was 4,483 in the 2005–2006 school year and reached a high of 5,899 in 2010–2011. This rise in the 2010–2011 school year represents a 27 percent increase in suspensions and expulsions over the previous school year. Prior to this marked upturn, the largest annual change in suspension and expulsion rates was the 11 percent increase that took place between the 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 school years.

The number of suspensions and expulsions for every cause reported by school districts was greater in the 2010–2011 school year than for any previous year going back

to 2005–2006. (See Table 1.) The most significant percentage increases in suspensions and expulsions in 2010–2011 relative to the prior school year of 2009–2010 were in the following areas: alcohol (90%), drug use (89%), fights and assaults (85%), and harassment/extortion (78%) (percentage increases not shown in table).

It is important to acknowledge that reporting requirements have changed at the state level and school districts no longer report the reasons for suspensions and expulsions the same way as in previous years. During the 2010–2011 school year, there were no



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Juvenile trends

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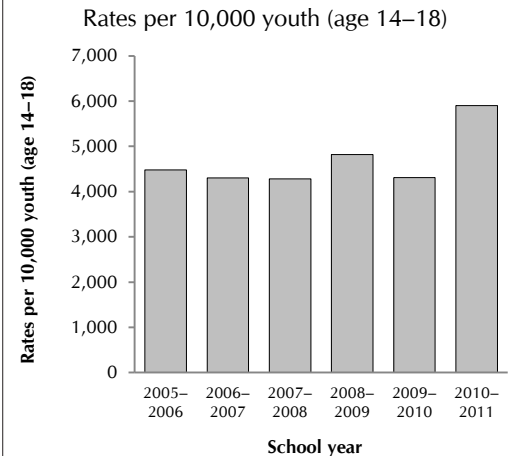
instances recorded of suspensions and expulsions for (1) truancy, (2) arson or vandalism, (3) theft, or (4) inappropriate behavior. No suspensions for these causes were noted because these categories of incidents are not listed under new data reporting requirements. Of particular note is the absence of suspensions or expulsions for inappropriate behavior during the 2010–2011 school year. Suspensions and expulsions for inappropriate behavior, along with suspensions and expulsions for “other” reasons, were the most frequent causes for suspensions and expulsions every school year between 2005 and 2010. Therefore, zero reported instances during the 2010–2011 school year significantly impacts annual trends in reasons for school suspensions and expulsions. This change in trend more likely reflects a change in the way suspension and expulsion data

were reported than a change in student behavior. While the marked increase in the number of suspensions and expulsions overall in the 2010–2011 school year is evident, it is unclear whether this reflects a change in school policy or student behavior.

These recent trend data are part of the array of information that can be used by policymakers in school districts and the juvenile justice system. The statistics discussed here provide background for the accompanying articles in this issue of the *Forum* on zero tolerance policies, school discipline, and the Anchorage School District/Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice diversion program, StepUp.

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Figure 3. Rates of Suspensions and Expulsions in Alaska, School Years 2005–2006 to 2010–2011



Source of data: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2012

Table 1. Reason for Suspension or Expulsion in Alaska by School Year, 2005–2011

Column percentages.

	2005 to 2006		2006 to 2007		2007 to 2008		2008 to 2009		2009 to 2010		2010 to 2011	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alcohol	281	1.1 %	300	1.2 %	228	1.0 %	187	0.7 %	37	0.2 %	388	1.3 %
Drug use	760	3.0	680	2.8	627	2.6	609	2.3	170	0.8	1,516	5.0
Fight/assault	4,069	15.9	3,872	16.0	3,231	13.6	3,184	12.3	942	4.2	6,316	20.9
Inappropriate behavior	10,084	39.3	10,094	41.6	9,673	40.8	11,647	44.8	9,306	41.3	0	0.0
Truancy	4	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	743	2.9	1,609	7.1	0	0.0
Arson/vandal	352	1.4	346	1.4	429	1.8	337	1.3	240	1.1	0	0.0
Harassment/extortion	1,944	7.6	2,115	8.7	1,980	8.4	1,983	7.6	551	2.4	2,488	8.2
Tobacco	744	2.9	717	3.0	623	2.6	683	2.6	251	1.1	948	3.1
Theft	545	2.1	556	2.3	473	2.0	477	1.8	470	2.1	0	0.0
Other	6,844	26.7	5,590	23.0	6,441	27.2	6,124	23.6	8,964	39.8	18,521	61.4
Total	25,627		24,270		23,705		25,974		22,540		30,177	

Source of data: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2012