

# **Road to Reform**

## ***Rebuilding Juvenile Justice in Illinois***

**Prepared by  
AFSCME Council 31  
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[www.AFSCME31.org](http://www.AFSCME31.org)

## **Executive Summary**

The current proposal to merge the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) into the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) seeks a bureaucratic solution to a programmatic problem. There is widespread agreement that the current juvenile justice system is not fulfilling its mission of reducing the recidivism rate of juvenile offenders. But the merger appears likely to merely replicate the mistakes of the past, offering only cosmetic change when what is required is a serious commitment of new resources to revitalize the programs essential to ensure that youth have the opportunity to rebuild their lives and to make the facilities safe.

### **DJJ starved of resources**

DJJ was created four years ago as a stand-alone agency, in hopes of garnering more resources and reducing recidivism. But the new department has never been given the opportunity—in terms of dollars, staff, programs or training—to succeed.

- The department's budget has increased at an average of just 0.6 percent per year—less than the rate of inflation—from a base budget that itself was woefully inadequate.
- Sharp staffing cuts that began in 2002 have not been reversed, with frontline staff now down 24 percent from eight years ago. There is 40 percent less non-education program staff and 21 percent less security staff. Despite some modest progress in hiring teachers over the past 18 months, the DJJ school district remains 41 positions short of simply meeting state standards.
- This severe staff shortage has forced the department to rely heavily on overtime to meet minimum staffing needs; overtime costs have increased 147 percent since DJJ was established.
- Security staff have never received appropriate training to implement new behavior modification techniques.
- The incidence of violence in youth centers has increased due to the lack of staff and inconsistent and confusing youth accountability measures. More than four in five respondents (85 percent) to an AFSCME survey of DJJ employees said the youth centers are less safe today than four years ago.

### **No sound rationale for merger**

Proponents claim that merging DJJ into DCFS would achieve efficiencies and leverage additional resources. But current statute allows the sharing of services across state agencies, and there is no evidence to suggest the merger would yield greater administrative efficiencies. Most crucially, DJJ can and already is developing a process to access DCFS services and federal funding for youth on parole (aftercare). This collaboration can and should go forward without a merger.

DCFS operates under a federal consent decree and is facing intense pressure given the steep cuts to its budget and staff while coping with the increased demand for child protection services. Its necessary focus on these services may be diluted or detract from its ability to properly serve an added population with different needs. Experts see pitfalls, with the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators telling the *Chicago Tribune*, “the juvenile correctional agency tends to get lost in a large bureaucracy, and juvenile offenders just do not compete very well for resources with abused and neglected children.” The advocacy group's executive director “said the department's problem all along has been funding.”

Advocates of the DJJ-DCFS merger often cite Washington, DC and Missouri as model programs for Illinois, but a close look reveals striking differences from our own: Both of these programs serve far fewer youth, cost significantly more per youth, and have higher staff-to-youth ratios compared to Illinois. Further, the lower recidivism rates boasted by the District of Columbia and Missouri are calculated on a far narrower basis than Illinois: The Illinois juvenile recidivism rate counts reoffenders and technical parole violators over three years; DC and Missouri report only reoffenders (not technical violators) over a single year.

## **Recommendations**

An AFSCME opinion survey of DJJ employees yielded 239 responses—a participation rate among frontline employees of nearly 25 percent.

In addition to reporting that the youth centers are less safe today than four years ago, respondents concurred that Illinois must add resources in the form of programming funding and staff in order to reduce recidivism.

Specifically, they suggested that rather than merge with DCFS, DJJ should focus on the following areas:

- Improve mental health treatment;
- Expand substance-abuse treatment programs;
- Strengthen core educational services, provide options beyond a high school diploma or GA, and ensure smaller class sizes;
- Make vocational education more widely available and connect youth to future employment;
- Create specialized, adequately staffed parole for juveniles;
- Restore organized recreational programs;
- Ensure youth accountability and rehabilitation by providing adequate safety and security through the use of appropriate measures to sanction inappropriate behaviors;
- Assess the efficacy of new approaches to behavior modification; train staff in those found to be effective, eliminate those found to be ineffective;
- Adequately staff facilities to accomplish all of the above and to reduce wasteful overtime costs; and
- Include youth center staff in reforms.

## **Introduction**

During the Spring 2010 legislative session, Governor Pat Quinn proposed merging the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) into the much larger Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). While offering few specific arguments in support of the merger, the Quinn Administration has offered a broad rationale of focusing more attention on juvenile rehabilitation, attracting more federal funding and reducing recidivism among young offenders.

The juvenile justice system in Illinois is comprised of a broad-based network of alternative sentencing programs that are operated by county governments and nonprofit agencies (and funded in part by the Illinois Department of Human Services) in communities across the state. Juveniles who commit misdemeanor crimes, nonviolent offenses, or are first-time offenders are normally sentenced to participate in one of these programs in their home county. However, repeat offenders or those who commit violent crimes can be sentenced to one of the state's secure juvenile facilities operated by DJJ.

DJJ operates eight secure facilities for incarcerated youth: Illinois Youth Centers at Chicago, Harrisburg, Joliet, Kewanee, Murphysboro, Pere Marquette, St. Charles and Warrenville. According to the April 2010 DJJ quarterly report to the General Assembly, these centers held 1,155 youth with an additional 1,730 on parole (number does not include 106 parolees living outside Illinois). Of the youth center population, just 54 juveniles were serving time for misdemeanor crimes; the vast majority had been sentenced for more serious felony offenses:

Murder – 8

Class X felony (e.g. agg. kidnapping, agg. battery with a firearm, agg. criminal sexual assault) – 143

Class 1 felony (criminal sexual assault, possession of cocaine, heroin) – 291

Class 2 felony (arson, aggravated battery of a senior citizen, repeat offenses) – 323

Class 3 felony (aggravated battery) – 202

Class 4 felony (aggravated assault, theft, possession of controlled substance) – 125

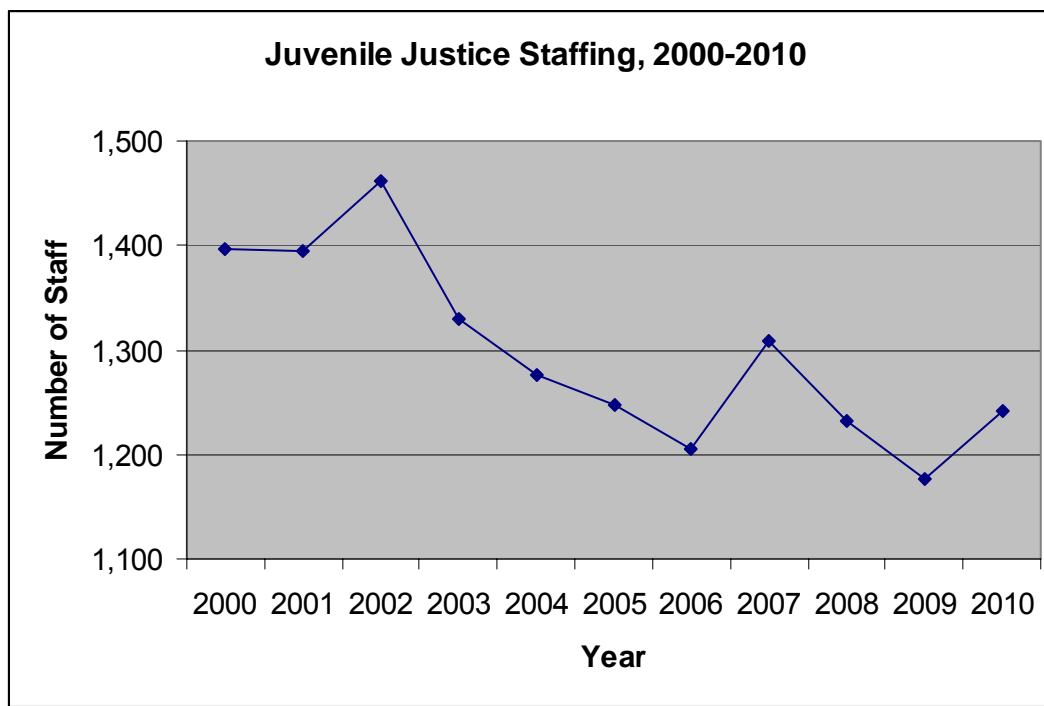
Just four years ago, DJJ was spun off from the Department of Corrections (DOC) to form a 'stand-alone' agency—a transformation spearheaded by some of the same forces now supporting the proposal to fold DJJ into another large parent agency. When DJJ was created, AFSCME argued that forming a new agency without any serious effort to address the chronic shortage of resources that had beset the juvenile division within IDOC would be only a bureaucratic reshuffling, not a real investment in programs proven to foster rehabilitation. Our union argued that recidivism could only be reduced by bringing increased resources—especially in the areas of education, job training, counseling and substance abuse treatment—to bear on the problems that lead youth to re-offend, and by addressing the severe staffing shortage that prevented those services from being delivered. The ensuing years have indisputably affirmed the validity of that argument. Since DJJ was formed, recidivism has declined only slightly, staffing levels have worsened, the youth centers have become more dangerous, and their resources for programming have been further strained.

In AFSCME's view, the current merger proposal merely repeats those past mistakes, seeking facile solutions on the cheap for a set of challenges that require a serious commitment of effort and resources. To gauge where the department has been, where it stands, and what steps should be taken to truly reinvent the Illinois juvenile justice system, this report draws on a systematic new survey of those who know best the scale of this challenge—frontline employees of the Illinois Youth Centers.

## ***Starved of resources, DJJ struggles***

When DJJ was created four years ago, its proponents touted the restructuring as a way to draw more resources. Yet they secured legislative approval for their plan by promising that the new department could bring about major reforms without any additional funding. In fact, the new department did not gain significant new resources: Its budget has increased just 0.6 percent per year over five fiscal years—not even keeping up with the rate of inflation.

Youth center staffing has been reduced over the same five-year period—and the cuts are even steeper when viewed over the past 10 years:



\*Numbers prior to 2006 reflect the Juvenile Division of the Department of Corrections.

Since the juvenile division's staffing peak at 1,463 employees in 2002, the youth centers have been cut to just 1,241 staff in March 2010—a 15 percent reduction. Examining only frontline staff shows the loss of key staff since the inception of DJJ is even greater. Overall, there were 24 percent fewer frontline staff employed at DJJ facilities in 2010 compared to 2002. Security staff over this period were reduced 21 percent. The cuts have been even sharper in most facilities, including St. Charles (minus 38 percent), Joliet (-27), Warrenville (-24), Harrisburg and Murphysboro (each -20) and Kewanee (-16)

A sharp increase in overtime hours and concurrent spiraling costs have been one consequence of this persistent staff shortage. Without adequate staff, the department—like other understaffed Illinois agencies—has come to rely on its employees working long overtime hours simply to cover mandatory posts. From FY 05 to FY 09, overtime increased from less than \$3 million to more than \$7 million annually. This 147 percent jump in costs could have been mitigated or avoided if DJJ simply hired adequate staff—a circumstance that would have

greatly benefited youth center operations as well, improving access to services for youth and making the facilities safer.

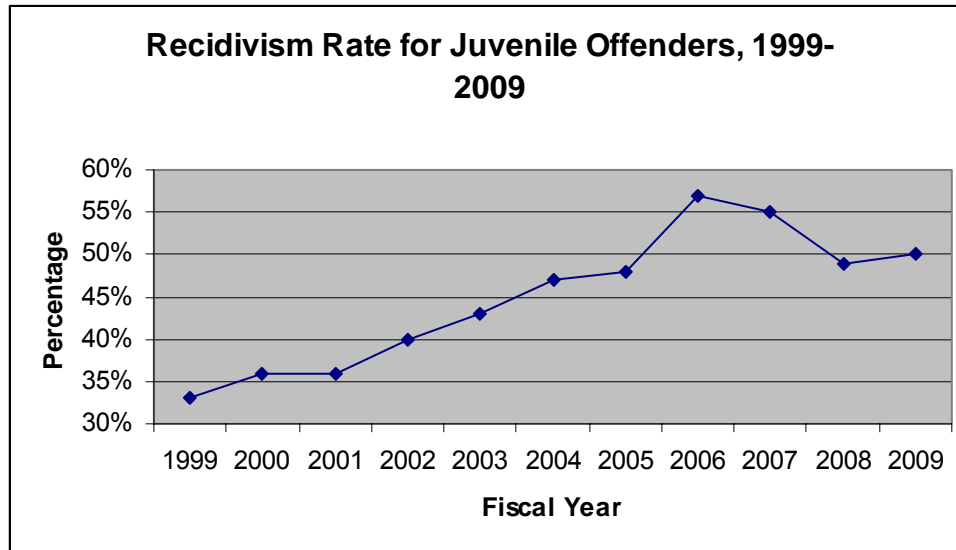
A second repercussion of staff cutbacks has been rising violence—both among the youth and against staff. While hard data documenting violent incidents is difficult to obtain and unreliable even when reported, the union’s survey results showed that nearly two-thirds of respondents had witnessed violence between youths; nearly a third had lost work time due to injuries suffered as a result of on-the-job violence; and fully 85 percent feel the youth centers are less safe today than they were four years ago, prior to the creation of the stand-alone department. Employees emphasize that a secure environment is the necessary foundation for successful rehabilitation of youth—their safety must be ensured before they can be expected to make progress toward such challenges as addressing substance abuse or mental health problems, getting a GED, or acquiring job skills.

A third result of the cuts has been further damage to necessary and vital education and rehabilitative programs. The new DJJ was supposed to focus on programming instead of punishment: Youth were to begin receiving the mental health and educational programming they had previously been denied, owing to past policy decisions and staffing cuts. Harsher security measures would give way to treatment-based programming. But in fact those programs continued to deteriorate. Non-education program staff—including chaplains, social workers, psychologists, youth and family specialists, and leisure activities specialists—were reduced by 40 percent between 2002 and 2010.

Over the past decade, the state’s youth centers have seen a precipitous decline in the core educational programs intended to ensure that incarceration does not deprive any young person of his or her right to a quality public education. Youth with severe behavioral problems or learning disabilities who need special attention too often got none. Of late, some progress has been made in hiring education staff. But in an indication of how bad things had become, DJJ School District 428 remains understaffed despite these additions. The School District has informed the Governor’s Office that it needs 41 additional educators just to comply with state mandated standards for education, special education and vocational classes. Only 17 of those positions are currently funded. *[See Appendix A, staffing needs spreadsheet produced by DJJ school district superintendent Lane Walls.]*

But perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the performance of the new DJJ has been its failure to make significant progress in reducing recidivism. Reducing crime and rehabilitating young offenders are the twin missions of the juvenile justice system—by helping young people who commit crimes to turn their lives around, an effective juvenile justice program can limit the numbers of youth that fall into lives of adult crime, as well as aid youth in becoming productive citizens.

Even before the creation of DJJ, a combination of budget cuts and staff reductions had resulted in a shifting of resources away from programming, education, and counseling to an emphasis on security in the state’s youth centers. This shift in direction had dire consequences for the juvenile recidivism rate, which was 33 percent in 1999, before the Ryan Administration removed supports for youth in the juvenile division. It was at 40 percent in 2002, before the Blagojevich Administration drastically cut staffing levels all over state government, including the juvenile division of DOC. By the time DJJ was formed as a separate department in 2006, the recidivism rate had reached 57 percent. While recidivism has fallen since then to an estimated 50 percent in FY 09, this is less likely due to policy changes in the youth centers than it is to new parole policies which go to considerable lengths to avoid citing youth for parole violations.



In order to effectively implement a rehabilitative approach, improvements in education and programming are imperative. Supporters of establishing a separate department claimed that doing so would, in and of itself, create the basis for a more effective approach to rehabilitative programming. But the current recidivism rate does not bear out this contention.

Not only are more staff and resources needed, but agency leadership must take an objective look at the treatment model employed to establish the order and maintain the control necessary to implement successful programming. These youth badly need order in their environment and need to know the limits of their behavior and the consequences for acting out. Just as one disruptive student can throw a classroom into chaos and make learning impossible, a youth exhibiting bad behavior who is not brought under control can undo even the possibility of program success.

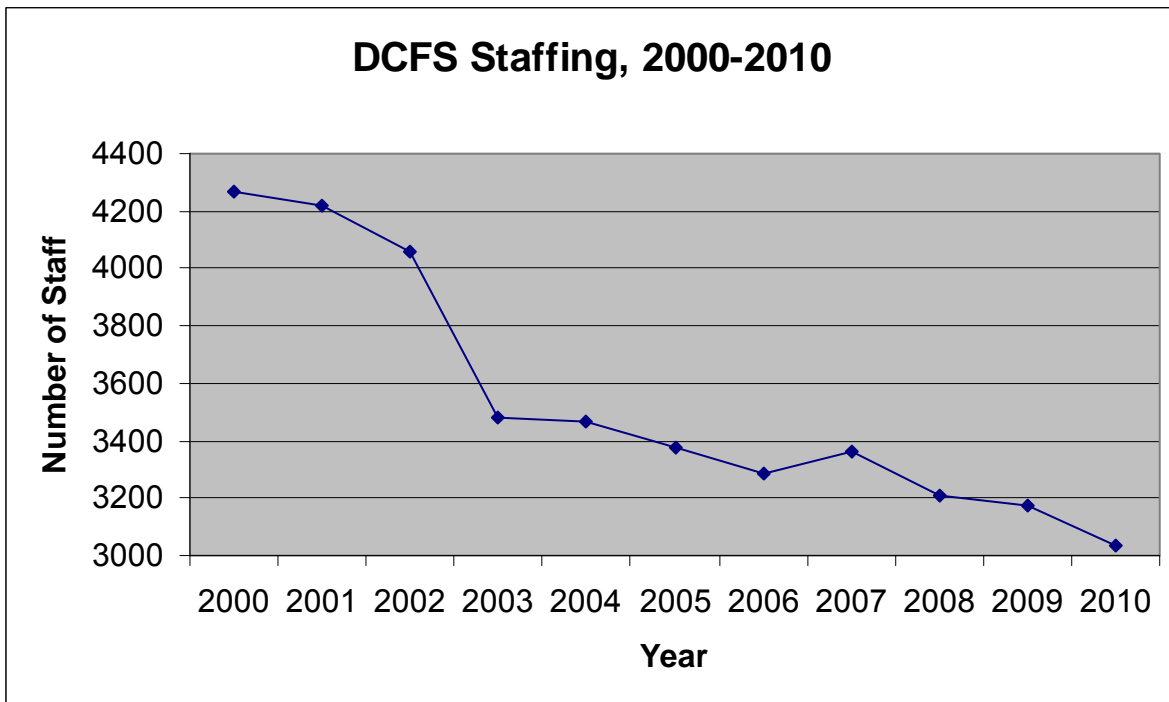
Instead of improving conditions in the youth centers and strengthening the prospects for rehabilitation, the creation of DJJ may have actually made matters worse. While security rules were relaxed and punishments were removed as promised, the other side of the equation—enhanced educational, counseling and treatment programs that could focus and engage the energies of young offenders—never materialized. The result is a less secure system—marked by the ever-present threat of violence.

### ***Merger plan: Another hollow promise?***

The most frequent justification cited by the Quinn Administration for its push to merge DJJ back into a large parent agency is a stated desire to garner more funding and provide more programming. But a merger is not necessary to engage DCFS resources for committed youth, or to leverage federal funding. To the contrary, current statute allows DJJ to share services “with the Department of Corrections or other State agencies”, and the specific DCFS resources the administration has identified—including Medicaid and Title IV-E funding for DJJ youths on parole who are wards of the state—are already being engaged through a collaboration between the departments. Wholesale bureaucratic reshuffling of DJJ into DCFS is not required to access these resources.

Nor is there any evidence to suggest the merger would yield greater efficiencies. The merger proposal envisions a structure that mirrors the existing DJJ within DCFS. As DJJ was created with scant administrative staff, a merger would produce little or no savings as a result of streamlining.

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services has no experience operating secure facilities and no institutional knowledge of youth corrections. Further, DCFS itself has only recently—and barely—returned from the brink of its own crises. It is still operating under a longstanding federal consent decree and in recent years has been whipsawed between sharply higher demands for its child protection services and steep cuts to its budget and staff. The predictable result has been ballooning caseloads for child protective and family support caseworkers. This context hardly offers a propitious time to expand the department’s mission.



Further, observers rightly question the wisdom of forcing the youth centers into a large parent agency.

*Youth prison systems operate under a larger social services agency in nearly two dozen states, according to Ned Loughran, executive director of the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, a nonprofit organization that represents the directors of state juvenile justice departments. But Loughran said the model works only in the smallest states, such as Delaware.*

*"My biggest fear ... is that the juvenile correctional agency tends to get lost in a large bureaucracy," said Loughran, who was commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services from 1983 to 1995. "And juvenile offenders just do not compete very well for resources with abused and neglected children."*

*Loughran, who has followed Illinois' experiment closely and has been working for nearly a year on an assessment of the agency's mental health services, scheduled to be released next week, said the department's problem all along has been funding.*

*"People think (the merger) makes sense because they assume (the children) all come from the same kinds of backgrounds," he said. "People think a one-stop shop will serve them all. But I haven't seen that happen."* CHICAGO TRIBUNE, July 16, 2010

Advocates of the merger cite the experience of other jurisdictions, most commonly pointing to Missouri and Washington, DC. But these juvenile justice systems are not apt comparisons to Illinois. The District of Columbia has a standalone juvenile justice agency at the cabinet level. Missouri has an agency that combines numerous functions, such as juvenile justice, along with the Illinois equivalents of the Department of Human Services and DCFS. The numbers below show the most striking differences: The juvenile justice agencies in these jurisdictions serve far fewer youth than Illinois, spend more—more than twice as much per youth in the case of DC—and have far better staffing ratios (more than three times as many staff per youth in Missouri). In addition, the DC system involves youth at a rate nearly 8 times greater than Illinois—2.3 percent of all youth aged 15 through 19 in the District of Columbia are committed to its juvenile justice facilities or on parole, versus just 0.3 percent in Illinois and Missouri. Consequently, one would expect that DC is dealing with a population of youth that in Illinois is instead diverted to alternative and community-based programs.

Jurisdiction	Population Served	Pop. Served vs. Jurisdiction's Total Pop. Age 15-19	FY 2009 Budget (Actual)	System Cost per Youth*	Employees	Staff : Youth Ratio
IL	2885	0.3%	\$125 million	\$43,442	1202	0.42 : 1
MO	1172	0.3%	\$60 million	\$51,194	1540	1.31 : 1
DC	920	2.3%	\$94 million	\$102,547	541	0.59 : 1

\* Calculated by dividing system cost by population served.

The Missouri and DC programs are held in such high regard because of their supposedly low recidivism rates. But even those outcomes require closer examination. Missouri claims a recidivism rate of just 9 percent, but measures only those who commit new crimes (not technical parole violations) in their first year of release. The District of Columbia also counts only new offenders—not technical violators—and only in the first year, to arrive at its 25 percent recidivism rate. Illinois, on the other hand, counts both new offenders and technical violators over three years—a fact that makes its 50 percent rate seem far less egregious in comparison.

Undoubtedly, there are important lessons that can be learned from what DC, Missouri and other jurisdictions have achieved, but clearly they do not present readily replicable models for Illinois. To improve its juvenile justice system, Illinois must add resources in the form of funding for adequate programming and staff. As long as we tolerate an under-resourced juvenile justice system, we will not adequately reduce recidivism.

## ***Voices from the frontlines:***

### ***First-hand perspectives from Illinois Youth Center employees***

In all the years of public debate, the myriad legislative hearings, and the countless media reports regarding juvenile justice in Illinois, numerous “experts” of varying sorts have claimed center stage with promises of easy solutions that could be achieved at virtually no cost. Largely absent from the dialogue—either left out or ignored—have been the voices and the experiences of frontline employees in the state’s juvenile justice system,

ranging from juvenile justice specialists to educators to psychologists. This report is intended to bring those voices into the debate, to provide a fresh perspective from the professionals who have dedicated their careers to seeking to help troubled youth.

AFSCME conducted a systematic survey of DJJ employees, receiving nearly 240 completed, confidential surveys from frontline employees—a strong participation rate that speaks to the significant level of engagement of DJJ employees and their desire to work cooperatively to revitalize the Illinois youth centers.

Survey responses revealed that the system is no better through the eyes of employees than it was before the split from the Department of Corrections. In fact, because staff shortages and program cuts have not been reversed or have worsened, many employees regard the system as worse off today.

The changes they propose are similar to those AFSCME proposed five years ago during the debate over the creation of the stand-alone DJJ. That the needs are the same speaks to the failure of the previous attempt to solve the problems of our state juvenile justice system by simply making a nominal change. What the committed youth of Illinois need is an investment of resources during their time in the IYCs to avoid later incarceration. DJJ needs leadership that understands the needs of these youth and the resources to harness the talented and dedicated staff to make change happen.

## **Devote more resources to mental health care**

*“While exact prevalence rates are not known, experts in mental health and juvenile justice estimate that the rate of mental disorder among these youth is substantially higher than among the general population of youth—possibly as high as 60 percent, compared to 22 percent in the general population of youth. In 1995, an assessment conducted in the state of Virginia over a one week period revealed that more than three-quarters of all youth in the state’s 17 detention facilities exhibited at least one diagnosable mental disorder. Of that number, eight to ten percent had mental health needs in the severe/urgent range and 40 percent were assessed as having needs in the moderate range.” (Rotenberg, Susan, 1997. Responding to the Mental Health Needs of Youth in the Juvenile Justice System, Regional Research Institute for Human Services.)*

Mental health treatment was a key concern of respondents, and DJJ employees on the frontlines had several suggestions for improving this critical component of juvenile justice services. The most common suggestion was to increase the amount of individual therapy, and to improve the functioning of group therapy by reducing the size of groups. Both of these proposals involve resource allocation, as more staff would be required to do either. From the surveys:

- *More counseling and involvement with counselors is needed. More mental health programs should be implemented without taking youth out of school.*
- *Counselors are understaffed and don't have enough quality time to spend with each individual youth.*
- *Youth are not getting proper counseling on mental health issues.*
- *This facility has one psychologist and a clinical service supervisor. Occasionally a visiting psychologist is here for a day.*
- *Warrenville added more group counselors, but the youth need one-on-one counseling and therapy. That's what they ask for.*

- *The counselors are so overloaded at this facility that they cannot possibly attend to the needs of the youth in a timely manner, if at all.*
- *[We need] new materials for mental health program [and] more training for mental health staff [to develop] newer, evidence-based programming.*

## **Improve substance-abuse treatment**

In addition to having a mental health disorder, approximately 50% to 75% of delinquent youth also have serious substance abuse issues (Cocozza, Joseph J. 1997. *Identifying the Needs of Juveniles With Co-Occurring Disorders*, Corrections Today). This has implications for future criminal behavior. The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs reported the results of a longitudinal study of adolescents. It found that “Substance-related behaviors were correlated with other problem behaviors. ... substance use was associated with a range of other problems. Across all behaviors listed ...there were significant differences between the problem behavior levels reported by users and nonusers. For example, 31% of youth ages 12–14 who drank alcohol and 18% who did not drink alcohol reported having been suspended from school, and 21% of 15 to 17-year-olds who had used marijuana during the previous 30 days also said they had been arrested during the previous year, as opposed to 5% of those who had not used marijuana in the previous 30 days” (McCurley and Snyder, 2008. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*).

While there was some praise for substance abuse programming now offered in youth centers, survey respondents also identified numerous problems. Respondents recommended expanding drug treatment programs, but stressed the importance of ensuring the efficacy of such programs. While some felt drug treatment was so critical to future success that it should be mandatory, others argued that because youth not committed to recovery could hamper progress in a group setting, participation should be voluntary. This was of particular concern in those cases where treatment is linked to the living unit.

- *We need a more structured substance abuse program [and] more classroom time in education. This month, with 22 weekdays [there were only] 8 days of school.*
- *We have been forced to complete drug treatment in a much more condensed time frame.*
- *[The substance abuse] program meets at the same time as the school day, so students only get school in morning.*
- *Substance abuse counselors conduct group with limited control. Group size should be smaller.*

## **Provide appropriate educational opportunities**

According to the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University, “Children who receive quality education services, meet age-appropriate education milestones, and earn high school and post-secondary school diplomas have significantly brighter outcomes as adults. ... Quality education services assist youth in meeting age-appropriate goals, developing academic and social skills, and becoming responsible adult members of our communities.” (Leone & Weinberg, 2010. *Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems*)

DJJ frontline staff clearly recognize the central role education plays in the future of committed youth. Education, followed closely by vocational programs, was the most frequent subject for comment in survey responses. The strongest concern expressed was about the lack of teachers. While recent hiring was frequently noted, respondents made it clear there is still a shortage of educators. In fact, DJJ School District 428 indicated

recently that they require 41 additional teachers just to bring them into compliance with state standards. In addition to arguing for strengthening core educational services, many respondents offered valuable suggestions for a more robust educational experience, encouraging DJJ to offer a broader array of coursework, options beyond a high school diploma or GED, smaller class sizes, and classes organized by student achievement levels.

- *Classes aren't challenging for youths. The subject matter covered in class settings is far below where these kids should be.*
- *Youth spend more time reading magazines or playing games because of lack of teachers.*
- *Not enough one-to-one teaching and too many distractions preventing the youth who are trying to learn from learning.*
- *The state has let these youths down. Many of these young men cannot read or write.*
- *Youth are passed based on attendance in school, not by what they have learned. Some youth can't read or write but are given diplomas.*
- *Youth need to be divided by behavioral/developmental levels in order to learn.*
- *Hire more teachers and staff. Implement more programs and try to help these youth rather than house them.*
- *All youths need to be in a classroom, to be talked to by a teacher, and have out-of-the-classroom books for math, history, reading, writing, spelling.*
- *We have only eight academic teachers for approximately 250 youths, but seven empty classrooms.*
- *Full-time school with smaller classes. Hire teacher aides and substitute teachers, smaller caseloads for counselors, more recreation options, more organized sports.*
- *There are not enough teachers in the school to adequately educate the youth. The student to teacher ratio is too high.*
- *We need more teachers and all youth in school. Too many youth lack basic reading, spelling and math skills.*
- *Education standards should be set at public school standards.*

## **Connect youth to employment**

Vocational education provides both a sense of accomplishment and a basis for future employment.

Unfortunately, vocational education is not now widely available in IYCs. There are only eight instructors employed in the whole system. Regarding vocational education opportunities, the most common answers from respondents on this program were "non-existent" or "none." Many noted that successful programs that the youth had found rewarding and that were useful in building skills – like small engine shop or construction trades – had been cancelled due to a lack of teachers and materials.

Programs that connect youth to employers willing to hire them in the community must be expanded. The Department of Justice has long advocated this type of approach because of the many barriers that make it difficult for court involved youth to obtain legitimate employment. Many researchers agree that the risk of recidivism is increased if appropriate schooling, vocational training, or employment is not available. However,

continuity is critical, and training without skill sets that can be used in the community or directly linked to employment do not produce the same lower recidivism rates (Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy, David M. Altschuler, Juvenile Reentry & Aftercare, 2009).

Staff articulated two benefits of good vocational training for the youth: First, that it is valuable for their future success in finding employment, but also that it is a positive way to keep youth constructively engaged in rebuilding their lives.

- *Need more vocational, parenting and life skills classes. Teach skills that student could [use when they] leave here to get a job. Every class in DJJ should have an aide to work with individual students academically and, defuse behavior escalation without impacting teaching time.*
- *The state has eliminated vocational training. Many of these young men will not go on to college. They need something to fall back on once they return to society.*
- *In this particular area the vocational training is down the drain. Nothing is being taught that the youth can use in a life situation.*
- *Vocational training is non-existent or minimal. No computer training, no carpentry, nothing that would give them a shot at learning a trade.*
- *There needs to be more programs, recreational, vocational, conflict resolution, restorative justice, community services/volunteer work for the girls to become invested in something positive.*
- *These youth need more programs preparing them for life after parole - living skills, job skills, independent living, how to apply for a job. They leave here without these skills and then reoffend. We send them home with a GED certificate and no other training. We also need college and trade classes to teach skills.*
- *Youth with GEDs or high school diplomas should be getting some type of training to prepare them for return to their community.*
- *More college prep classes for youth who are interested in attending college after release. The need for more qualified teachers is a must, and bringing in more vocational instructors, such as carpenters and auto mechanics.*
- *Computer training and business education classes are needed. These existed [previously] but are no longer provided. Culinary arts, welding, and auto body programs were [offered but] are now nonexistent. These were quality programs.*
- *There are barely any vocational opportunities for the youth. Why not give them tools to go to work and be productive when they get out?*

## **Create specialized, adequately staffed parole for juveniles**

Prior to the reorganization of the Juvenile Division in 1998, parole was separated into “adult only” caseloads and juvenile caseloads (as do both Missouri and the District of Columbia systems). The agents assisted in developing transition plans for youth before their release and then followed up with them to ensure they adhered to their plans. Parolees could count on assistance reconnecting with family, finding housing if necessary, and

referrals to day programs and counseling in the community. Now most parole agents carry a mixed caseload of youths and adults—and are not able to focus their efforts on “wrap-around” services for youth.

DJJ employees envision a system in which transition planning would start on the first day of incarceration, with programming in the IYC to give youth the tools they will need when they get out. A plan would be developed to connect every young offender to community resources such as schools, residential programs, social service agencies and substance abuse programs that would assist them upon their release. Then, after release, the parole agent would ensure compliance with the program and also remove roadblocks and advocate for resources to address any new needs that surface.

A return to a separate juvenile parole program would be a real reform, providing agents to better address the different needs of youth. However, four years after the establishment of DJJ, we are still waiting for the implementation of the separate parole system – known in DJJ as Aftercare. The titles and job descriptions have been negotiated with AFSCME and have been in place for over a year. Funding has been identified. And yet there have been no parole agents assigned to juvenile caseloads. Now, the merger discussions are threatening this reform before it has ever had a chance to be tested—with outside self-appointed “experts” debating whether the job description is adequate and how the training should be conducted.

### **Restore organized recreational programs to build social skills, engage youth**

Leisure Activities Specialists plan and staff activities to occupy youth when other programming is not underway and recruit volunteers to help with those activities. There are currently nine LAS’s in the system, compared to seven when DJJ began. Three facilities have no LAS at all, and the lack of organized recreation was a frequently voiced concern of DJJ employees.

Employees view such activities as serving three key functions: providing an incentive for positive behavior; preventing idle time which can provide openings for negative behavior; and engaging youth in team-oriented activities that build social skills. They see recreation as important to maintaining order in the facility but also as a source of uplift for the youth.

- *If active, regular, vigorous sports were supplied top all youth, there would be less tension and fighting. [Organized recreation gives youth] an opportunity to bond with each other.*
- *We used to have softball, track & field, carnivals, weight lifting classes 10-12 years ago. Now we have almost no organized rec activities.*
- *[Our facility has] only 1 LAS, when at one time we had 6 or 7. There are basically no off-wing activities for youth.*
- *Sitting in a dayroom for hours at a time watching TV or playing cards is not real recreation.*
- *Very limited organized recreational activities exist. One staff doing the job many had before.*
- *I am the only one in charge of the youth's recreation. Although I do my best I cannot provide a top-notch program by myself. DJJ has made it very clear that this is not important.*
- *Programs need to be done on 2nd shift. Keep kids occupied because now there is too much down time.*
- *Recreation non-existent. Most of the girls in this facility weigh 10-20 lbs more in a matter of weeks rather than months.*

- *The youth have only a ball to play with.*
- *We don't have LAS. Physical activity is non-existent.*

## **Ensure youth accountability and rehabilitation**

Security must be the first task of any correctional facility, adult or juvenile. Adequate security provides the environment where rehabilitation can take place. Youths cannot learn and staff cannot teach in a chaotic or violence-prone environment. But security can be maintained and youths held accountable in ways that will better allow needed programming for rehabilitation.

The survey asked employees to rate safety and security for both employees and youth at their facility. More than four out of five of the respondents rated safety and security as worse than three years ago.

<b>59%</b>	<b>- Safety and security is much worse than three years ago</b>
<b>26</b>	- Somewhat worse
<b>14</b>	- About the same
<b>2</b>	- Better than three years ago
<b>0</b>	- Much better than three years ago

Twenty-nine percent of the respondents had personally sustained violence-related on-the-job injuries that required them to take time off from work in the last three years. Many of the injuries were incurred while responding to youth on youth violence, but some were the result of youth assaults on staff.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents had witnessed acts of youth-on-youth or youth-on-staff violence in the last three years, and many noted that violence was increasing. The most commonly reported were youth-on-youth assaults—reinforcing frontline workers’ contention that those most harmed by lax security are the youth. Following is a small sampling of the assaults and violence survey respondents described:

- *Breaking up a violent assault [I suffered a] chipped right elbow and torn triceps tendon. [I was] off work for eight days and on light duty for three months.*
- *I was working Unit 11 in the staging area when two security staff were assaulted by a youth. When I responded I was assaulted by another youth. I was punched in the face, knocked to the ground and kicked. I was off work five days with injuries to my face, side of torso and leg.*
- *Fight in the fitness center. Staff breaking up fight had finger almost bitten off.*
- *I was target of a planned youth assault on two teachers. I was struck in the face and body with the youth's fists. Staff responded well and quickly. I had minor injuries as a result and came back the next day. Other teacher was not so fortunate, had major injuries and hospitalization.*
- *I was struck in the head with a chair by one youth trying to strike another youth.*
- *I sustained a serious knee injury breaking up a fight. A youth was pushed into my leg which caused a hyperextension and a meniscus tear of my left knee.*

- *Youth punched me in the jaw. Youth was assaulting another youth and when I, along with another staff, separated the youth she began to assault me and the other staff.*
- *Just this month youth walked up to another youth and punched him in the face. The second youth did not strike back. The youth's face was swollen on one side. Was later found that the youth had suffered a broken jaw.*
- *Last month, youth-on-youth assault (broken nose) and youth-on-youth fight with contusions & abrasions on face. Month before that, youth-on-youth assault (broken jaw). Have seen numerous other fights and youth-on-youth assaults.*
- *I have witnessed multiple fights in my short career [less than a year on the job] including youth-on-youth and youth-on-staff assault. Youth assaulted [name redacted] after youth was told to go to his assigned room due to being aggressive.*
- *Teacher pushed into a file cabinet by a student in class. Another student, when teacher asked for help, closed the classroom door instead. Security was not in the hallway to help. A third student eventually went for help.*
- *End of Feb. 2010 one youth assaults another with a book to the face - no confinement time. Mid Feb. 2010 two youth assault another youth, serve no confinement time, then assault another youth the next day - again no confinement time. Jan. 2010 youth assaults staff and inflicts back injury, staff still off work in late March.*
- *Fights in dietary involving 16 youth. Three youth began fighting and other youth jumped in. Several staff were injured attempting to control the fight. Youth had busted lips, scratches, etc. Staff received pulled muscles, bruises, concussion, knee injuries.*
- *Youth-on-youth assault. Youth received black eye and staff that tried to separate youth injured knee.*
- *Staff escorted youth to confinement and youth kicked the door, slamming it on staff's finger. Staff needed stitches to stop the bleeding.*
- *Youth walked up and punched another youth in the nose. Youth was rushed to the hospital and received plastic surgery due to seriousness of injury.*
- *Youth-on-youth assault in dietary. Staff received a dislocated knee.*
- *There are daily assaults and fights but youth are released from confinement in less than 24 hours with no additional punishment.*

DJJ management has instituted a requirement that responses to youth violence must rely on using behavior-modification techniques to reward positive behavior and staff interventions in lieu of tickets (which result in privileges being taken away) or confinement. However, either because staff have not been adequately trained in the use of these new techniques or because the techniques are not really effective in moderating behavior, youths are being left without the structure they need, violence is increasing, and other youths and staff are at greater risk. Survey respondents' recommendations include:

- *Create more discipline and structure for these kids. Right now there's really no consequences for their actions, which can lead to dangerous atmosphere.*
- *Replace the administration with people who care about the safety of youth and staff—not just say they do. DJJ needs to hold youth responsible for their actions. At this point discipline is null and void. I mean it—someone is going to die.*

- *For any program within our system to be effective, security needs to be maintained and able to address issues when youth are out of compliance with the rules and practices of the facility.*
- *Find a balance between the hard-headed, physically-based approach of adult corrections and the seemingly ineffective therapeutic approach currently adopted. Understand that the offender may have environmental and psychiatric reasons for their presence here, but they are still offenders.*
- *There is not enough discipline for the youth when they violate the rules in order to get them to refrain from doing it again.*
- *Consistent consequences for negative behavior. If the little stuff is handled, the big stuff won't happen (i.e. assaults on staff).*
- *We are all about reward for good behavior now. We used to be only about punishment for negative behavior. We need both. Kids have little respect for authority.... How will no respect for authority help these kids in the adult world? Answer: It won't!*
- *Administration (IYC and Springfield) are too soft on bad behavior and other smaller, weaker youth are at risk for their safety.*
- *We have lost control. More and more youths are sentenced here with adult crimes. No one even cares about the staff and their safety. Someone will lose their life.*

### **Adequately staff juvenile facilities**

Time and again in the suggestions above, the issue of short-staffing is seen to impact the ability of the IYCs to rehabilitate youth. Vacant positions at every level are a problem. Inadequate professional staffing affects programming and education. Facilities are not currently staffed to do the minimum expected of the IYCs. To implement many of the reforms above, more staffing will be needed. No reform plan can happen without additional resources, and staffing resources are the key to success or failure. Survey respondents gave numerous examples of the consequences of understaffing, including:

- *It is no longer mandatory to have 2 staff working confinement on 10 PM-6 AM shift. That makes one less staff on duty if and when something happens, which puts staff and youth at risk. If a staff has to go to the hospital, then who is to cover the post?*
- *Reduced the staff for the Confinement unit from 3 to 2 or sometimes 1. Having 1 or 2 staff where the most aggressive or unstable youths are housed is a major security risk to staff and youths.*
- *Many positions haven't been filled since employees left or retired. Everyone is doing more. Teachers now do audits, transcripts and often must procure their own classroom necessities.*
- *Two special treatment units were combined, so now have two different age groups in the unit. I think the two should be separate because the older kids have a negative influence on the younger kids.*
- *Infirmery post [eliminated]. Youth that have medical issues now go to confinement, which is not made for medical purposes.*
- *I have been the only staff with six youth, two on suicide watch. And I have to conduct shower and rec.*

- *School secretary eliminated. Educators now fill in, takes time away from lessons.*
- *Housekeeping. More areas of the building not being cleaned on a regular basis.*
- *One security staff per living unit. Eliminated security supervisors on buildings with living units, housekeeping posts, youth property control. Posts should be reinstated for safety and security of facility, staff and youth so buildings will have adequate supplies, sanitation, and youth property can be controlled properly.*
- *We have had several mandatory posts eliminated. The greatest threats to security and safety are the Confinement II and III posts due to its conflicting with DJJ's own door opening procedure, and the HCU II position which places one staff in a highly isolated environment moving youth for up to 4 different professionals at the same time: Doctor, Dentist, MHP and Nurse call.*
- *Many educators have retired or moved on without their positions being filled, leaving us with higher numbers of youth in classes.*
- *No office coordinator for a school. Processing grades, transcripts, requests for records, not to mention orders, time sheets, etc. is more than a full time position.*
- *DJJ has eliminated the visiting room officer as a mandatory post. It should be reinstated because the facility needs to have staff available for searches and monitoring of youth when visiting with people from outside the facility.*

## **Include IYC staff in reforms**

Juvenile employees want to make a difference in the lives of the youth who come through their facilities. For many youth, incarceration is a chance to turn their lives around, and DJJ employees are the people who can help them do it. But for any reforms to succeed, employees must be viewed as more than the recipients of policy memos or retraining sessions. AFSCME Council 31 has consistently made clear to DJJ administration that AFSCME local unions at the youth centers stand ready to cooperate in efforts to improve conditions and strengthen programming. But too often the union—and the voices of the employees which it represents—is shut out of the planning process. Wardens must reach out to local union representations to solicit ideas, troubleshoot potential problems and get feedback on what is working and what is not.

In responding to the general question of recommendations to improve DJJ's overall operations, the most common theme was a desire for communication between management and staff, and between different programs within the facility.

- *Listen to frontline workers with the experience & knowledge to come up with practical ideas that can actually be applied within the specific facility or program. Take input from those of us at the local level.*
- *Shrink high paid central positions and run facilities with their superintendents. We hire people based on their ability to make decisions, find solutions and solve problems, then tie their hands and micromanage from Springfield. Give employees the freedom to show what works. Strengthen the front line and be accountable for your goals. Make accountability of youth job one.*
- *Have administration encourage staff, not be against us. Not talk to staff as if they are second class citizens. Boost morale.*

- *Let staff have more involvement in decision-making.*
- *Allow area supervisors to do their jobs & have Springfield stop micromanaging and listen to frontline staff when problems are brought up because they are the first to notice problems.*
- *Eliminate Springfield micro-management and give on-site Administrator the authority to make decisions. Have politicians work 2-3 days with the line staff.*
- *Put knowledgeable people in key supervisory positions.*
- *Why are the staff that spend 8 hours a shift with the youth not involved with ideas? Why do those that only read reports have all the ideas?*
- *Utilize the great staff. Provide adequate support and resources for them to do their job.*

## **Conclusion**

Just four years after the Illinois Youth Centers were removed from a large parent agency in the form of the Illinois Department of Corrections, the state's juvenile justice system has made little progress. Recidivism has not been markedly reduced, cuts to educational and treatment programs have not been reversed and staff shortages have not been addressed. As a consequence, frontline employees say the facilities are less safe for youth and staff alike, the department wastes millions of dollars on overtime costs that adequate staff would render unnecessary, and too often young offenders are not prepared to become productive members of society upon their release.

This is an outcome AFSCME predicted when the union opposed the creation of a DJJ that had no additional resources to reverse staff and budget cuts, improve security or invest in programs. Yet now frontline employees and their union are being sidelined again as many of the proponents of the stand-alone DJJ are pressing forward on a plan to merge the youth centers back into a large parent agency—this time the Department of Children and Family Services.

Merger proponents show no evidence that their plan will reduce recidivism, ensure adequate staff levels, make facilities safer, rebuild education and treatment programs, or obtain additional funds. In fact, if efficiencies can be achieved through shared services between departments, this can and should be done under current statute without the disruption that a massive departmental reorganization would produce.

The Quinn Administration should set aside its rush to yet another bureaucratic restructuring and instead work with frontline employees to make concrete improvements now. Staffing cuts should be reversed, bringing down the youth-to-staff ratio, improving services and cutting overtime costs. Serious investment should be undertaken to strengthen academic and vocational education programs, mental health care, substance abuse treatment and organized recreational opportunities. A comprehensive assessment of each youth should take place and be coupled with an aftercare plan connecting parolees to resources and services in their communities.

These are concrete and meaningful steps that should be implemented now to reverse a nearly decade-long slide in juvenile justice outcomes in Illinois. Yet another structural reorganization should not be allowed to substitute once again for such meaningful reinvestment, or for a true and productive partnership between the administration of the juvenile justice system and the frontline employees—the juvenile justice specialists,

educators, counselors, psychologists, social workers, parole agents and others—who are striving to bring about the safe and successful rehabilitation of young offenders in Illinois.

**Staffing for School District 428**

Facility	Current # of Staff			Staff Needed					
	# Regular Ed	# Special Ed	# Vocational	# Regular Ed	Position/Title	# Special Ed	Position/Title	# Career & Tech Ed	Position/Title
Chicago	4	1	0	2	PE/Language Arts	1	General	0	
Harrisburg	15	6	7 CON	5	Writing,Math, Social Studies/Science, Health	3	Science/Health, Life Skills	1	Vocational Inst.
Joliet	11	3	3	5	Science/Math/Health	1	Science/Health, Life Skills	3	Foreign Lang/Art/Music
Kewanee	12	4	1	1	Math, Science, P.E.	2	LBS1	1	Janitorial, Landscaping, or Computers
Murphysboro	4	3	1	2	1 elem/1 sec writing	1	consultation sped for Rtl and PBIS	2	1 Horticulture / 1 Construction Occup
Pere Marquette	2	2	0	1	Educator	0		1	Voc. Educator
St. Charles	10	5	3	4	US History/Science/Elem Lang Arts/PE/Title I Math	1	Social Studies/Lang Arts/Science/Confinement	2	Computer Tech/Landscaping
Warrenville	6	1				1	General	1	Computer Tech
<b>Totals</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>		<b>10</b>		<b>11</b>	
<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>97</b>			<b>41</b>					
<b>% increase needed</b>				<b>31%</b>		<b>40%</b>		<b>137.50%</b>	

**As of October 30, 2009 :**

SD 428 HC - 126  
 FY 10 HC Goal- 135  
 45 add'l teachers needed to meet statutory minimums

**As of May 3, 2010 :**

SD 428 HC - 130  
 FY 10 HC Goal- 135  
**41 add'l teachers needed to meet statutory minimums; 17 positions of 41 needed currently posted**  
 4 Clerical needed (SpEd Office, JOL, MPB, WRV)  
**OPTIMAL SD428 HC - 176 (12 Adm; 138 Teachers; 26 Support)**