



Statement in Support of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder's Announcement on Providing Quality Education Services for America's Confined Youth

December 8, 2014 - The Southern Education Foundation (SEF) applauds and stands in support of the [joint announcement](#) from U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder addressing quality education services for America's confined youth. The guidance and support are a welcome, needed set of priorities to improve opportunities for our nation's most vulnerable youth: those students in our juvenile justice facilities.

SEF recognizes that there are persistent opportunity gaps faced by youth of color in this country, and is encouraged by the efforts of the My Brother's Keeper White House Initiative, and the jointly released sets of guidance from the Department of Education and the Department of Justice over the past several months: guidance released in October, to ensure all students have equal access to educational resources; and today's guidance to ensure that youth in juvenile detention centers are ensured a quality education.

Earlier in 2014, SEF released a report on the educational status and academic outcomes of incarcerated youth ([Just Learning: The Imperative to Transform Juvenile Justice Systems into Effective Educational Systems](#)). This report addressed the overwhelming lack of educational opportunity in our nation's juvenile justice systems, primarily impacting youth of color, and the need to transform the system. SEF's *Just Learning* report found that in 2010, the approximately 70,000 youth incarcerated on any given day were primarily youth of color (63 percent). The evidence that these youth have already been impacted by a lack of access and persistent inequity is clear, as the data show they enter juvenile justice facilities behind in school, possess substantial mental and health problems, and are frequently confined for nonviolent, minor offenses. In 2009, most incarcerated youth in the system for 90 days or more failed to earn a single course credit, and only about one-quarter remained on track to re-enter their local schools. The report concludes that juvenile justice programs are actually making it harder for students to turn their lives around. These youth should not be forgotten when we work to achieve the goal under My Brother's Keeper of graduating every American child from high school college and career ready.

SEF's recommendations for transforming our juvenile justice systems are ambitious, in recognition that it will ultimately take an overhaul of priorities to make education the focus of incarcerated students' days. We are encouraged that the jointly released guidance today reflects that necessary shift. Our recommendations include:

- Re-organize programs so that they are designed and operated to advance the teaching and learning of students.

- Set and apply the same educational standards that exist for all students in a state to the schools and educational programs in the juvenile justice system.
- Establish effective and timely methods of testing and reporting on the educational status and progress of every child and youth in the juvenile justice system.
- Develop and implement an individual educational plan and learning strategy-including special education, developmental services, academic motivation and persistence, and meta-cognition-to guide the instruction and services of every student in the juvenile justice system.
- Establish systems of coordination and cooperation to provide a seamless transition of students from and back into public schools.
- Create and maintain data systems to measure institutional and system-wide educational progress and identify areas in need of improvement.

Today's announcement and accompanying guidance present an important opportunity, and it will take all of us coming together to ensure incarcerated youth have access to quality education. The Dear Colleague letters should serve as useful tools and provide clarifying information on the protections afforded incarcerated youth. We urge those leaders in juvenile justice systems across the country to take the guidance seriously, and we hope that the resources and supports these leaders need will be provided to transform juvenile justice facilities into effective educational systems.