



Grand Challenges
for Social Work



Achieving Equal Opportunity and Justice in Juvenile Justice

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Bo-Kyung Elizabeth Kim
University of Southern California

Susan McCarter
University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Patricia Logan-Greene
State University of New York at Buffalo

GRAND CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL WORK INITIATIVE

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Grand Challenge: *Achieve equal opportunity and justice*

GRAND CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL WORK INITIATIVE

The Grand Challenges for Social Work are designed to focus a world of thought and action on the most compelling and critical social issues of our day. Each grand challenge is a broad but discrete concept where social work expertise and leadership can be brought to bear on bold new ideas, scientific exploration and surprising innovations.

We invite you to review the following challenges with the goal of providing greater clarity, utility and meaning to this roadmap for lifting up the lives of individuals, families and communities struggling with the most fundamental requirements for social justice and human existence.

The Grand Challenges for Social Work include the following:

- Ensure healthy development of all youth
- Close the health gap
- Build healthy relationships to end violence
- Eradicate social isolation
- End homelessness
- Promote smart decarceration
- Reduce extreme economic inequality
- Build financial capability for all
- Harness technology for social good
- Create social responses to a changing environment
- Achieve equal opportunity and justice
- Advance long and productive lives

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Achieving Equal Opportunity and Justice in Juvenile Justice

Bo-Kyung Elizabeth Kim, Susan McCarter, and Patricia Logan-Greene

In order to achieve equal opportunity and justice, our nation's most vulnerable youth must not bear a disproportionate burden of justice system involvement. In 2016, nearly one million youth in the United States were arrested (Hockenberry & Puzzanhera, 2018). These youth are often those growing up with neglect, maltreatment, and abuse; living without financial security; facing mental, emotional, and behavioral health problems; and experiencing discrimination for various reasons not limited to race, ethnicity, culture, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Moreover, once they become justice-involved, they face diminished outcomes in development, education, and employment, as well as an increased likelihood of continued system involvement. Therefore, we propose rebuilding social work's commitment to juvenile justice by capitalizing on recent policy and systems change, cross-sector collaboration, and evidence-based interventions. To transform the juvenile justice system over the next decade, we propose five actionable goals for social work practice, policy, and research to dismantle inequity and injustice and foster the full social, civic, economic, and political integration of justice-involved youth.

Key words: juvenile justice, youth incarceration, diversion, school-to-prison pipeline, detention, juvenile court, re-entry, disproportionate minority contact

CURRENT JUVENILE JUSTICE

The first juvenile court was founded in 1899 with the premise that juvenile offenders were profoundly different than adult offenders. Because of their immaturity and vulnerability, juveniles were regarded as less culpable, needing protection, and more amenable to rehabilitation (Bishop, 2005). This assertion was reaffirmed in the 2005 *Roper v. Simmons* case, wherein the U.S. Supreme Court referenced neurobiological research suggesting that the typical human brain does not mature before age 25. The court cited that research as evidence for the elimination of the death penalty for juveniles (Haider, 2006; Johnson, Blum, & Giedd, 2009).

Although originally intended to rehabilitate youth, the juvenile justice system has vacillated between rehabilitative and punitive models, seeking a balance between maintaining community safety and rehabilitating youth (Jenson & Howard, 1998). These pendulum swings have disproportionately affected and further disenfranchised vulnerable youth in the United States (McCarter, 2011). This paper provides an overview of the juvenile justice system and offers five

empirically grounded goals for juvenile justice policy and practice. By pursuing these goals, the profession can advance the work of improving equal opportunity and justice over the next decade.

JUVENILE JUSTICE CASE PROCESSING

Young people can come into the juvenile justice system for acts that, if committed by an adult, could result in criminal prosecution. In the juvenile system, such acts are referred to as *delinquent acts*. The system also processes youth for deeds that are not considered criminal if committed by adults—for example, status offenses such as truancy, running away, and underage consumption of alcohol.

The United States has no federal age of criminal responsibility (i.e., the age at which one is considered an adult by the justice system), and state statutes differ on the subject. State laws also differ on the nature and use of waivers (mandatory, presumptive, statutory, and discretionary),¹ which enable juvenile court judges to waive jurisdiction over cases and thereby to clear the path for the prosecution of youth in the adult criminal system. This means that a young person's involvement with either the juvenile- or criminal-justice system depends on the state as well as the circumstance (McCarter & Bridges, 2011). As of the latest Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) figures, nine states continue to have an age of criminal responsibility that is younger than 18 years, with seven states considering 17-year-olds to be adults and two states considering 16-year-olds to be adults (Puzzanchera, 2018). Whether a youth is considered a juvenile or an adult in the eyes of the court has significant ramifications, beginning with how the case is processed. Juvenile justice case processing differs from criminal court processing in a myriad of ways, including terminology, steps, requirements, and services provided (McCarter & Bridges, 2011).

Youth come into the juvenile justice system from several paths. One is through formal arrest by law enforcement. Others include referrals from schools, families, and other public systems such as child welfare (See Figure 1). In 2016, over 850,000 juvenile court cases were processed. That represents 26.9 delinquency cases for every 1,000 juveniles aged 10 or older in the United States (81% of the cases derived from law enforcement referrals; Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2018). Moreover, OJJDP reports that, in 2017, more than 31 million youth were under juvenile court jurisdiction—79% were between the ages of 10 and 15 years, 12% were 16, and 9% were 17. Hockenberry and Puzzanchera (2018) note that the small proportions of 16- and 17-year-olds in the juvenile court population are a result of cross-state variations in the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2019).

According to the OJJDP, 56% (479,600) of the estimated 850,500 delinquency cases in 2016 were handled formally with petitions filed through the local juvenile court,² whereas 44% (370,900) were handled informally or without petition. In the cases handled informally without

¹ A discussion of waivers follows below.

² In juvenile courts, *petitions* are formal documents that initiate court proceedings regarding a young person. A delinquency petition filed in juvenile court is similar to charges filed in criminal court for adults.

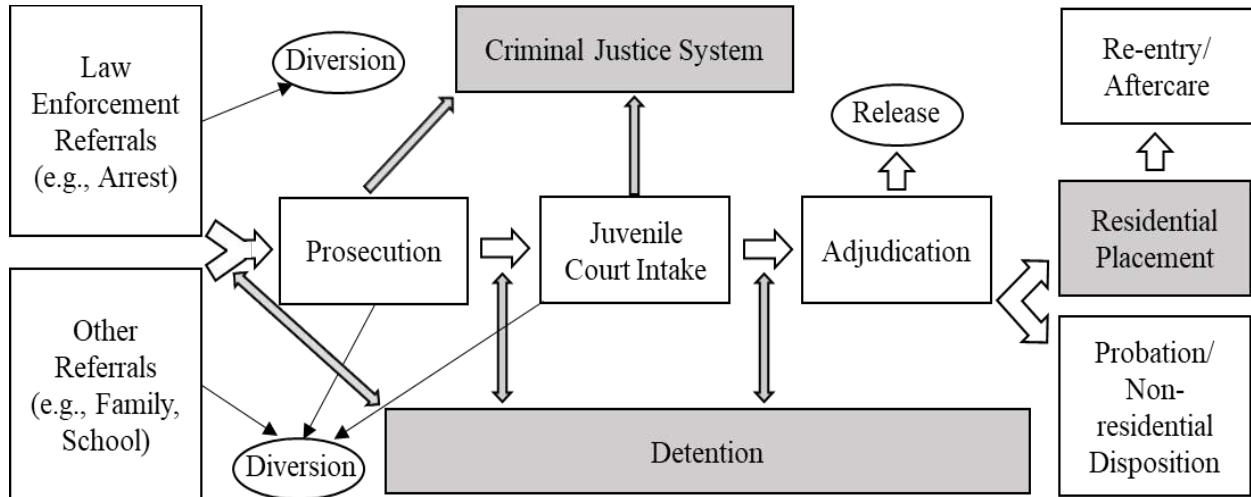


Figure 1. Case flow through the juvenile justice system. Adapted from the case flow diagram presented in *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: A National Report* (NCJ 153569, pp. 76–79), by H. N. Snyder & M. Sickmund, 1995. Retrieved from National Criminal Justice Reference Service website: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/153569NCJRS.pdf>.

petitions, 40% (147,600) of the youth had their charges dismissed, 16% (58,800) were assigned probation, and 44% (164,500) received another type of sanction, including diversion with or without community service, restitution, mediation with or without restorative justice, and agency referral (Hockenberry & Puzanchera, 2018).

After their initial contact with the system and through the duration of the court processing, youth whose cases proceed to court may stay in the community or be placed in detention (Bartollas, 2006). When a youth’s case reaches court, prosecutors in some jurisdictions have the discretion to send the case directly to the criminal justice system (referred to as a *prosecutorial waiver* or *discretionary transfer*; McCarter & Bridges, 2011). In the next stage, formal intake at juvenile court, a judge may decide, based on the severity or type of crime, whether to send the case to the criminal justice system (referred to as a *judicial waiver*; McCarter & Bridges, 2011). A judge also may decide to process the case and divert the youth. If the juvenile does not admit guilt at the initial hearing, the case is not transferred to adult court, and the judge decides to move forward formally, the case enters the adjudication stage, which is analogous to a trial in the criminal justice system (Bartollas, 2006). The juvenile justice system does not impanel juries, and presiding judges have full discretion over adjudication. Youth are released if the case petition is not sustained. If a case petition is sustained, the judge determines a disposition, which is equivalent to a “sentence” in the criminal justice system (Siegel & Welsh, 2009). Youth may receive probation, the terms of which require them to keep the peace, maintain good behavior, and continue contact with the court counselors for a specified length of time. Or they may receive dispositions requiring residential placement (e.g., in a camp, state facility, or group home), which is always followed by aftercare (e.g., probation, parole; Bartollas, 2006).

DISPARITIES IN JUVENILE JUSTICE

Over the last 12 years, the number of youth in the juvenile justice system has significantly declined (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2018), but the most vulnerable and disadvantaged youth in the United States continue to bear the biggest burden of juvenile justice system involvement. The juvenile justice system disproportionately affects youth growing up with neglect, maltreatment, and abuse (Ryan, Testa, & Zhai, 2008); living in poverty (Birckhead, 2012); facing mental, emotional, and behavioral health (MEB) problems (Sedlak & McPherson, 2010); and experiencing discrimination, including on the basis of race, ethnicity, culture (McCarter, 2017), sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation (Irvine & Canfield, 2016; Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009).

Neglect, Maltreatment, and Abuse

Children in the child welfare system are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system (Ryan & Testa, 2005). Studies suggest that 60% of the youth committing serious offenses are also involved in the child welfare system (Langrehr, 2011; Zajac, Sheidow, & Davis, 2015). According to self-reports by crossover youth (youth who either enter the justice system from the child welfare system or vice versa), 70% of those experiencing some form of maltreatment also participated in violent crime and 79% engaged in a broader form of delinquency. Ryan and colleagues (2008) indicate that, when children are removed from home, the likelihood of delinquency rises because they experience lower levels of investment from adults and weaker social bonds, which can include lack of permanency, commitment, and attachment. Other researchers suggest that youth in the child welfare system have increased likelihood of externalizing behaviors (Kortenkamp & Ehrle, 2002) and running away (Crosland & Dunlap, 2015). As a result, they have more frequent contact with law enforcement. Studies indicate that child-welfare system involvement increases a youth's chances of being detained (Conger & Ross, 2001) and receiving a disposition for out-of-home placement (Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000; Tam, Abrams, Freisthler, & Ryan, 2016).

Poverty and Socioeconomic Status

Other research indicates that poverty is associated with juvenile-justice system contact. Birckhead (2012) estimated that nearly 60% of Tennessee youth under the jurisdiction of the state juvenile justice system were either on public assistance or had annual family income of less than \$20,000. Court officials acknowledged that they steer low-income families into the juvenile justice system to “help the youth and facilitate ... services, accountability, and discipline” (Birckhead, 2012, p. 59). Logan-Greene, Kim, and Nurius (2016) found that one in five youth entering probation for the first time came from families with annual incomes below \$15,000. Although it is widely acknowledged that youth in the juvenile justice system come from low-income families, the extent to which socioeconomic status contributes to inequitable outcomes is often overlooked (Birckhead, 2012). Moreover, many of the informal processes that provide avenues for exit from the system (e.g., diversion, community service) require time, resources

(e.g., restitution, fees), transportation, and a stable mailing address to receive court communications. Those requirements can disadvantage low-income children.

MEB Disorders

A significant proportion of youth in the juvenile justice system contend with MEB disorders. National estimates indicate that approximately 22% of the overall population under age 18 years experiences psychiatric disorders but that the rate is approximately 70% for court-involved youth (Cocozza & Shufelt, 2006; Teplin, Welty, Abram, Dulcan, & Washburn, 2012). These mental health concerns include increased risk of aggression or displays of anger, self-regulatory challenges, substance use, and trauma symptoms (Kim, Gilman, Thompson, & DeLeon, in press; Wasserman, McReynolds, Lucas, Fisher, & Santos, 2002). A meta-regression study of mental disorders among youth in detention and correctional facilities found that the majority of those aged 10 to 19 ($n = 16,750$) have a conduct disorder diagnosis (Fazel, Doll, & Långström, 2008). Comorbid disorders are also prevalent for justice-involved youth. Estimates for juvenile justice samples range from 39% (Schubert, Mulvey, & Glasheen, 2011) to 79% (Shufelt & Cocozza, 2006). In one longitudinal study of detained youth in Cook County, Illinois, 51% had a comorbid diagnosis of substance abuse and an affective, anxiety, or conduct disorder; and 73% of those youth had a drug dependence problem and a behavioral disorder, including either conduct or oppositional defiant disorder (Teplin et al., 2012). Moreover, research estimates suggest that 30% of justice-involved youth have diagnosable learning disabilities (Sedlak & McPherson, 2010), 75% have experienced traumatic victimization, and 93% had adverse childhood experiences, including domestic/community violence, child abuse, and exposure to substance abuse/mental illness (Baglivio et al., 2014; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 2003; Kim, Gilman, Thompson, et al., in press; Logan-Greene, Kim, & Nurius, 2020).

Discrimination

Race, ethnicity, and culture

In 2016, American Indian youth comprised 2% of the U.S. population under the age of 18, Asian youth 6%, Black youth 15%, Hispanic/Latinx youth 23%, and White youth 55%. Yet, for that same year, American Indian youth accounted for 2% of delinquency cases, Asian youth for 1%, Black youth for 36%, Hispanic/Latinx youth for 18%, and White youth for 44% (Hockenberry & Puzanchera, 2018). Although the types of crimes committed may differ slightly by race/ethnicity—indicating, for example, that rates of petit larceny are higher among Black youth than among White counterparts and rates of arson are higher among White youth than among Black counterparts—these differences cannot explain the current disproportionality in cases (Hockenberry & Puzanchera, 2018; McCarter, 2011). A study that compared self-reports with official records and controlled for self-reported delinquent behaviors found that race/ethnicity was by far the strongest predictor of having an official record (e.g., arrest or incarceration; Gilman et al., 2014).

Moreover, racial/ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system are worsening. Comparing detention rates, OJJDP found that, in 1997, Black youth were detained at a rate 5 times that for White youth. By 2015, the difference had risen to 6.1 times (OJJDP, 2017). Similarly, comparing incarceration rates, OJJDP reported that, in 2001, Black youth were incarcerated a rate 4.1 times the rate for White youth, but in 2015, Black youth were incarcerated 5 times more often than White youth—frequently for the same crimes (Sickmund, Sladky, Kang, & Puzzanchera, 2017). As these examples suggest, racial and ethnic disparities are pervasive across most contact points in the juvenile justice system and across most jurisdictions (Bishop, 2005; Kempf-Leonard, 2007; McCarter, 2011; Kim et al., in press).

Sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation

Since the inception of the juvenile court, rates of juvenile justice involvement have been higher among boys than among girls. In 2014, those identifying as boys/men comprised 72% of the delinquency cases in juvenile courts (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2018). For that same year, the delinquency case rate for boys was 2.5 times that for girls (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2018). Inasmuch as these are case processing statistics, they do not reflect actual crime commission rates and underrepresent accurate rates of female juvenile delinquency (Steffensmeier, Schwartz, Zhong, & Ackerman, 2005). Historically, girls in the juvenile justice system have been punished more often for subjective moral offenses (e.g., actual or suspected sexual behavior) or waywardness (Abrams & Curran, 2000; MacDonald & Chesney-Lind, 2001; Kim, Quinn, Logan-Greene, DiClemente, & Voisin, 2020) than for finite acts of delinquency. Recently, as delinquency case rates for girls started rising, the field recognized that theories and programs previously developed for boys needed to be revisited to be appropriate for girls (Chesney-Lind, 2001; Lipsey & Cullen, 2007; Logan-Greene, Kim, Quinn, DiClemente, & Voisin, 2018; Kim, Gilman, Kosterman, & Hill, 2019). Despite increased attention to the needs of girls in the justice system (Leve & Chamberlain, 2004), much of the practice and policy are driven by evidence derived from male-dominated juvenile justice samples (Lipsey & Cullen, 2007).

It is important to note that few jurisdictions record sexual orientation or gender identity (beyond a male/female binary), but a growing literature suggests that lesbian, gay, bisexual, gender-expansive and non-cisgender youth are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system (Irvine & Canfield, 2016; Majd et al., 2009). Studies report that approximately 13% to 15% of youth in detention facilities identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (Majd et al., 2009; Hunt & Moodie-Mills, 2012). Irvine (2010) surveyed six jurisdictions across the United States and found that approximately 11% identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, including 19% of gender-conforming girls and 9% of gender-conforming boys. The 2012 National Survey of Youth in Custody, conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, estimated that 12% of adjudicated youth placed in residential facilities identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Beck, Cantor, Hartge, & Smith, 2013). Estimating the number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth is challenging in part because sexual-orientation and gender-identity data rely heavily on self-report and youth might feel embarrassed or scared to disclose this information (Development Services Group, 2014). Studies have shown that these youth are at greater risk for victimization, including bullying and sexual/physical abuse, as well as for MEB challenges

such as substance use, depression, and suicide (Friedman et al., 2011; Himmelstein, & Brückner, 2011; Kann et al., 2016).

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM CONTACT

Development

Adolescence includes distinctive developmental stages during which identity, values, psychosocial maturity, social and interpersonal skills, self-control, and independence take form (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). During this period of profound social, emotional, physical, and cognitive changes and expanding social influence (e.g., peers, schools, communities; Kim, Oesterle, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2015), adolescents typically experiment with various risky behaviors, including substance use and delinquency (McCarter, 2018). Most grow out of these behaviors as part of their normative development (Kim, Gilman, Tan, et al., in press; Lambie & Randell, 2013; Mulvey, 2011; Stouthamer-Loeber, Wei, Loeber, & Masten, 2004). In fact, a preponderance of research suggests that 40% to 60% of youth who commit acts of delinquency will naturally age out of offending by early adulthood (Fabio, Tu, Loeber, & Cohen, 2011; Le Blanc & Fréchette, 1989; Piquero, Hawkins, & Kazemian, 2012).

Although psychologists contend that the majority of adolescent offenders are developmentally behind their nonoffending peers (Kroll et al., 2002), incarceration itself—a disruption of youth’s normative developmental context—can place adolescents at a developmental stage that is out of sync with their chronological age. Furthermore, by inhibiting opportunities for prosocial development and social interaction, incarceration can limit mastery of certain developmental tasks and milestones such as autonomy and social integration (Dmitrieva, Monahan, Cauffman, & Steinberg, 2012). These challenges also may be coupled with exposure to offending peers in correctional settings (Little, 2006) and can reinforce negative behaviors through a peer contagion effect (Dishion, Eddy, Haas, Li, & Spracklen, 1997; Zhao, Kim, Li, Hsiao, & Rice, 2018). Altschuler and Brash (2004) suggest that adolescents whose development has been stunted or disrupted face greater challenges to continuing education, obtaining employment, building positive relationships, and overcoming additional obstacles. Finally, stigma attached to juvenile justice involvement can affect youth both internally and externally, creating significant challenges to positive adolescent development (Mears & Travis, 2004).

Educational Attainment

Compared with peers not involved in the system, youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system have lower rates of educational attainment and higher rates of school dropout (Chung, Mulvey, & Steinberg, 2011). Although educational attainment and success have been linked to reduced delinquency and other positive life transitions (Foley, 2001), education after juvenile justice contact remains a major challenge. Arrest alone predicts high school dropout by weakening participation in school, the youth’s social mobility and control potential of educational institutions (Hirschfield, 2009).

First among the barriers to education is the challenge of re-enrollment in the school of origin (Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2009; Kirk & Sampson, 2011). Due to safety and accountability policies, schools now have greater access to juvenile justice records (e.g., Cal. Welfare and Institutions Code § 827(a)(1) (2019); Cal. R. 5.552(b) (2019)). Schools find various ways to reject re-enrollment of system-involved youth, resort to expulsion, or force transfer to alternative school settings (Feierman et al., 2009). Second, education within the juvenile justice system is suboptimal. Despite requirements that all youth receive quality education, instructional offerings in the juvenile justice system often are inconsistent, fragmented, and inferior (Altschuler & Brash, 2004). Third, special education needs are largely unaddressed, exacerbating the educational achievement gap (Hogan, Bullock, & Fritsch, 2010). Finally, educational credits earned in the juvenile justice system often are nontransferable (Mears & Travis, 2004). This discontinuity in educational opportunities furthers the educational achievement gap, results in early dropout, and limits the number of students who pursue a college education (Chung et al., 2011).

Employment

Given the many challenges encountered by justice-involved youth, including MEB disorders and educational failures, many do not meet minimum employment qualifications (Abrams & Snyder, 2010). Most training programs in juvenile facilities focus on education rather than vocational or job skills (Platt, Bohac, & Wade, 2015). Even if job skills are obtained during incarceration, the stigma that follows can affect a young person's ability to obtain employment (Abrams & Snyder, 2010). Under the law, juvenile records do not contain "criminal offenses," and youth are not required to report their juvenile justice involvement as criminal history; however, surveys of postincarceration employment-application processes find that most youth disclose and having even a juvenile record places the job applicant at a disadvantage for obtaining the desired position (Nellis, 2011). This is further compounded by racial inequality. Compared with formerly incarcerated White individuals, formerly incarcerated individuals of color are far less likely to be called back for an interview (Decker, Spohn, Ortiz, & Hedberg, 2014); Pager (2003) compared the experiences of White individuals with criminal records to those of Black individuals without a criminal record, finding that the Whites were more likely to be called back. This points to further need to understand and address the disparate consequences of justice system involvement, which further marginalize vulnerable populations in this country.

Continued System Involvement

Educational and employment barriers also pose challenges to youth subject to probation requirements. Such barriers may further preclude youth from the sorts of prosocial and meaningful engagement in society that can facilitate successful transition to adulthood (Mears & Travis, 2004). A prospective longitudinal study compared individuals incarcerated as juveniles with counterparts who had no system involvement as youth. It found that, in their transition to adulthood, individuals incarcerated as juveniles were more likely to experience alcohol abuse and dependence and to receive public assistance at ages 27, 30, and/or 33 (Gilman, Hill, & Hawkins, 2015). Similarly, a Los Angeles study found that approximately one fourth of the juvenile probation group received at least one of the two forms of public cash assistance

(CalWorks and general relief) during the 1 to 4 years in which they were tracked after exiting juvenile probation (Culhane et al., 2011). The study suggests that the majority of those who had contact with the juvenile justice system and/or the child welfare system may find themselves in poverty and requiring public assistance during young adulthood (Culhane et al., 2011).

Each year, approximately 100,000 youth leave juvenile justice facilities (secure and nonsecure placements), returning to their respective communities under the supervision of local probation or parole agencies (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Research consistently has suggested that the majority of youth who serve time in juvenile justice facilities will reoffend as juveniles or as adults within a few years after release. In a recent longitudinal study of nearly 2,500 youth offenders who were sentenced to a juvenile correctional facility in a southwestern state, rearrest rates were as high as 85% over a 5-year period (Trulson, Marquart, Mullings, & Caeti, 2005). The California Department of Juvenile Justice estimates that 70% of juveniles released from its state institutions recidivate within 2 years (California Juvenile Justice Reentry Partnership, 2007). Gilman and colleagues (2015) found that incarceration as a juvenile not only increased the likelihood of participating in criminal behavior as an adult, but also increased the likelihood of incarceration during adulthood; the findings were robust to the inclusion of statistical controls for criminal behaviors.

ACHIEVING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND JUSTICE IN JUVENILE JUSTICE

As the preceding discussion suggests, the law is applied inequitably for the most vulnerable youth, especially those whose circumstances and identities are discussed above. However, recent innovations make it possible to achieve equal opportunity and justice in juvenile justice. These innovations include policy and systems change, cross-sector collaboration, and the consistent implementation of evidence-based practices. After summarizing these innovations, the following sections present five specific and actionable goals to achieve equality and justice in the U.S. juvenile justice system within the next decade.

Innovation 1: Policy and Systems Change

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDPA) was reauthorized for 5 years on December 21, 2018, through the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018. Because the act had not been reauthorized since 2002, many policy practitioners across the country viewed the 2018 action as an indication of the current potential for justice reform (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, n.d.). The JJDPA serves as a national juvenile-justice and planning system, provides federal funding for delinquency prevention and juvenile justice reform, and guides the OJJDP. The reauthorization includes several specific policy changes. It strengthens the decarceration of status offenders, extends sight and sound separation to juveniles tried as adults,³ and revises the

³ Sight and sound separation requires that juveniles placed in adult lock-up or jails be protected in spaces without any visual or auditory contact with adult offenders.

term *disproportionate minority contact*⁴ to *racial and ethnic disparities*.⁵ The act imposes new obligations upon states. It requires action from states to reduce overrepresentation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system, compels states to submit a 3-year plan that demonstrates how their juvenile justice operations are guided by empirical evidence on brain development and behavior, and stipulates additional requirements for state allocations. Moreover, it eliminates specific restraints on pregnant inmates, imposes valid court order exceptions for status offenders, and supports the educational progress of youthful offenders through stricter compliance with Part A of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The reauthorization also implements policies and procedures to screen for, identify, and document domestic human trafficking.

A final measure in the 2018 reauthorization includes key elements of the Youth PROMISE Act (the Youth Prison Reduction Through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act), a bill first proposed in 2009. The reauthorization requires states to ensure that members on their state advisory groups possess specific expertise (e.g., in adolescent development), and qualifications (e.g., mental health or substance abuse state licenses). As amended, section 223(a)(3) of the 1974 act specifies group representation—for example, representatives of victim or witness-advocacy groups, tribal representation in states where tribes are located, and members of the affected group (such as individuals who are or have been under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system or a parent or guardian of such an individual; codified as amended at 34 U.S.C. § 11133 (a)(3) (2018)). The state advisory group provisions also recognize the importance of cross-sector collaboration, including more formalized school-justice partnerships.

Innovation 2: Cross-Sector Collaboration

Providing equal opportunities in a just system equipped to significantly improve the well-being of youth requires a collaborative effort among systems (Grisso, 2008; Logan-Greene, Kim, & Nurius, 2020). Many have used the 2018 reauthorization’s language on state advisory group membership to implement school-justice partnerships. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges has been at the forefront of collaborative initiatives to reduce the number of petitions and referrals to juvenile courts for school-based behaviors. Through judicially led school-justice partnerships, the council has sought “to enhance collaboration and coordination among schools, mental and behavioral health professionals, law enforcement, and juvenile

⁴ *Disproportionate minority contact* refers to the overrepresentation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system and was added as the fourth mandate to the JJDP in 1988 as “disproportionate minority confinement.” When the act was reauthorized in 2002, OJJDP revised the term to “disproportionate minority contact” and added financial penalties for states that fail to actively address disproportionality in their juvenile justice systems (see McCarter, 2011).

⁵ The last reauthorization in 2018 replaced “disproportionate minority contact” with “racial and ethnic disparities.” *Racial and ethnic disparities* is deemed a more precise term since there are jurisdictions in which youth of color comprise the statistical majority and the revision states that the focus of assessment is on racial and ethnic demographics.

justice officials to help students succeed in school and prevent negative outcomes for youths and communities” (Wachter, Hurst, Deal, & Thomas, 2017, p. 2).

All school-justice partnerships have the goal of reducing referrals from schools to juvenile courts, although approaches may vary in terms of eligibility criteria for youth served and graduated responses. Some partnerships focus on prevention, identifying youth at risk of court involvement and providing support and services to them. Others center on diversion (at the school level by school personnel, resource officers, or law enforcement, or at intake by court counselors), allowing youth who have committed nonviolent or minor school-based behaviors to avoid juvenile court involvement.

The 2018 reauthorization of the JJDPa includes mandates for community-based prevention and treatment services. Innovative cross-system collaborations will improve delivery of these services and desired outcomes. Cross-sector collaborations in juvenile justice should include collaborations among the juvenile courts, child welfare, health/mental health/substance use, and education systems, as well as collaborations among law enforcement (e.g., police officers, school-resource officers, probation officers) the courts (e.g., defense attorneys, prosecutors, judges), and other service providers (e.g., teachers, counselors, social workers, health care providers). Given the natural overlap, we would be remiss if we did not recognize that the model of cross-sector collaboration should also be applied to the grand challenges. Though best addressed through the grand challenge to achieve equal opportunity and justice, juvenile justice reform should also include the efforts to address other grand challenges: healthy development for all youth, stopping family violence, ending homelessness, promoting smart decarceration, and reducing extreme economic inequality.⁶ Finally, to make juvenile justice more equitable and just, we recommend strengthening practice- and research-community connections, including accelerating science using the research-to-practice feedback loop (Pettus-Davis & Kennedy, 2019).

Innovation 3: Consistent Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices

There has been significant growth in the evidence on what supports work for justice-involved youth and those with wide-ranging MEB problems (Lipsey & Cullen, 2007; Lipsey, 2009; OMNI Institute, 2013). The most widely known and tested programs include multisystemic therapy (MST; Henggeler, Schoenwald, Borduin, Rowland, & Cunningham, 2009), functional family therapy (FFT; Alexander & Parsons, 1982), and treatment foster care Oregon (TFCO, formerly known as multidimensional treatment foster care; Chamberlain, 2003). All of these have been found effective at reducing various MEB problems and improving rates of recidivism (Cocozza et al., 2005; Dembo, Wareham, Poythress, Cook, & Schmeidler, 2006; OMNI Institute, 2013).

MST is an intensive, family- and community-based treatment program that empowers youth and caregivers to enhance their capacity to address any MEB problems in adolescence. The treatment targets the ecological domains of youth: peers, school functioning, family relations, and family–neighborhood engagement (Henggeler et al., 2009). It has shown positive effects across 22

⁶ More on the Grand Challenges for Social Work can be found at <http://grandchallengesforsocialwork.org>.

randomized controlled studies (both efficacy and effectiveness trials) involving youth with serious offenses (e.g., violent or sexual offenses), maltreatment history, and substance abuse problems (Henggeler et al., 2009). A long-term follow-up study found that, 13.7 years after MST implementation, those who participated had 54% fewer arrests and 57% fewer days of confinement relative to the comparison group (Schaeffer & Borduin, 2005). In another independent study, youth in the treatment-as-usual group were 3.2 times more likely to have been rearrested relative to those in MST at the 18-month follow-up (Timmons-Mitchell, Bender, Kishna, & Mitchell, 2006). The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2019) concluded that MST provides a benefits-to-cost ratio of \$3.02, with a 99% chance of the benefits exceeding the costs.

A short-term (approximately 30 hours), family-based therapy for youth at risk for institutionalization and their families, FFT aims to enhance family communication and supporting skills and to reduce negative family attributions and patterns of behavior (Alexander & Parsons, 1982). Based on family-specific risk and protective factors, the therapy targets parenting skills, youth compliance, and the complete range of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs. In a 32-month follow-up to a quasi-experimental study with 27 families, recidivism rates were significantly lower for those who received FFT than for those who received the usual probation services (Gordon, Graves, & Arbuthnot, 1995). In another quasi-experimental study, receipt of FFT with adherence was associated with a significant reduction in felony and violent crimes (Sexton & Turner, 2010). FFT has been implemented across 300 community settings in the United States and four international settings (Sexton & Alexander, 2004, 2006). The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2019) suggests that FFT provides a benefits-to-cost ratio of \$18.75, with a 100% chance of the benefits exceeding the costs.

An alternative to residential placements, TFCO, better known as multidimensional treatment foster care, targets youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system (Chamberlain, 2003), providing family-based services in youth's natural setting while offering close supervision and support for youth and families. Focusing on effective parenting strategies, TFCO aims to support youth in fostering positive relationships with peers, family members, teachers, and other adults. It has been successfully implemented across 50 sites in the United States and 35 sites in several European countries (Fisher & Gilliam, 2012). In a large, randomized, controlled trial, TFCO has been shown to reduce the number of criminal referrals and days incarcerated (Chamberlain & Reid, 1998; Eyberg, Nelson, & Boggs, 2008). In a 2-year follow-up, youth in the TFCO group had committed fewer violent offenses relative to the comparison group and received fewer criminal referrals (Eddy, Whaley, & Chamberlain, 2004). The TFCO youth had lower subsequent engagement in substance use (Smith, Chamberlain, & Eddy, 2010). Multidimensional treatment foster care has also shown efficacy with female juvenile offenders in reducing the number of days incarcerated and enhancing academic outcomes (Chamberlain, Leve, & DeGarmo, 2007). The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2019) suggests that multidimensional treatment foster care provides a benefits-to-cost ratio of \$4.29, with a 91% chance of the benefits exceeding the costs.

Although these interventions have proven effective with juvenile offenders, the remaining challenge is to ensure equitable access to these effective programs across diverse populations experiencing disproportionality in the juvenile justice system. There are currently 2,657

nonpharmacological treatments tested in randomized clinical trials, and these treatments currently represent 773 protocols meeting standards for being considered evidence-based, yet the use of evidence-based interventions in MEB health systems has been slow, with low adoption and penetration rates (Bruns et al., 2016). Barriers include the lack of generalizability of manualized evidence-based treatments to populations with complex multi-system needs (Daleiden & Chorpita, 2005; Southam-Gerow, Chorpita, Miller, & Gleacher, 2007), unfavorable provider attitudes toward evidence-based practices (Borntreger, Chorpita, Higa-McMillan, & Weisz, 2009), and limited accessibility and fit of evidence-based practices in clinical settings (Weisz et al., 2012).

Thus, we recommend practice approaches such as the wraparound service model, a nonproprietary and locally adaptable “operating system” that has few exclusion criteria and can provide individualized care across multiple system settings (Bruns, Sather, Pullmann, & Stambaugh, 2011). Additionally, serving clinically diverse populations requires mastery of multiple evidence-based practices, and those practices typically will apply to only about 60% to 70% of a population, especially if additional juvenile characteristics—such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity—are matched with evidence (Bernstein et al., 2015; Chorpita, Bernstein, & Daleiden, 2011). This concern can be addressed by a service delivery system, such as the managing and adapting practices (Chorpita & Daleiden, 2014), that allows the integration of scientific evidence into everyday practice, for example, within wraparound settings. Finally, many justice-involved youth also have special education needs (e.g., learning disabilities, emotional or behavioral disorders, cognitive impairment) in addition to various MEB disorders. Providing effective care for them requires coordination and empirically grounded treatment.

MEASURABLE GOALS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

Achieving equal opportunity and justice in juvenile justice means that access to services and outcomes are not determined by age, geography, race/ethnicity/culture, economics, abuse history, MEB health problems, gender identity, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. It means that typical adolescent/student behaviors and status offenses are not criminalized and youth are instead offered alternatives to court contact. Finally, equal opportunity and justice in juvenile justice requires wraparound support for youth re-entering their communities after their justice-system involvement. Therefore, we propose five actionable and measurable goals to improve the equality and justice of the U.S. juvenile system in the next 5 to 10 years.

1. Assess the relative rate indices across all nine contact points for all vulnerable populations.⁷
 - a. By 2025, return to monitoring the relative rate indices for race/ethnicity for all nine contact points in all jurisdictions.

⁷ Relative rate indices are calculated by dividing occurrences at specified decision points by the number of youth in the jurisdiction’s general population, and thus they provide mathematical context. A relative rate index of 1.0 shows proportionality, whereas relative rate indices that are not 1.0 show disproportionality: relative rate indices under 1.0 suggest underrepresentation, and relative rate indices above 1.0 indicate overrepresentation.

- b. By 2025, add relative rate index monitoring for all other vulnerable population groups salient to the local jurisdiction (e.g., students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, and students from households with low socioeconomic status).
2. Increase positive discipline options to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and decriminalize nonviolent school behaviors and status offenses.
 - a. In a decade, establish formal school-justice partnerships in at least 15 states.
 - b. By 2025, decrease the use of zero-tolerance policies to less than 10% of states and increase use of positive discipline strategies and practices by 25%.
 - c. By 2025, reduce in-school arrests for nonviolent behaviors by 25%.
3. Offer diversion alternatives for first-time and low-risk offenders.
 - a. Increase the number of first-time and low-risk offenders diverted by 50% within a decade.
 - b. Include diversion as an option in 25% of the school-justice partnerships within a decade.
4. Implement a consistent, nationwide age of criminal responsibility at 21 years, keeping youth in the juvenile justice system through the age of 20 years.
 - a. By 2025, set the age of criminal responsibility to at least 18 years in all states.
 - b. Within a decade, raise the age of criminal responsibility to 21 years in at least 10 states.
5. Employ a rigorous wraparound model to improve re-entry success for youth transitioning from justice systems back into their communities.
 - a. By 2025, systematically increase the integration of evidence-based practice into wraparound services.
 - b. Within a decade, implement comprehensive, evidence-based wraparound services for youth exiting the justice system in 25 states.
 - c. Use wraparound services to reduce by 50% in a decade the number of youth forced to return to the justice system for procedural reasons (violated on motions).

Assess Relative Rate Indices Across All Nine Contact Points for All Vulnerable Populations

Beginning in fiscal year 2019, OJJDP changed the Title II application process's data collection requirements,⁸ reducing the required number of contact points from nine to five. Prior to 2019, the contact points included (1) arrest, (2) complaint, (3) diversion/no approval for court, (4) detention, (5) approval for court, (6) adjudication, (7) disposition, (8) placement, and (9) transfer to adult/criminal justice. Under the new requirements, data are collected at five points: (1) arrest, (2) diversion/no approval for court, (3) detention, (4) placement, and (5) transfer to adult/criminal justice. OJJDP's website suggests that this policy change "streamlined" the process by using the "five [contact points] that research supports as the most critical" (OJJDP,

⁸ In compliance with the JJDPA (Section 223(a)(22)), states must submit 3-year juvenile justice plans (with annual updates). States that are found to be out of compliance risk forfeiting 20% of their formula grants allocation for the year.

n.d., para. 2). Yet, juvenile justice researchers contend that this narrowing of data collection points is in response to significant federal funding cuts to budgets for OJJDP and that data should be collected at all nine contact points to best address disparities in juvenile justice (Tamilin et al., 2019). Many jurisdictions have not implemented the reduction in data collection points. We recommend that, *by 2025, all jurisdictions return to monitoring the relative rate indices for race/ethnicity for all nine contact points.*

Most juvenile justice jurisdictions use a relative rate index to assess disproportionality at each contact point evaluated. Relative rate indices, however, are currently only used to assess racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice. They can be used to measure equity for any of the demographic variables described above. Such disparities cannot be addressed without first being identified and documented using disaggregated data.

Another component of the 2018 reauthorization of the JJDPA replaced the term *disproportionate minority contact* with *racial and ethnic disparities*. Most justice advocates support this policy revision since equity, not simply achieving proportionality, should be the desired outcome (McCarter et al., 2017). Also included in the reauthorization is the requirement that states identify how they will measure the success of their efforts to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice, as well as revised requirements for data collection on youth who have disabilities, learning disabilities, and histories of child abuse and neglect. Again, in order to achieve equal opportunity and justice, we must *add relative rate index monitoring for all other vulnerable population groups salient to the local jurisdiction (e.g., students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, and students from households with low socioeconomic status). Such monitoring can and should be in place by 2025.*

Increase Positive Discipline Options to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Decriminalize Nonviolent School Behaviors and Status Offenses

The term *school-to-prison pipeline* describes a pathway between the education system and the justice system. Concern about school safety has produced zero-tolerance policies and reliance on school resource officers. These steps have significantly increased the use of exclusionary discipline—that is, suspensions and expulsions (Fabelo et al., 2011; McCarter, 2017; Skiba et al., 2011). Studies have shown that youth of color are far more likely to be excluded from classrooms (e.g., suspension, expulsion) than are their White counterparts exhibiting the same behaviors (Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). The same finding is evident for students with MEB problems and disabilities (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirier, 2005); students receiving free and reduced-price school lunches (Verdugo & Glenn, 2006); and students who identify as gender expansive, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (Himmelstein & Brückner, 2011; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). Significant research suggests that even one suspension increases the likelihood of students repeating a grade, dropping out, and coming into contact with the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011; Losen, Hewitt, & Toldson, 2014).

In order to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, jurisdictions need to work together on increasing positive school discipline and decriminalizing nonviolent school behaviors and status

offenses. According to the National Education Association (2015), minor infractions that used to warrant a trip to the principal's office are now being handled by law enforcement with very serious consequences. The association recommends positive approaches to discipline, including restorative justice practices that result in better school climates and improved educational outcomes, particularly increased graduation rates. Positive discipline approaches have been found to preserve students' opportunities for education and empower educators by providing satisfactory discipline skills and tools. With these assets, educators can better connect with students, address student behavior issues, and build trust within the school community (National Education Association, 2015). Therefore, we suggest setting three goals: (1) *Within a decade, establish formal school-justice partnerships in at least 15 states;* (2) *by 2025, decrease the use of zero-tolerance policies to less than 10% of states and increase use of positive discipline strategies and practices by 25%;* and (3) *by 2025, reduce in-school arrests for nonviolent behaviors by 25%.*

Offer Diversion Alternatives for First-Time and Low-Risk Offenders

Diversion programs seek to minimize the effects of labeling (youth identifying themselves as criminals; Becker, 1963; Rausch, 1983), interrupt/redirect emergent offending patterns (Sullivan, Veysey, Hamilton, & Grillo, 2007), connect youth with more appropriate services (e.g., substance abuse and mental health services; Andrews & Bonta, 2010), and reduce the likelihood that they socialize with other offenders and learn antisocial attitudes (Loeb, Waung, & Sheeran, 2015). Diversion is an intervention or strategy that prevents juveniles from being formally processed through the court system while holding them accountable for their actions (National Institute of Justice, 2017). It has been shown to be effective for low-risk and/or first-time offenders (Wilson & Hoge, 2012). There are generally two types of youth diversion: informal and formal. Informal diversion is implemented without any further requirements and incurs no court record (Siegel & Welsh, 2009). Formal diversion is typically implemented through a diversion contract or commitment to fulfill specific conditions. When said conditions are met, no further justice contact is required (Dembo, Wareham, & Schmeidler, 2005); if the conditions or expectations are not met, official court processing may be a consequence (Wilson & Hoge, 2012). Juveniles can be offered diversion at various contact points in the justice system, including before and after a charge or complaint is filed (Bates & Swan, 2018). Precharge diversion is informal and usually reserved for first-time or low-risk juvenile offenders. It does not involve a court record (Siegel & Welsh, 2009). Postcharge diversion is more formal. It involves law enforcement or district attorneys and requires an admission of guilt. The diversion contract specifies conditions under which charges will be dismissed or the court record removed (Cocozza et al., 2005; Wilson & Hoge, 2012). Diversion also can be built into school-justice partnerships in another effort to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. We suggest *increasing the number of first-time and low-risk offenders diverted by 50% within a decade and that diversion be included in 25% of the school-justice partnerships within a decade.* Preventing low-risk youth and those who have just committed their first offense from entering the juvenile justice system means more equitable and just outcomes for all.

Implement a Consistent Age of Criminal Responsibility at 21 Years, Keeping Youth in the Juvenile Justice System Through the Age of 20 Years

A challenge to providing equal opportunity in the juvenile justice system is the lack of a consistent age of criminal responsibility. In 2016, South Carolina and Louisiana set the age of criminal responsibility at 18 years, raising their upper age for juvenile justice to 17 years. In the state of New York, the juvenile justice system served youth up to age 17 in 2018 and up to age 18 in 2019. Michigan will raise its age to 18 in 2022 (Campaign for Youth Justice, 2019; Justice Policy Institute, 2017; Puzzanchera, 2018). Until December 2019, North Carolina considered 16-year-olds to be adults. The last state to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 16, North Carolina began serving 16- and 17-year-olds in the juvenile justice system on December 1, 2019 (Powell, 2017). As of January 2020, only three states still regarded 17-year-olds as adults: Georgia, Texas, and Wisconsin. *By 2025, the age of criminal responsibility should be at least 18 years in all states.*

Nationally, the evidence suggests that juvenile offenders are less culpable than adult offenders and more amenable to treatment (Bishop, 2005; Hahn et al., 2007). Keeping youth in the juvenile justice system increases parent and family involvement (Davies & Davidson, 2001; Parker, 2013), lowers recidivism rates, improves education outcomes (Andrews et al., 2011; Redding, 2008; Robinson & Kurlychek, 2019; Sharlein, 2018; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018; Weber, Schlueter, & Bellas, 2015), delivers services that are more developmentally appropriate (Howell & Lipsey, 2012; Robinson & Kurlychek, 2019), lessens the impact of a criminal record (Jacobs, 2015; Wiley, Slocum, Esbensen, 2013), improves juveniles' institutional and community safety outcomes (Ahlin, 2018; Beck et al., 2013), and increases cost-effectiveness for states (Mendel, 2013). Thus, most scholars and practitioners recommend setting the age of criminal responsibility at 21 years or older (Farrington, Loeber, & Howell, 2017).

Vermont was the first state to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 21 years. This policy change will be incremental; 18-year-olds will be legally served by the juvenile justice system starting in July 2020, and 19-year-olds in 2022 (Vastine & Chester, 2019). Vermont's legislature modeled cross-system collaboration in working with courts, law enforcement, and the education and child welfare systems to develop the plan that can serve as a national model. *Within a decade, 21 years should be the age of criminal responsibility in at least 10 states.*

Employ a Rigorous Wraparound Model to Improve Reentry Success for Youth Transitioning From Justice Systems Back Into Their Communities

Service needs across multiple public systems, including child welfare and mental health systems, schools, and social services, leave many youth lingering in the juvenile justice system. Some studies estimate that as many as 55% of youth are rearrested within 1 year of release (Lieberberg & Ungar, 2014). A successful reentry strategy entails coordinated services that engage youth, families, and community/peer support systems (Howell, Kelly, Palmer, & Mangum, 2004). Such a strategy is often termed the *wraparound model*. The 2018 JJDPA reauthorization also includes this language:

Reentry planning ... for juveniles will include—

- (A) A written case plan based on an assessment of needs that includes—
- (i) the pre- and post-release plans for juveniles;
 - (ii) the living arrangement to which the juveniles are to be discharged; and
 - (iii) any other plans developed for the juveniles based on an individualized assessment. (codified as amended at 34 U.S.C. § 11133 (a)(31) (2018))

Thus, before a juvenile is released from an out-of-home placement, a final assessment must be conducted and a post-release plan written. Yet, *practitioners need to increase the integration of evidence-based practice into wraparound services.*

National research by the Council of State Governments suggests that successful reentry for youth is guided by four overall principles:

1. Base supervision, service, and resource-allocation decisions on the results of validated risk and needs assessments.
2. Adopt and effectively implement programs and services demonstrated to reduce recidivism and improve other youth outcomes, and use data to evaluate system performance and direct system improvements.
3. Employ a coordinated approach across service systems to address youths' needs.
4. Tailor system policies, programs, and supervision to reflect the distinct developmental needs of adolescents. (Seigle, Walsh, & Weber, 2014, pp. iii–iv)

A substantial evidence base indicates that a rigorous wraparound model meets these four principles. Such a model also provides a focus on family voice and choice, individualized services, team and community base, natural supports, collaboration, cultural competence, strengths, and persistence. These attributes foster positive youth, system, and cost outcomes (Bruns et al., 2004). *This type of wraparound model can be implemented for youth exiting the justice system in 25 states within a decade.*

Helping youth return to their communities and not revisit justice facilities also requires probation reform over the next decade. According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice (n.d.), in 2017, approximately 63% of juvenile-court-involved youth had probation as part of their disposition. Conditions of probation range from approximately five to as many as 30 conditions, yet practitioners find that youth only remember about a third of their probation conditions (Peralta, Yeannakis, Ambrose, Yule, & Walker, 2012). In 2015, the most serious offense for 23% of all detained youth was a technical or probation violation, as it was for 15% of youth currently committed (Hockenberry, 2018). Moreover, the significant disparities by race continue: Youth of color represent almost 70% of those committed to a residential facility for a technical violation (Hockenberry, 2018). In a comprehensive report on Juvenile Probation Transformation, the Urban Institute reports that wraparound services can reduce the number of youth who violate the conditions of their probation (Esthappan, Laco, & Young, 2019). *Within a decade, we can*

use wraparound services to reduce by 50% the number of youth charged with technical violations and forced to return to the justice system.

CONCLUSION/IMPLICATIONS AND MOVING FORWARD

Justice scholars and practitioners around the country perceived significant potential for justice reform in the reauthorization of the 2018 JJDP (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, n.d.). Youth in the juvenile justice system are still-developing human beings with complex and intersectional strengths and challenges. Therefore, reform of juvenile justice practice and policy requires innovative, cross-system, collaborative efforts among the education, child welfare, law enforcement, health/mental health, and justice systems (Bath et al., 2019; Grisso, 2008; Logan-Greene, Kim, & Nurius, 2020).

Nevertheless, studies have shown that unequal access exacerbates disparities. For example, youth of color are less likely than White counterparts to be offered diversion by law enforcement and prosecutors for the same offenses (Ericson & Eckberg, 2016), and they are more likely to be formally processed/petitioned, detained, and waived to criminal courts (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2018). Youth of color, when compared with similarly situated White youth, are also far less likely to receive programs and services that address their mental, emotional, behavioral, physical, and educational needs (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2014). In a national longitudinal study, queer and gender-expansive students were disproportionately suspended, expelled, and arrested despite demonstrating no greater misbehavior or delinquency (Himmelstein & Brückner, 2011). And many of the informal practices that permit some youth to exit the juvenile justice system (e.g., diversion, community service) require time, resources (e.g., restitution and fees), transportation, and a stable mailing address to receive court communications. Those requirements disadvantage low-income children (Birckhead, 2012). We cannot allow current policies and practices to perpetuate the existing structural and systemic inequalities. As we explain, the consequences of involvement in the juvenile justice system are dire, even without the racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and other inequities that exacerbate these experiences. We can no longer reinforce the injustice and disempowerment of our society's most disadvantaged and vulnerable. Thus, central to transforming the juvenile justice system is the need to address the systemic and structural injustice and mistreatment that have led to the disparities evidenced in this position paper.

Despite social workers' prominent role in juvenile and criminal justice during the latter part of the twentieth century, their involvement as frontline workers in the justice field has decreased overall (Peters, 2011). Scholars attribute this to the shift away from rehabilitation and toward harsher punishment, zero tolerance, and incapacitation/incarceration (Scheyett, Pettus-Davis, McCarter, & Brigham, 2012). Now, as rife disparities and mass incarceration compound the issues of trauma and mental illness, the need is paramount for social work to return as a potent partner and leader (Peters, 2011; Scheyett et al., 2012). Social work's mission is to enhance human well-being and help individuals meet their basic human needs, with particular attention to the empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). The grand challenge to achieve equal opportunity and

justice provides a detailed outline for social work to reclaim a pivotal position in justice practice, policy, and research; to dismantle inequity and injustice; and to foster the full social, civic, economic, and political integration of justice-involved youth and their families.

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ABOUT THE GRAND CHALLENGE TO ACHIEVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND JUSTICE

In the United States, some groups of people have long been consigned to society’s margins. Historic and current prejudice and injustice bar access to success in education and employment. Addressing racial and social injustices, deconstructing stereotypes, dismantling inequality, exposing unfair practices, and accepting the super diversity of the population will advance this challenge. All of this work is critical to fostering a successful society.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

BO-KYUNG ELIZABETH KIM is Assistant Professor in the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work at the University of Southern California.

SUSAN MCCARTER is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

PATRICIA LOGAN-GREENE is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

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CONTACT

Grand Challenges for Social Work
GCSocialWork@ssw.umaryland.edu